

**GURPS**

Fourth Edition

# ALPHABET ARCANE™



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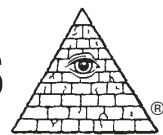
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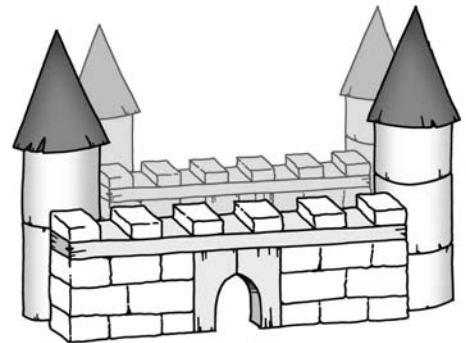
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# INTRODUCTION

This resource for *GURPS Fantasy* campaigns provides adventure seeds, curious characters, and unusual artifacts. Some are trivial items, useful as red herrings and humorous diversions. Others are objects of staggering power.

Because they vary greatly in clout, cultural assumptions, and tone, not all of these items will be suitable for every campaign. You might employ them when the adventurers travel to lands (or worlds) beyond the usual campaign setting.

## LANDS BEYOND

Many of the entries refer to unfamiliar nations, lands, and peoples. Most are the fantastic or mythologized equivalents of actual places and cultures on medieval or ancient Earth. The intent is to provide a bit of color, cultural background, and legend-quality “weight.” The GM should substitute his campaign’s equivalent.

A brief description of these lands follows; they are tagged with the letter of the entries in which they appear.

The default location for the entries is a region of European character. Lacron (V), Norfon (C) and the homeland of Count Vanderlan (V) are small kingdoms. The port of Erutappet (F, T) is located on the east end of the Mediterranean.

The kingdom of Moranx (U), the necropolis of Nehr (D), and the city-state of Salybos (N) are long-lost ancient places, located in the equivalent of Mesopotamia. Larshum (H) is a later Middle Eastern kingdom; it is a sometimes rival of Cheo (H), a stand-in for ancient Egypt.

The Leopard Emperor’s lost realm (G) thrived long ago in central Africa.

In Central Asia, or its equivalent, can be found the plains of Doromi and Kyangi and the city of Kanost (J); the home village of Condor Boy (K, L, O, Y); and the mountains from which Guruka Hemay (B) stages his raids. The Silk Road (called here the “Spice Trail”) passes not far from these places, as well as the remote Panner Wastes (L) and the monastery of the Xao-Qui Brotherhood (X).

Nian-Cho (F, H, I) and Arowundee (B) are Asian nations. Su-Dwar (A) is an isolated archipelago as far to the east as you can go without going off of the edge of the map, and possibly the edge of the world. It is a stand-in for Japan; not the actual place, but how it might have been imagined by a 15th-century European eager for tales of curious customs and fabulous treasure.

### Who Is This Kid?

Pick a child at random, and ask him if he has heard about Condor Boy. He’ll look puzzled . . . not because he doesn’t know *all about* Condor Boy, but because it’s hard to imagine anyone who *wouldn’t*.

This book assumes that every country in the campaign has its own Condor Boy stories. Many are variants of local legends and tall tales. But one adventure – Condor Boy’s journey to the far edge of the world – is told everywhere, and it is not a story; it actually happened, ages ago. The celestial beings who sent him on this quest gave him many magical gifts. Several of these boons are described here (see pp. 18-19, 23, 33).

The wild land where the Coyote Helm (C) was discovered was home to warring empires with an ancient pre-Columbian flavor. This is also the location of “.” *Is for Full-Stop Drum*, found in *Pyramid* #3/1.

## LANDS BEYOND BEYOND

A few entries (E, Q) refer to the Celestial Sphere. The stars, planets, comets, and other heavenly bodies float through this unearthly realm. It is also home to a civilization of beings who direct heavenly phenomena. While they are of a higher order than earth-bound humans, and receive directions from the gods, these “celestials” are not divine in nature.

The Celestial Sphere may be literally up in the sky. This is likely the case in cosmologies involving flat earths and enormous turtles. Reaching the place could require a magical ladder, a flying carpet, or a harness tethered to a flock of swans.

The Celestial Sphere could also be a parallel plane whose objects magically correspond to heavenly bodies. In this case, a Gate spell will be required to send Essum the star pilot (and the burned-out star Shemhault; see pp. 9-11) home.

Condor Boy (see box) visited many fantastic places during his adventures, including the Gates of Night (through which the sun passes at dusk) and a monastery floating beyond the edge of the world. Like the Celestial Sphere, these could be an integral part of the campaign world’s cosmology . . . or may only exist in a parallel world of myth and legend.

## LANGUAGES AND CULTURAL FAMILIARITY

The Cultural Familiarities of NPCs list generic “real world” equivalents. When an NPC’s native culture is long gone, there still may be some circumstances in which he benefits from his experience; some things never change. The person also knows enough about life in the old days to get a small bonus (+2) for the default History skill for that time and place.

Some characters are listed as knowing a *lingua franca* or a *trade language*. A *lingua franca* is a widely used language known by scholars, leaders, and educated merchants. In classic times, Greek was a *lingua franca* all around the Eastern Mediterranean. Latin had its time in the sun in medieval Europe.

A *trade language* is a tongue used by a region’s merchants. It may be a pidgin, creole, or simplified dialect of a formal language. Sailors and port city street urchins may know a few words of it. Arabic was a trade language from North Africa to Malaysia for centuries; Persian was useful along the Silk Road. Spanish was a trade tongue in the age of sail; English is a trade language of sorts today.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stefan Jones has been writing adventure gaming material since 1981, including *GURPS MacGuffin Alphabet*. His life has been uneventful, except for the time a bum tried to set him on fire. He lives in a suburb of Portland, Oregon.

# THE ALPHABET ARCANE

## 26 RELICS, RELICTS, WRECKS, AND RARITIES

### A IS FOR ANNALS OF COUNT KATYDID

The news travels the docks to taverns and tea houses frequented by merchants: The Serpent of Cheetutma Strait has been defeated, opening up a trade route to the fabled Su-Dwar Archipelago! And the man responsible is none other than native son Langer von Handersson.

A small fleet of battered ships soon enters the harbor. The docks are sealed off by a squad of bravos; a large tent and tall canvas screens are erected, blocking the view of curious onlookers. Langer's crew emerges, arms laden with rare spices and fine cloth. Captain von Handersson himself appears, dressed as a Su-Dwar nobleman. And behind him follow . . . some far-Eastern variety of ogre? No, just men in colorful, outlandish puppet-costumes that tower over the crowd. It seems von Handersson has become an aficionado of a school of Su-Dwar theatre, the tall-tale play. He convinced a small company of performers to accompany him home. His plan: Introduce tall-tale plays to his home city's movers and shakers, and make such an impression that the troupe is invited to entertain at the royal court.

One of the actors is also an aspiring playwright. The captain teamed him up with local scholars to translate a canonical set of tall-tale plays. The first production scheduled for performance was the classic *Annals of Count Katydid*. The blowhard of the title describes being shipwrecked in the land of the Oddney Winkers. In a play within a play, priests of two Winker faiths compete over whose creation myth is most definitive, whose afterlife is most pleasant, and whose rules of sanitation and food-handling are most virtuous.

#### THE SHOW WON'T GO ON

The project was going well when tragedy struck: One of the translators – a reclusive scholar well known for his fear of the dark – was run down by a runaway carriage . . . at night, just a few blocks from von Handersson's residence.

A few days later, someone dressed in one of the tall-tale play costumes – a caricature of von Handersson, as it happened – plowed through a religious precession, slapping down one of the temple virgins and smashing an idol. The villain plunged over a seawall and into the river. The costume was lost to sight, but fished out of the water a day later. One of the Su-Dwar entertainers was found strapped inside. The captain was summoned before the constabulary for questioning and told not to leave his residence. Townspeople began whispering about “von Handersson's folly.”

Just yesterday, a banquet at the mayor's palace was ruined when almost all of the guests became sick. The culprit: a roast seasoned with a batch of Fenyr bought straight off one of von Handersson's ships.

Through a mutual friend, the captain contacts the adventurers and asks for their help in determining who is trying to ruin his reputation.

#### WHODUNIT?

Who would want to sabotage a seemingly harmless dramatic exposition? Here are some possibilities.

#### *The Isolationists*

Not everyone on Su-Dwar is happy about the return of foreigners to the islands. Trade with the outside world threatens local monopolies, and many of the nations' noblemen are traditionalists who fear contamination by outside cultures.

Several of the performers von Handersson brought back with him are in fact agents of Su-Dwar's isolationist interests. Using skills finely honed in their homeland's own political and commercial struggles, they plan not only to ruin their patron's thespian ambitions, but also to sow doubt about the wisdom of continued trade with Su-Dwar.



## The Rival

Despite his wealth and fame, Captain von Handersson is dissatisfied with his lot. He feels he needs . . . a title. His plan to earn a knighthood by entertaining the royals could well work, but he is not the only wealthy merchant with ambitions to enter the nobility. A jealous competitor – just as wealthy, but relatively obscure – has cooked up a plot to embarrass and ruin the mariner.

Of course, it's possible that the adventurers were first contacted by this rival merchant, and that *they* were given the task of arranging von Handersson's downfall.

## The Cultists

One of the scholars helping translate the *Annals of Count Katydid* is also the leader of a secret society . . . one that picks members based on their ruthlessness, ideological inflexibility, and lack of humor. The scholar expected to find outlandish foreign ideas in the *Annals*, but he didn't expect blasphemy. To his horror, he realized that one of the satirical theologies ascribed to the fictional Winkers was clearly based on his society's occult teachings. How had the Su-Dwar become privy to this knowledge? Something would have to be done to prevent dissemination of the sacrilegious material. The show must not go on!

## Tall-Tale Plays

As though making up for a millennium of lost opportunities, Su-Dwar's merchants have gone on a commercial war-footing. They eagerly accept iron, tin, and other metals in trade for spices, embroidered cloth, intricate carved miniatures, and other exotic items.

Visitors report that the natives are cultured and subtle, and have a rich literary tradition. In addition to respectable works, Su-Dwar's writers have produced more colorful forms of entertainment. One of these is the *hwon-chutt suff*. Su-Dwar interpreters politely translate this as "tall-tale play," but "braggadocios' battle" is closer to the original meaning. Actors in bulky costumes (giant walk-in puppets, really) portray long-winded travelers trying to top each others' tales of exotic adventure. The basic stories are classics with genuine comic appeal, but the real fun comes from what the actors bring to their roles. A certain degree of interpretation and improvisation is encouraged; as a result, each performance is a unique experience.

# B IS FOR BLOCK PRINT CHARMS

The mood is bleak along the great Spice Trail. Caravans arriving from the east bring news that the terrible bandit captain Guruka Hemay has joined forces with Guruka La'Ramin, his cousin and a powerful sorcerer. Together they have hatched a scheme that would make Hemay's bandit company unbeatable.

The cousins have kidnapped a score of monks from the mountain kingdom of Arowundee. The monastery they hail from prints the famous Thief-Go-Away charms that flutter on merchant stalls across the continent. As rumor has it, La'Ramin plans on forcing the monks to print charms that deflect arrows and turn blades. A gravely wounded merchant recovering at the caravanseraï of Topto claims that members of the bandit legion already ride with paper charms tied to their grotesque braided beards.

## GURUKA'S BAND

The Guruka clan traces its ancestry to General Guruka Ko'Ramin, who led the remnants of the Vush Horde into the Great Eastern Mountains. For a decade, their raids nearly halted trade on the Spice Trail. A punitive expedition finally crushed the once-great army, but Ko'Ramin's descendants have engaged in small-time thievery and protection rackets ever since. Guruka Hemay hopes to revive the clan's glory days by building his bandit company into a full-fledged army.

The bandits' home mountains lie between two important caravan routes. While the marauders have yet to do anything bold enough to convince neighboring kingdoms to send in an army, the region's merchants feel increasingly threatened.

The bandits are supported by a dozen hamlets. They can count on tribute, supplies, and shelter from a dozen more. An ancient fortress looms over one of the most loyal settlements. Guruka Hemay renovated it for his cousin's use. The kidnapped monks are housed in the keep's drafty towers.

## GURUKA HEMAY

204 points

No one imagined that the sickly, bookish Guruka Hemay would grow up to be a ferocious warrior. A forceful, colorful leader, Hemay is hard on his men and doesn't hesitate to make an example of slackers and shirkers. However, he is as loyal to them as he expects them to be loyal to him, and he will risk his life to rescue men who have been captured.

When not ambushing caravans or raiding hamlets, the captain enjoys listening to bards' tales (particularly of old military campaigns), practicing horse-back acrobatics, and swaggering through his native village draped in barbaric finery. He has been known to put on shows for captives, dazzling them with feats of strength and agility.

**ST** 12 [20]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].  
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 13 [4]; Will 13 [10]; Per 13 [10]; FP 13 [6].  
Basic Speed 6.00 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 10\*; Parry 10\*; Block 10\*.  
5'9"; 160 lbs.

## Social Background

TL: 3.

CF: Central Asia [0].

Languages: Local language (Native) [0]; Asian trade language (Accented/None) [2]; Western trade language (Accented/None) [2].

## Advantages

Charisma 2 [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fearlessness 3 [6].

## Disadvantages

Bully (12 or less) [-10]; Enemies (Bandit hunters; 6 or less) [-10]; Reputation -4 (Ruthless and terrifying bandit; Everyone but clan; 10 or less) [-6]; Sense of Duty (Band of warriors) [-5]; Social Stigma (Wanted criminal) [-10].

Quirks: Shows off acrobatic skills; Unusually hospitable to important captives [-2].

## Skills

Acrobatics (H) DX+1 [8]-14; Animal Handling (Equines) (A) IQ [2]-10; Area Knowledge (Native Region) (E) IQ+2 [4]-13; Area Knowledge (Lands Along Trade Routes) (E) IQ [2]-12; Bow (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Climbing (A) DX [2]-12; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-12; History (Native Region) (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-14; Knife (E) DX [1]-12; Lance (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Observation (A) Per [2]-13; Public Speaking (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Riding (Equines) (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Shield (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Shortsword (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Spear (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Survival (Mountain) (A) Per [2]-13; Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]-12; Thrown Weapon (Spear) (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Tracking (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Whip (A) DX+1 [4]-13.

\* Includes +1 for Combat Reflexes.

## Lucky Charms

The anti-pilfering charms that Arowundee merchants hang from their stalls are made of rice paper. The slips are covered in pictograms spelling out a prayer. The thick, colorful ink is applied with a simple block printing process.

The charms *work*, but only if you have at least four . . . and more are better, up to a point. The exact numbers given here should be known only to the GM, who may be changed if necessary. Neither the players nor the NPCs can accurately min-max their use of these charms.

1-3 slips: No effect.

4-9 slips: -1 penalty.

10-15 slips: -2 penalty.

16+ slips: -3 penalty.

The penalty applies to any skill a petty thief might use, including Filch, Sleight of Hand, Stealth, and even Fast Talk. The charms only protect goods in a modest shop or stall. There is another catch: The owner must sincerely believe in the god or gods whose favors are invoked by the slip.

Genuine charms are imported from a distant monastery, and cost about \$10.00. Counterfeits are common.

## Equipment

Mail leggings (DR 4/2); mail shirt (DR 4/2); heavy leather sleeves (DR 2); pot-helm (DR 4); large knife (1d cut/1d-1 imp); camp gear; horse; medium shield (DB 2); two javelins (1d imp); shortsword (1d+2/1d-1); whip (1d(0.5) cr).

## GURUKA LA'RAMIN

155 points

La'Ramin was a clever, mischievous, spiteful child. He had no friends, and even his parents barely tolerated him. No one objected when he was spirited away by recruiters from the Esoteric College of the Spiral Way, who sensed that the boy had considerable talents.

La'Ramin spent 15 years memorizing spells, studying herbal lore, and alienating his fellow students. He learned many things, but he never mastered as much as he could, or knew as much as he imagined. After repeatedly failing promotion to journeyman, La'Ramin became convinced that other students were sabotaging his career. He arranged a laboratory accident that resulted in two of them being expelled.

The grand master eventually caught on to La'Ramin's deceptions. He was on the verge of expelling the youth when some of Hemay's bandits banged on the chapter house gates and demanded tribute. La'Ramin claimed that he could run off the band . . . which he did, not by cowering them with magic but through blackmail. Some of the bandits were childhood acquaintances, and he had dirt on them that could ruin their standing with Hemay. This victory bought La'Ramin some time; he finished studying some useful spells, then slipped away to join his cousin's band.

Hemay is intrigued by La'Ramin's big plans and impressed by his arcane knowledge. The other bandits fear and respect the mage but don't like him.

La'Ramin avoids combat, not because he is a coward but because of how he behaves in the aftermath of battle. The sights and sounds of post-combat suffering puts him into a trance-like state in which he babbles, strikes himself with his fists, and smears himself with blood.

Unknown to La'Ramin, the apprentices he had expelled are looking for him, and plan to ruin his hopes as he once ruined theirs.

**ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 10 [0].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP: 12 [4]; Will 15 [5]; Per 14 [0]; FP: 12 [6].

Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.6'0"; 160 lbs.

## Social Background

TL: 3.

CF: Central Asia [0].

Languages: Local language (Native) [0]; Asian trade language (Accented) [4]; Western trade language (Accented) [4].

## Advantages

Magery 1 [15]; Social Regard (Feared) [5].

## Disadvantages

Enemy (Former classmates; 6 or less) [-10]; Odious Personal Habit (Blood smearing) [-5]; Overconfidence [-5]; Post-Combat Shakes [-5]; Sense of Duty (Hemay) [-2]; Social Stigma (Bandit) [-5].

*Quirks:* Abrasive; Ambitious; Boasts of big plans; Tattletale [-4].

## Skills

Area Knowledge (Native Mountains) (E) IQ [1]-14; Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Detect Lies (H) Per-2 [1]-12; Fast-Talk (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; First Aid/TL3 (E) IQ [1]-14; Herb Lore/TL3 (VH) IQ-2 [2]-12; Knife (E) DX+1 [1]-13; Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Riding (Equines) (A) DX-1 [1]-11.

## Spells\*

Appotation (H) IQ-1 [1]-13; Deflect Missile (H) IQ [2]-14; Detect Magic (H) IQ-1 [1]-13; Extinguish Fire (H) IQ-1 [1]-13; Ignite Fire (H) IQ-1 [1]-13; Light (H) IQ-1 [1]-13; Predict Weather (H) IQ-1 [1]-13; Scroll (H) IQ-1 [1]-13; Sense Foes (H) IQ [2]-14; Seek Water (H) IQ-1 [1]-13; Turn Blade (H) IQ [2]-14.

## Equipment

Leather jacket (DR 1); leather pants (DR 1); leather helmet (DR 2); large knife (1d-2/1d 1d-2 cut/1d-2 imp); camp gear; horse; small chest with collection of herbs; writing supplies.

\* Spells include +1 for Magery.

## GURUKA'S BANDITS

Most of the bandits come from mountain hamlets, and many are from the Guruka clan. Some of the raiders are fugitives from other lands, and a few are former caravan guards who have pitched in their lot with Hamay.

Most of the guards know how to use another weapon in addition to a sword. Include one of the following sets of skills and equipment with the basic bandit, if desired:

- Lance-12 and lance (1d+2 imp) and medium shield (DB 2).
- Spear-12 and Thrown Weapon (Spear)-14 and two javelins (1d imp) and medium shield (DB 2).
- Bow-14 and regular bow (1d imp), hip quiver with 20 arrows, and light shield (DB 1).

## Will They Work?

La'Ramin's plan to mass-produce protective scrolls began as an elaborate boast. Hemay took him seriously, and began gathering resources for the effort. The magician is currently stalling for time, hoping to make a breakthrough. He recently inscribed the Turn Blade spell on a slip of paper on which the monks had printed nonsense symbols. He brought the scroll with him on a raid, and used it to cast the protective charm on one of Hemay's lieutenants. As he had hoped, the ploy convinced his fighting companions that his project was beginning to bear fruit.

La'Ramin's scheme will likely fail no matter how much time he gets. The printed anti-theft charms are not magic spells, but a *receipt for prayers*. The monks who create the chits commit to spin prayer wheels, light incense, and chant on the buyer's behalf. Putting enchanted ink on enchanted paper isn't enough; La'Ramin would need to find a monastery full of monks willing to petition for the safety of a band of thugs and thieves.

**ST 11; DX 11; IQ 10; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10. Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Block 8. 5'6"; 150 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Asian trade language (Broken/None); Duty (Guruka's company; 12 or less); Enemies (Bandit-hunters; 6 or less); Fearlessness 2; Native language (Native/None); Reputation -2 (Ruthless bandit; Everyone but clan; 10 or less); Sense of Duty (Fellow warriors); Social Stigma (Wanted criminal). *Quirks:* Crude manners; Contemptuous of civilized folk.

**Skills:** Area Knowledge (Native Mountains)-10; Brawling-12; Knife-11; Riding (Equines)-12; Shield-11; Shortsword-11; Stealth-10; Survival (Mountain)-9; plus Packing-11 or Animal Handling (Equines)-11.

**Equipment:** Mail leggings (DR 4/2); mail shirt (DR 4/2); heavy leather sleeves (DR 2); pot-helm (DR 4); shortsword (1d+1 cut/1d-1 imp); large knife (1d-1 cut/1d-1 imp); camp gear; horse.

# C IS FOR COYOTE HELM

Treason in Norfon was punished by either execution or exile to the lead mines of Hoarfrost Isle. King Carinel gave his old friend (and would-be usurper) Baron Tannel a third option: exploration.

The young king proposed that Tannel lead a fleet over the Foul Sea to the wild lands along the edge of the world. If the rumors were true, he would return with gold, gems, exotic spices, and pledges of fealty from whole nations of barbarian chieftains.

Tannel left port with five ships and 170 men. He returned two years later with two battered vessels and a few dozen sickly survivors. Tannel, missing an eye and a leg, made his official report.

Instead of cities of gold, fertile lands, and easily cowed tribesmen, the expedition found bleak storm-wracked shores, impenetrable mountain ranges, and endless arid plains. The hospitable spots swarmed with savages whose warriors moved like shadows through the night, and could fill the air with stone-tipped arrows.



He presented the king with a paltry few crates of loot, surrendered his commission, and retired to the fishing village where he grew up.

King Carinel was pleased with Tannel's offerings. There was a bale of herbs that cured scurvy, the mummified head of an enormous bird, and an obsidian dagger that, when thrown, unerringly pierced the heart of its target. There was also a bronze-trimmed leather helmet, of great age, which could summon an outlandish creature dressed in motley clothing. The dog-like being would entertain those present by dancing, juggling, and performing sleights of hand, then whirl about and disappear without a trace. Guests who have witnessed the magical performer express disappointment only in its final act, in which it asked riddles in an unknown tongue.

## A CLOSER LOOK

The helm is of hardened leather, rimmed and reinforced with bronze. On top is a small figurine of a wolf-like creature. It stands on its hind legs and holds a small drum and drumsticks in odd un-human hands. Its head is raised to the sky, and appears to be howling . . . or perhaps laughing.

Mages can sense powerful magic about the helm. Analyze Magic and similar spells show it contains a summoning spell, one that has the character of a divine invocation. Anyone magically peering into the object's past shrieks, clutches his head, and faints. He awakens a few hours later, babbling about the "Dark City across the Sea," the "Last Question," and the "Drummer of the Abyss." After calming down, he can provide a more coherent report about vague, disturbing images of grim cyclopean cities, sacrificial altars, and the leering faces of men smeared with ashes and blood.

When the helm is worn, a living creature similar in appearance to the figurine on top appears. The slightly built furry biped – Lesser Coyote – stands about 4' high. She (this much is anatomically obvious) is dressed in a vest pieced together from colorful rags, a necklace of silver bells and copper medallions, and a headdress of eagle feathers. She appears not only friendly, but delighted by the present company.

## LESSER COYOTE

Once summoned, Lesser Coyote offers an introductory bow and entertains everyone present. She entrances young children with magic tricks, teaches intricate dance moves to bashful young men, and favors young women with a feather from her bonnet and copper beads magically plucked from the air. She amuses older guests with dancing, juggling, and (if appropriate to the audience) a disturbingly risqué pantime show.

After she has had a chance to show her talents, Lesser Coyote's expression becomes serious. She seeks out the most important person in the room, clears her throat, and asks him (or her) a question. Her words are incomprehensible, but her tone unmistakably grave. After pausing for an answer, she repeats the question twice more, speaking even more deliberately and earnestly. In the likely case that she gets no answer (or the *wrong* answer, on the off chance that someone can actually understand her), Lesser Coyote looks immensely relieved. After a final bow, she spins around three times and vanishes.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

Lesser Coyote once belonged to a mighty pantheon. While only the equivalent of a court jester, she had significant powers on the spiritual and physical planes. The civilization that worshipped the pantheon was wiped out ages ago; its conquerors converted the few survivors and expunged every trace of its culture. Bereft of believers, the gods that Lesser Coyote entertained faded away. She survives because she is ordained to play a part in the grim end-time events prophesied by the lost civilization. It is her duty to appear when the helmet is donned, and ask the Last Question of the mortals around her. The entertainment she provides before fulfilling this duty is a lagniappe for her hosts, and a desperate bit of self-expression by a once vivid and powerful personality. When the question is answered satisfactorily, the *other* survivor of the pantheon will fulfill *his* remaining duty . . . after which there won't be any more entertainment for anyone, ever.

### "Lesser" Coyote?

Lesser Coyote is not on speaking terms with her disreputable older brother, who went on the lam after a practical joke went too far. She suspects he's hanging out with other gods these days.

### Put Away the Dice

Thanks to her divine nature, Lesser Coyote cannot be captured, subdued, or killed by mortals by *any* means, physical or magical. By turnabout, she cannot harm others, nor have any lasting, significant effect on the physical world.

However, because of her old job title as a kind of jester, she is allowed to *entertainingly humiliate* anyone who assaults her. A warrior grappling her might find himself, after a few twists and turns, engaged in a passionate embrace, with her floppy black lips pressed against his. Blades swung at her bend into curious shapes. She snatches arrows from the air and adds their fletching to her headband. Other attacks are shrugged off as casually as a busy mother ignoring a pesky two-year-old.

## THE LAST QUESTION

Lesser Coyote speaks a language that has been dead for thousands of years. No one living can comprehend it and great pains were taken to expunge all written record of it. This is a good thing. If someone understands Lesser Coyote's question, and gives the right answer, she will give a mournful howl. Soon after this, the sound of a giant drum will be heard all over the world . . . the drum whose beat signals the beginning of the End-Time.

That much is prophesied. But what *is* Lesser Coyote's question? What answer is she looking for? And just how will this "End-Time" play out?



These matters are best determined by the GM, to match the style and power level of the campaign, and its mythos. More importantly, the GM's choices should create opportunities for adventure. For example: After the beat of his drum triggers some earthquakes and snuffs out a few minor stars, the *other* survivor of the ancient pantheon – a mysterious figure only known as the Drummer – discovers that he cannot wake the serpent-deity who was supposed to swallow the earth. It

slithered off into oblivion ages ago. Unable to fulfill his destiny, the Drummer could take a demotion; as a mere dark lord, he tries to start a grim empire in his ancient homeland. Released from *her* ancient duty, a steadily fading Lesser Coyote could aid those opposing him.

For more details on the Drummer and his drum, see “.” is for Full-Stop Drum in *Pyramid* #3/1.

## D IS FOR DRAW TOGETHER SHARDS

When it came time to categorize and catalog the magical library hidden in the necropolis of Nehr, the spell Draw Together Shards was mistakenly identified as a quaint variant of the Repair spell. In fact, it is far more powerful. It was created by a mage to help with his research of even more ancient magic.

### *Draw Together Shards (VH)*

#### Regular

Draw Together Shards is meant to be cast on a fragment of a clay tablet. It also works on pieces from ceramic pots, lamps, and statues. The shards of the item begin moving quietly toward the ensorcelled piece. It might take days or months for all of the bits to arrive . . . even more if the bits have to crawl out of the sea, extricate themselves from a wall, or assemble themselves from dust. When all of the components are in the

same area, they whirl about for a moment before slamming together. The resulting item is as good as new. Unlike more conventional repair spells, any writing on the item is intact.

The time required for an item to reassemble itself is the number of pieces squared, in hours. Thus, a tablet broken into 12 pieces would take six days to gather. *Double* the time if the pieces are scattered over an area of a large city or county. *Triple* the time if even a single piece must cross the face of a large nation; *quintuple* the time if the pieces have to come through an ocean or large continent.

Long distance modifiers apply to this spell.

*Duration:* See above.

*Cost:* 4 to cast; 2 per day to maintain (until completion).

*Time to cast:* 5 minutes.

*Prerequisites:* Repair, Trace, and Apportation.

## E IS FOR ESSUM'S BARGE

Star pilots are the most punctual, persevering, and dedicated residents of the Celestial Sphere. Night after night, year upon year, generation after generation, they steer their craft in carefully prescribed courses across the heavenly vault.

For a star pilot and his craft to go down is unheard of, but just such a thing happened 20 years ago. The unlucky pilot was Essum; his cargo was Shemhault, a smoldering red star that he kept in formation in the constellation of the Lesser Sword.

The barge crashed in Kanharry, a chilly northern land of barren hills, swamps, and dark boreal forests. The region is sparsely settled, thanks to a population of enthusiastically predatory wolves (see p. 31) and snow leopards.

Essum's barge landed on a marshy river bank in early winter. Despite the cushioning of snow, the impact came close to splitting the great craft in two. Shemhault broke free and skidded hissing through the snow. It plowed through a stand of pines, leveled an abandoned village, and finally came to rest in a swamp.

Exposed to the earthly realm's vulgar elements, the corpses of Essum's crew evaporated like dew. The

pilot's own body did not disappear or decay. The hunters who found the wreck were not even sure that he was dead. While rough and uncultured, they sensed that the stern-featured giant was someone deserving respect and reverence.

### Healing Essum

It is possible to revive Essum. His giant form must be bathed, suffused, and injected with the Balm of Celestial Quintessence. (See *Q is for Quintessence*, p. 25). Each resuscitation attempt requires four portions of the Balm and a Pharmacy (Herbal)+2 or Esoteric Medicine+4 roll. Using an additional measure of the Balm gives a +4 skill bonus; allow another +1 bonus for each additional healer (skill 12+) assisting.

On an ordinary success, Essum stirs and blinks his eyes; he'll need 2d weeks to fully recover. On a critical success, only 1d days of rest are required. On an ordinary failure, the attempt fails but another can be made. On a critical failure, the patient crumbles to dust!

The hunters used a sledge to move Essum to their clan's seasonal camp. After much debate the elders and shaman decreed that the giant was one of the sleeping champions of the People, and that he should be set among the biers of the kings of old. When summer came, a grand precession carried Essum over high passes and through treacherous valleys to an ancient ruined city that the northern tribes had adopted as their royal necropolis. The pilot was brought to an underground vault and laid on a pile of furs. The chamber was stocked with firewood, lamp oil, and dried meat and berries – provisions for the giant should he awaken from his slumber. An expedition was sent each year to refresh the supplies, cleanse the giant's body, and perform solemn rituals.

Essum is in fact not quite dead. A silver mirror held up to his face will fog over . . . if one is patient enough to wait a day for him to exhale.

*The Shemhault cinder is a source of the rare element Celestial Quintessence.*

## ESSUM

198 points

Essum's father was a human hero who climbed to the starry realm to rescue his sister, who had been kidnapped by a bureaucrat of the celestial court. Along the way, he seduced one of the maidens whose dancing stirs the Northern Lights. The babe that resulted from this union was ridiculed and subject to cruel tricks, but overcame the disgrace of his origins to become a respected star pilot.

A stern, demanding, and emotionally remote person, Essum devoted his life to his career. He spent his days studying in his austere mansion behind the western wall of the vault of the night. He was unfamiliar with the quotidian details of life on the earth, but the face of the world became as well known to Essum as the night sky is to a terrestrial navigator. Intrigued by written accounts of fishing and whaling, the pilot eventually made several trips to port cities. He learned a few words of several "terrestrial" languages, but mostly kept to himself.

If revived, Essum will be wracked with guilt over the loss of his crew and ship. He will be determined to return to the Celestial Sphere and set things right.

**ST** 18 (Size, -10%) [72]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 12 [20]. Damage 1d+2/3d; BL 65 lbs.; HP 14 [-8]; Will 14 [15]; Per 12 [5]; FP 10 [-6].

Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 8. 9'2"; 297 lbs.; SM +1.

### Social Background

*TL:* 3.

*CF:* Celestial realm [0].

*Languages:* Language of Celestial Sphere (Native) [0]; Campaign's common tongue (Broken) [2]; Asian trade language (Broken/None) [1]; Western trade language (Broken/None) [1].

### Advantages

Absolute Direction [5]; Charisma 1 [5]; Extended Lifespan 3 [6]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; Gigantism [0]; Reputation 3 (Respected star pilot; All residents of Celestial Sphere; Always) [5].

### Disadvantages

Duty (Return to heavens) [-5]; Honesty (12 or less) [-10]; Increased Consumption 1 [-10]; Workaholic [-5].

*Quirks:* Fascinated by "wet" ocean and conventional ships; avid reader; Stern and demanding of underlings [-3].

### Skills

Area Knowledge (Celestial Sphere) (E) IQ+2 [4]-13; Climbing (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Fishing (E) Per+1 [2]-13; Geography/TL3 (Earthlike Worlds) [2]-10; History (Celestial Sphere) (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Knot-Tying (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Leadership (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Navigation/TL3 (Celestial "Ocean") (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Savoir-Faire (Celestial Court) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Seamanship/TL3 (E) IQ+2 [4]-13; Shield (Buckler) (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Shiphandling/TL3 (Sky Barge) (H) IQ+3 [16]-14; Short-sword (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Thrown Harpoon (E) DX+2 [4]-13.

## THE BARGE

The barge is 170' long and 65' wide. It is roughly rectangular in shape, with a large superstructure at the rear of the main deck. The sides bristle with snapped-off oars.

Much of the substance of the craft's timbers – celestial quintessence – has leached away. What is left resembles weathered gray balsa wood. It squeaks, splinters, and sags when walked upon.

The main deck is 50' wide and 120' long. Amidships is a circular hollow, about 40' across, lined with blackened tiles. The star Shemhault once nestled in this cavity.

The superstructure has two levels. Down below is a galley and mess; up top is the half-covered pilot's deck where Essum worked the tiller.

Below and to either side of the main deck are galleries where the oarsmen sat. The benches are huge, suitable for beings standing 12' tall.

The cramped holds are packed with supplies. Besides coils of rope and spare oars, these included barrels of water, hard-tack, and amphora of honey and wine. The crash made a mess of the stores, and bandits and villagers have carried off some of it.

### Korank's Drum

Essum's exemplary service earned him many prizes. One was a magic drum whose resonant thrum inspired his oarsmen to greater effort. He gave it to his overseer, Korank.

The drum is about 5' across, 4' high, and weighs 200 lbs. It comes with two massive drumsticks, each 3' long and weighing 20 lbs. It is mounted just fore of the superstructure.

Oarsmen paced with the drum row 20% faster and require half as many rest breaks.

## MINING SHEMHAULT

Once a blazing mass of pure celestial quintessence, Shemhault is now a dark lump of slag . . . but not all of its magical essence has escaped to the heavens. Thus, a peculiar mining operation has sprung up around the former star. It is operated by Haraktar Soat's-Son, hetman of a piratical coastal clan. Most of the laborers are captives whose families could not afford to pay ransom; Haraktar has promised them freedom, a purse of silver, and passage back to civilized lands in exchange for two years of work.

The cinder resembles a slightly lopsided sphere of rust-stained pumice. It is about 35' in diameter; about 2/3 of it protrudes above the swamp. It is surrounded by a rickety scaffold and a shroud of sailcloth strips. Panels of the shroud are lifted to allow the miners to chip away at the surface. The shards are taken to one of a half-dozen outbuildings to be processed. These circular buildings are mounted on wooden pilings; their conical copper roofs are topped with a glass bottle. Any

celestial quintessence that escapes the processing within is caught by these contraptions.

Haraktar's settlement is located on the slopes of a nearby hill. Besides the extraction huts, it has:

- A pair of rude barracks surrounded by a barricade. The prisoners are kept here.
- A cookhouse, with an attached pen full of goats and pigs.
- A longhouse where the guards and chieftain live.
- A strong house, constructed of stone and heavy timbers, built into the side of the hill. The extracted quintessence and other treasures are stored here.

The settlement produces several jars of celestial quintessence every month. It is shipped to the coast during the few weeks a year when the swamp freezes over. After the jars are packed in barrels full of sawdust, they are hauled by sledge to the banks of a still-flowing river. There they are stacked in the holds of flatboats, which take them to Haraktar's pirate haven on the coast.

## F IS FOR FABULOUS PAVILION

The *Tragedy of Laddon and Giral* has appeared as a play, a prose poem, and a lengthy bard's tale. In Nian-Cho, it became a popular shadow-puppet drama. While the details of these adaptations differ, the story remains the same and is based on an actual historical incident:

*The Vush Horde is closing on Erutappet, a port city on the Middle Sea. Laddon, a gruff mercenary captain, intends to leave with his men as soon as a ship becomes available. Giral, an unhappy noblewoman, had exiled herself to the city following a failed engagement and is about to join a convent. The city fathers try to spark a romance between the two; love might inspire Laddon to lead his forces in defense of the city, and perhaps influence Giral's father to send his army.*

*The plan works at first, but rivals for both of the lovers' affections conspire to ruin the plan. Magical "snares and diversions" are deployed to distract the captain and the would-be novice. In any case, the plot succeeds: Each lover blames the other for turning cold, and each returns to their selfish pursuits. Undefended, Erutappet falls to the horde. Laddon dies in a shipwreck soon after his company flees the city. Giral falls into a magical slumber from which she never wakes.*

The actual "snares and diversions" were a diabolically tough tavern puzzle (see *T is for Tavern Puzzle*, pp. 27-28) and a hypnotic orb containing a miniature fairy pavilion.

### THE ORB

The slightly smoky, mostly transparent crystal is shaped like a fat lima bean, and is about 9" across. It is mounted on a heavy stone base carved to resemble a stout tower. Anyone with Magery can sense that it contains powerful magic. Analyze Magic and similar spells detect multiple enchantments, all custom work. Some produce illusions; another affects dreams; there is a variation of Fascination and some sort of sleep spell.

A magical, animated tableau is visible inside the crystal. It depicts a pavilion in the middle of a clearing in the woods. Masked servants serve costumed revelers, who drink, dance, flirt, and watch performers. Different parts of the crystal provide different levels of magnification, ranging from close-ups to wide-angle shots. The scene inside slowly rotates as well. A patient viewer will be able to see each portion of the setting at close range, and get a good look at every character. The figures' features, expressions, and movements are distinct and lifelike, and the meadow and pavilion startlingly detailed. Night falls on the glade every 24 hours. The pavilion is lit with colorful paper lanterns until well into the night, when couples leave for liaisons in small cottages in the surrounding woods. The action never exactly repeats; it is easy to conclude that the orb is actually a window onto an actual place.

The orb's images have a mildly hypnotic effect. It takes a deliberate effort (roll Will+2) to tear one's eyes away from the ever-changing scenes of revelry. People fond of carousing, and those with a weakness for romantic stories, are especially susceptible (apply up to a -2 penalty to Will).

### THE LAND INSIDE

Characters sleeping near the orb have vivid, pleasant dream-adventures of a visit to the land inside the orb. Visitors "arrive" on a path emerging from a pleasant woodland. The clearing ahead has well-groomed lawns, flowerbeds, and a slow-moving stream whose bank is lined with willow trees. There are plenty of benches and decorative fountains.

At the center of the clearing is the pavilion, a white canvas canopy supported by silvery poles. Underneath are a banquet table, a pillow-strewn entertainment area with a raised dais, and three boudoirs surrounded by colorful curtains. There are a few outbuildings as well: three small one-room cottages (each containing little more than a bed and a washstand) and an improbably clean kitchen and pantry.

## The Inhabitants

The glade's inhabitants are pretty or handsome, well dressed, and unfailingly friendly and accommodating. Each resident has a specific, stereotyped role: Flirty servant girl, pompous butler, lecherous mustachioed fop, mysterious bard, gallant knight, snooty matron and her naive and vulnerable ward, buffoonish old general, and so on.

The people speak in the visitor's native language. If there are multiple visitors, the natives speak in a language that everyone knows. For game purposes, the inhabitants have a score of 10 in each attribute and any skills required.

Visitors to the land are greeted by about two dozen servants, entertainers, and guests. They immediately invite the new arrival to join them in endless rounds of romance, intrigue, and mystery. A person who accepts will have opportunities to bed beautiful women or men (as appropriate), participate in exciting duels, and help solve whodunits involving stolen necklaces or missing handmaidens.

More passive fun can be found in the pavilion, where minstrels, jugglers, and other entertainers perform on stage. Masked servers walk through every few minutes, offering goblets of wine, tiny loaves of bread, chunks of fruit, and little skewers of spicy fried meat.

The inhabitants do everything they can to keep visitors busy. People find it very difficult to get away and explore.

## Puzzling Evidence

A character who visits the pavilion more than three times may make a disturbing discovery. Roll Per-1; on a success, the GM chooses an anomaly to reveal to the player:

- The visitor follows a couple of residents happily chatting on their way to an assignation. After the couple arrives at their trysting place – in a cottage, or behind some bushes – they freeze in place and stare off into the distance. After a half hour, they reanimate, resume chatting, and head back to the pavilion.
- The character notices something odd about one of the cottages. He opens the door and reveals a featureless white void. A moment later he is blinded by a brilliant flash of light. When he can see again, he finds himself with his arms at his side staring at a *closed* cottage door. Looking inside shows that everything now appears fine inside.
- A villainous inhabitant who was defeated and exiled on a previous day is back, in the role of a food server. He is not disguised; he sounds and behaves just like he did a few days earlier. But no one notices.
- One of the little dramas – such as a hunt for a lost bracelet, with a subplot involving a lecherous monk – is

repeated. (If a visitor stays long enough, *all* of the plots return for an encore.)

- The two paths that leave the glade – the “road to the sea” (used by residents who are exiled) and the “road to the mountains” (used by happy couples departing on their honeymoons) – meander through the woods for a while, then join each other.
- The character meets an inhabitant who isn't happy and sociable. In fact, she seems downright gloomy and regretful. This is Giral, whose mind was trapped in the globe.

Trying to point out or explain these problems to the residents is futile. They aren't interested.

## STAY AWHILE . . . STAY FOREVER!

A character's first few dream-visits to the land in the orb end when he wakes in the morning. If his visit involved a lot of drinking and wild dancing he may feel a bit hung over and fatigued; he may have bruises or marks from a night of romance. Wounds from dueling show up as red welts. These are psychosomatic symptoms.

Anyone who makes a habit of visiting eventually becomes stuck in the fantasy. In the context of the dream, he receives an invitation to stay forever. To determine if a character is trapped, start making Will rolls after his third visit. Apply these modifiers:

- +6 initial bonus.
- 1 for each visit after the third.
- +2 if the character enjoys some kind of success in real life.
- 4 if the character suffers a real-life setback, tragedy, or disappointment.
- 1 if the character had a pleasing time on his last visit.
- 2 if the character enjoys carousing or is romantically inclined (as determined by quirks or disadvantages).
- +2 if the character made a disturbing discovery in the orb.

Trapped people become visible in the orb, but only as additional illusionary participants. The dreaming character cannot signal the outside world by jumping around and waving at the sky!

A trapped character is not comatose. He stirs, roll overs, and mumbles in his sleep. If pinched, slapped, or hit with an Awaken spell, he starts, blinks, and grumbles as though about to rise, but then goes right back to sleep.

Breaking the orb instantly ends the victim's slumber. The Nightmare spell, used in conjunction with Dream Viewing, can scare the character out of his dreamland vacation, albeit at the cost of some psychological trauma. Another approach is to enter the character's dream and persuade him to leave. This can be done by using the Dream Projection spell, or simply having another character take a nap in the vicinity of the globe.

A character whose body dies while he is dreaming remains as a participant in the fantasy world – with the voice, appearance, and broad mannerisms of the real person – just as Giral was trapped.

*Anyone who makes a habit of visiting eventually gets stuck in the fantasy.*



# G IS FOR GROSS OF PICKLED PRIVATES

The funeral rites of the Fifth Leopard Emperor, the last of his dynasty, included a universal rending of garments, sacrifice of a third of the empire's livestock, and the live burial of over 600 servants. Of these retainers, 144 – the emperor's prized eunuch advisors – did not perish with the others but instead entered a half-life, as had been arranged by the court necromancers.

The eunuchs spent a century tirelessly praying for the emperor's swift entry to the high paradise. When the first grave robbers broke into the tomb, the servants slew them. The same fate met the next dozen bands of thieves. They met their match in a chief necromancer's great-grandson; the bandit froze the gelded guardians in their tracks with a spell he'd found in the family archives. By the time the spell wore off, the tomb's treasures were gone. To make things worse, the emperor's funerary statue had been broken open and the sacred ashes inside scattered to the winds.

The desecration of the tomb left the servants in a serious fix: The emperor's soul would never reach paradise and call them to his side. However, there was another way for them to achieve their reward. When they were prepared for their service, their excised parts were pickled and sealed in stone jars. The leaden seals were stamped with symbols spelling out a contract promising the return of the organs after a lifetime of devoted service. The contract-seal is a sort of bearer bond; whoever possesses a jar commands the loyalty of the corresponding eunuch. An advisor coming into possession of his own jar could free himself from servitude and enter paradise with a fully intact spirit.

The advisors made their way to the imperial palace to claim their reliquaries. To their horror, they found that the new dynasty had done some serious housecleaning: The vault containing the jars was empty. The eunuchs found employment in rural temples and imperial outposts, and used their spare time to search for the vessels. They weren't the only ones looking; one by one, the eunuchs found themselves in thrall to new owners. Some of these were nobles, or at least respectable commoners, whom the advisors tolerated as masters. Other jars were obtained by criminals, foreigners, or lowly merchants; the ancient administrators served them only grudgingly.

The eunuchs' service continued as the reliquaries were inherited, sold, or stolen. They witnessed the rise and fall of many dynasties, mourned as the great empire declined, and fled with its people in the face of a barbarian invasion. Now, over a thousand years later, more than three score of the advisors are still active. Some have worked in the same palace or temple for centuries. Most have served many masters. All long for the day that they are released from service.

## THE ADVISORS

The eunuchs resemble vigorous and alert 80-year-olds. They have dark skin, piercing gray eyes, and wispy white hair. They speak the common languages of the day with a strange accent, in raspy but powerful and assured voices.

While their deaths have been indefinitely postponed and they are not affected by many of the weaknesses of the flesh, they are still mortal. They can subsist on a few nibbles of food and sips of water a day. They are not physically impressive, but a few – the emperor's military advisors – are fairly fit.

The advisors are brilliant and educated men. About half are priest-magi, with profound knowledge of the soul's path through the afterlife. One in four is a retired general. The rest are agronomists, masters of public works, architects, and poets. Unfortunately, their skills are rather out of date. The generals are adept at hopping on chariots and directing formations of men armed with spears, crude bows, and wicker shields. The architects know nothing of arches or vaulted roofs. The accountants tallied wealth by pressing crude symbols into clay tablets. The advisors' wisdom and experience won't be *totally* useless to a modern king, but he would have to adapt their advice to fit present-day realities.

Still proud of their former positions, the eunuchs dress in re-creations of their elaborate ceremonial garb. When they do eat, they prefer millet bread, rich cloudy beer, roast songbirds, and other delicacies of their ancient land. They treat servants and slaves abominably, ride their underlings hard, and gripe if asked to do menial work.

If a eunuch is given his reliquary and formally dismissed from service, he clutches the jar to his chest, shouts a mysterious incantation, and cackles triumphantly before collapsing into dust.

## Priest

139 points

The Leopard Dynasty owed much of its power and success to the priestly caste. The priests rewarded loyal subjects by healing their bodies, keeping evil spirits at bay, and ensuring a good harvest.

**ST** 8 [-20]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 16 [120]; **HT** 8 [-20].

Damage 1d-3/1d-2; **BL** 13 lbs.; **HP** 8 [0]; **Will** 16 [0]; **Per** 12 [-20]; **FP** 8 [0].

**Basic Speed** 4.50 [0]; **Basic Move** 4 [0]; **Dodge** 7.5'8"; 90 lbs.

## Social Background

*TL:* 1 [-10].

*CF:* Ancient African empire [0]; African [1]; Middle East [1]; Western [1].

*Languages:* Ancient empire's language (Native) [0]; Campaign's common language (Accented/Broken) [4].

## Advantages

Clerical Investment [5]; Courtesy Rank 6 [6]; Fearlessness 1 [2]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Vitals) [15]; Power Investiture 2 [20]; Reduced Consumption 2 [4]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+8 to HT) [15]; Unaging [15].

## Disadvantages

Disciplines of Faith (Ritualism) [-5]; Duty (Toward reliquary-holder; Involuntary; Quite often) [-15]; Eunuch [-1]; Hidebound [-5]; Skinny [-5]; Supernatural Feature (No body heat) [-5].

*Quirks:* Bitter; Nostalgic; Haughty; Utters odd religious mottos [-4].

## Skills

Administration (A) IQ [2]-16; Religious Ritual (H) IQ [4]-16; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-16; Theology (H) IQ [4]-16; • 12 points from Astronomy/TL1 (Observational) (H) IQ [4]-16; Exorcism, Meditation, or Sway Emotions, all (H) Will [4]-16; or Fortune-Telling (Dream Interpretation) or Public Speaking, both (A) IQ [2]-16.

## Spells

Choose 8 points from Banish, Bless Plants, Divination (Astrology), Divination (Augury), Final Rest, Heal Plant, Minor Healing, Predict Weather, Relieve Madness, Relieve Sickness, Sense Spirit, which will be either (H) IQ [4]-16 or (H) IQ-2 [2]-15.

## Equipment

Robe; holy symbol; staff (1d-1 cr/1d-2 cr); incense; unguents.

## Administrator or Scholar

79 points

The third Leopard Emperor, greatest of the dynasty, began the practice of gathering the wisest and most skilled men of the empire to the palace. Besides giving the emperor easy access to their talents, this allowed him and the priests to keep close track of their ambitions.

**ST** 8 [-20]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 16 [120]; **HT** 8 [-20].

Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 8 [0]; Will 12 [-20]; Per 13 [-20]; FP 8 [0].

Basic Speed 4.50 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0]; Dodge 7. 5'8"; 90 lbs.

## Social Background

*TL:* 1 [-10].

*CF:* Ancient empire [0]; African [1]; Middle Eastern [1]; Western [1].

*Languages:* Ancient empire's language (Native) [0]; Campaign's common language (Native/Broken) [5]; Ancient *lingua franca* (Native) [6].

## Advantages

Courtesy Rank 5 [5]; Fearlessness 1 [2]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Vitals) [15]; Reduced Consumption 2 [4]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+8 to HT) [15]; Unaging [15].

## Disadvantages

Duty (Toward reliquary-holder; Involuntary; Quite often) [-15]; Eunuch [-1]; Hidebound [-5]; Skinny [-5]; Supernatural Feature (No body heat) [-5].

*Quirks:* Bitter; Nostalgic; Haughty; Enjoys ancient gourmet food [-4].

## Skills

Administration (A) IQ [2]-16; Area Knowledge (Ancient Empire) (E) IQ [1]-16; History (Ancient Empire) (H) IQ-2 [1]-14; Literature (Ancient Empire) (H) IQ-2 [1]-14; Religious Ritual (H) IQ-2 [1]-14; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-16; Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-15; • 16 points chosen from among Accounting, Diagnosis/TL2, Diplomacy, Finance, Geography/TL2 (Region Around Ancient Empire), Law (Ancient Empire), Pharmacy/TL2 (Herbalism), all (H) IQ+1 [8]-17; or Architecture/TL2, Farming/TL2, or Merchant, all (A) IQ+1 [4]-17.

## Equipment

Robe; cane; writing instruments.

## General

180 points

**ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 10 [0].

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 10 [-2]; Will 14 [0]; Per 13 [-5]; FP 10 [0].

Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 8; Block 8. 6'1"; 150 lbs.

## Social Background

*TL:* 1 [-10].

*CF:* Ancient empire [0]; African [1]; Middle Eastern [1]; Western [1].

*Languages:* Ancient empire's language (Native) [0]; Campaign's common language (Accented/Broken) [4]; Ancient *lingua franca* (Accented/None) [2].

## Advantages

Courtesy Rank 6 [6]; Fearlessness 3 [6]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Vitals) [15]; Reduced Consumption 2 [4]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+8 to HT) [15]; Unaging [15].

## Disadvantages

Duty (Toward reliquary-holder; Involuntary; Quite often) [-15]; Eunuch [-1]; Hidebound [-5]; Supernatural Feature (no body heat) [-5].

*Quirks:* Bitter; Nostalgic; Haughty; Enjoys ancient gourmet food; Tries to assume command of any soldiers he meets [-5].

## Skills

Administration (A) IQ [2]-14; Bow (A) DX [2]-11; Brawling (E) DX [1]-11; Driving/TL1 (Chariot) (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Leadership (A) IQ [2]-14; Public Speaking (A) IQ [2]-14; Religious Ritual (H) IQ-1 [2]-13; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-14; Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ [1]-14; Shortsword (A) DX [2]-11; Shield (E) DX [1]-11; Spear (A) DX [2]-11; Soldier/TL1 (A) IQ [2]-14; Strategy (Land) (H) IQ+2 [12]-16; Tactics (H) IQ+2 [12]-16.

## Equipment

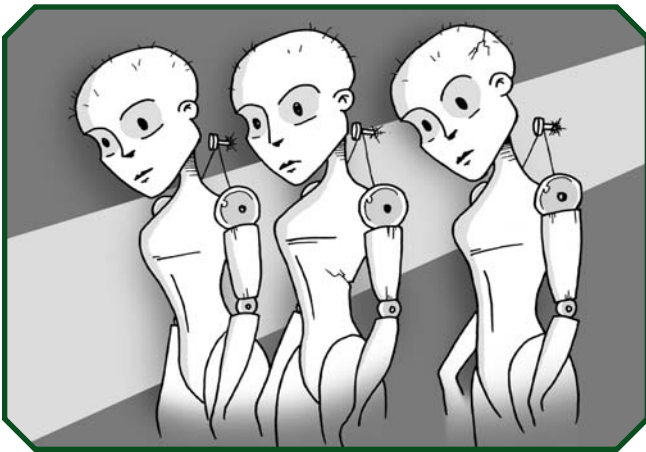
Robe; shortsword (1d+1 cut/1d-1 imp).

# H IS FOR HELPFUL DOLL

Not all kings take living servants to the grave with them. The ancient peoples of Cheo created realistic sculptures called *hippaya* (on Earth, the ancient Egyptians called them *ushabti*). They would come to life in the next world and serve the resurrected dead. The cheapest hippaya were made of unglazed, sun-hardened clay. Premium models were designed using wood, glazed ceramic, and metal.

When Princess Ushirpot of Larshum was betrothed to Prince Han-Lam of Cheo, her father commissioned a magnificent addition to her dowry-trove: 57 quite extraordinary hippaya. The cubit-tall figures had tailored clothing, real hair on their heads, and real teeth in their mouths. Most remarkably, a certain sound or action would transform the figure into an animated servant capable of real work. Each had its own specialty; while not remarkably competent, the servants required no food or drink and were wonderfully obedient. A second key sound or action turned the domestic back into an inanimate doll.

The hippaya were claimed by Urshipot's new mother-in-law, Empress-Dowager Pohuoato. This sour, demanding woman was obsessed with mortality and her place in the next world. Pohuoato ordered the servants be animated for inspection. After a stern group lecture, Pohuoato interviewed each one in turn. They were then marched to her splendid tomb in the mountains, assembled in a dim ante-chamber, and deactivated.



The empress-dowager inspected her tomb and its treasures every year. After she became bedridden, she delegated the task to a trusted advisor . . . one who didn't deserve her trust. He lent the hippaya to courtiers, imperial magicians, and the priests who managed the royal tombs. The dolls learned many secrets during this service, including the locations of treasure caches and the details of magical rituals.

Three master records of the hippaya's activation codes were made. One was reserved in the workshop in Larshum where the statues were crafted and enchanted. Another was kept in Pohuoato's residence. The final scroll was encased in a leather tube and placed in the empress-dowager's sarcophagus, so she could command the dolls when she woke in the next world.

What became of the empress-dowager's soul is unknown, but when her tomb was looted a century after her death, its treasures were there for the taking. Some of the hippaya were removed by the first thieves, for inclusion in other prestigious burials. The rest were taken several hundred years later, when the tomb was rediscovered. By this time, the purpose and properties of the hippaya were forgotten; the new thieves thought that they'd discovered artwork of marginal value. But marginal is better than nothing; the statues were shipped to curio dealers across the sea.

About two dozen of the magic servants survive intact. Many reside in tombs and curio collections. Two, at least, are regularly brought to life. One is a sturdy gardener kept as a diversion by the residents of a royal harem. A temple in Nian-Cho has a seamstress hippaya. In addition to maintaining the monks' robes, she is used as a stage prop in an annual religious mystery play.

## HIPPAYA

The useful dolls are a kind of golem, a tireless animated servant. When activated, they are encased in an "illusion of life" that makes them look like living, slightly undersized humans.

Hippaya are meek, compliant, and attentive; they speak deferentially, with elaborate courtly manners. When lashed (an acceptable treatment for slaves in Cheo and Larshum), they are programmed to groan and grovel.

Hippaya obey whoever activates them. They only understand the ancient tongues of Larsham and Cheo, but very simple requests can be made by Gesture.

The spell to create Hippaya has been lost for thousands of years. It only worked on elaborate figures, not mere slabs of clay.

Hippaya damaged in their fragile doll form have the corresponding deformity when activated; it is common for them to have missing digits, limbs, or eyes. Cosmetic scratches and marks are concealed by the illusion of life. Damage to a hippaya must be repaired by a craftsman who has the Artist (Pottery) skill. The clay, paint, wood, and cloth must be enchanted with the Golem spell (or the ancient Hippaya spell, if it is discovered or reinvented). The enchantment requires 5 points of energy and costs \$100 per point for repair materials used.

**ST** 9; **DX** 8; **IQ** 8; **HT** 8.

Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9; Will 8; Per 8.

Basic Speed 4.50; Basic Move 4; Dodge 7.

4"10' to 5"; 90-125 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Automaton; Cannot Learn; Doesn't Breathe, Doesn't Eat or Drink; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Injury Tolerance (Homogeneous, No Blood); Reprogrammable; Single-Minded; Social Stigma (Valuable Property); Unaging; Unhealing; Vacuum Support; Wealth (Dead Broke).

**Skills:** Savoir-Faire (Servant to Royal Court)-10. • One of the following: Housekeeping-10; Animal Handling-10, Cooking-10, Gardening-11, or Sewing/TL1-11.

**Feature:** Does not have or need to expend Fatigue Points.

# I IS FOR IMMOBILIZING KITTY

Fabled enchanter Lin-Barin created this magical feline for his sister-in-law, Madam Hiruta Iraqueet, a wealthy widow. She used the animal to discourage visitors taking advantage of Nian-Cho's tradition of hospitality. She named the cat Sir Chadost, after the courtier who codified the land's standards of etiquette.

*Beware of the friendly cat!*

By local custom, Iraqueet was obliged to provide refreshments to any visitor who knocked on her door and the uttered prescribed formal greetings. She soon found herself entertaining a steady stream of trappers, woodcutters, and vagrants. The cat allowed her to exploit another loophole in the rules. The uncouth guests generally knew just enough polite small talk to get through a quick lunch. She trained the animal to plop itself on the lap of her current visitor . . . and stay there. Trapped by the cat, his stay extended to hours, and he eventually made a social gaffe. Custom demanded that he make amends. Madame Iraqueet insisted these boors work off their debt with a day's toil in her orchard.

The widow's scheme was undone by a clever hunter. As he sat down to lunch, he tossed a bag of catnip onto Madam Iraqueet's lap. The cat settled in to play with the fragrant bundle, pinning his mistress in place. The hunter, who had practiced the art of charming banter, took a seat and patiently waited for his host to lose her composure. After 12 hours, she

admitted defeat and begged him to remove the cat. He agreed, on the condition that he keep the animal. Resigned, Iraqueet accepted. Soon after, she sold her estate and moved away.

The cat has changed hands many times through the decades. An unscrupulous madame took advantage of Sir Chadost to set up important clients for blackmail. Recent rumors suggest that Mad King Tasket has been using the animal in one of his elaborate practical jokes.

Sir Chadost is a friendly, chubby orange house cat. He has three special traits: Unaging, Luck, and a powerful, but limited, mind control spell that is cast on anyone whose lap he sits on. He may be shooed away before settling down, but once he gets comfortable, the victim must make a Will-4 roll. If the roll fails, the visitor feels obliged not to disturb the animal. The victim resists being pulled from the chair, and he protects the cat with his arms if someone tries to attack or remove the cat. He may roll again (Will-4) to break the charm every hour, or if placed in physical danger. Apply these modifiers:

Very hungry or thirsty: +1

In great danger (under attack, building on fire): +4

In desperate need to eliminate bodily waste: +1

Supplied with food and drink: -2

Host is charming and polite: -2

Likes/is obsessed with cats: -2/-4

Hates/is phobic of cats: +2/+4

The cat will leave of his own accord after 1d+8 hours.

# J IS FOR JUSTICE OF THE KANOST

*There seems to be one in every barracks, every wizard-school dormitory, every chapter house of the thieves' guild. Sometimes they are dim-witted, garrulous brutes, but as often as not, they are furtive, scrawny, scowling fellows who eat alone and won't meet your gaze. Make the mistake of striking up a conversation with them, and you'll get an earful: Lip-smacking admiration for the interrogation techniques of barbarians, sadistic villains, and would-be tyrants. Descriptions of the horrid things an usurper did to members of the former royal family. A longing to see, in person, what an iron maiden or the strappado does to a person.*

*It would be pathetic, if it weren't so disturbing.*

*If you don't find an excuse to get away, you'll almost certainly hear about Kanost.*

The dusty village of Kanost straddles an important caravan route between the fertile plains of Doromi and Kyangi. It was once an oasis of civilization on the steppe, with tree-lined streets, picturesque mansions, and bubbling fountains. Kanost's caravanserai was as splendid as a palace; its many temples filled the spiritual needs of the city's residents and visitors.

Old Kanost's wealth attracted entrepreneurs, artisans, and scholars. As traffic along the caravan route increased, more humble folk came to stay. The well-ordered old city found itself

surrounded by a ring of tenements, shanty towns, stockyards, and teeming marketplaces. Alarmed by what they saw as an invasion by thieves, prostitutes, beer-brewers, and soldiers of fortune, the city's wealthy merchants and temple administrators demanded action. Determined to show that he would not put up with lawlessness, Lord-Mayor Dhalinkost created new courts, new laws, and a new militia. Stocks and public gibbets were erected; deals were made to supply convict labor to Doromi's mines and quarries.

The campaign had some early successes. The streets of the old city were swept clean of beggars and pickpockets, and great advances were made against the worst of the smuggling gangs (that is, the ones that didn't work for well-connected merchants). Still, Kanost's elite was not satisfied. The guild masters wanted dues-flouting freelance artisans booted out. Holy men were enraged that the brothels still operated. Desperate, Dhalinkost sought magical assistance.

The College of the Lidless Eye had long called Kanost home. The College's silver-tongued prefect convinced the mayor that his group could supply what was needed. Members of the college accompanied the militia on their patrols, weaving spells to detect and trap lawbreakers. The city-state's already pitiless magistrates sentenced the guilty to



the Lidless Eye's creative, malevolent hexes. Execution by impalement was reintroduced. The proceedings were overseen by the Lidless Eye's high magi, who were rumored to derive mana from the suffering of the victims.

The streets of Kanost became cleaner, safer, and quieter, if only because so many citizens stayed at home rather than risk the net of arbitrary justice. Scores of refugees accompanied every caravan leaving town. With time, Dhalinkost became a mere puppet of the College's inner circle. His trusted advisors were accused of various crimes and met sticky ends; their splendid mansions were claimed by the dark mages. The city's temples were defiled and used to host orgiastic rites.

The reign of terror was broken, after four dreadful years, by some of its most miserable victims. Convict laborers toiling in a marble quarry rose up against their overseers. They were organized into an army by one of their own, a priest who had been falsely accused by a member of the Lidless Eye. They made their way to Kanost and began a bloody war against the dark mages. Ordinary folk, and eventually much of the militia, joined them. The sinister mages, and the magistrates who doled out sentences, were rounded up . . . and crushed with the obsidian tablets on which the details of the horrid magic rituals were inscribed. The last remnants of the College of the Lidless Eye fled into the southern mountains.

The people of Kanost did their best to set things right. The stark courthouses and dungeons of Dhalinkost's regime were razed; the temples were cleansed and re-sanctified. The city never returned to its heights of wealth and glory, but it did become a place where travelers could visit, worship, and conduct business without fear.

With time, the Lidless Eye's reign of terror became a tale for scaring children. Still, rumors that strangers have been seen poking around the ancient ruins give Kanost's current-day residents pause.

## A SAMPLER OF ABHORRENT SPELLS

All of the spells below are cast using a relatively lengthy ceremony, designed as much to terrify the victim as to share casting costs.

### *Imp Face*

**Regular; Resisted by Will**

This spell was used as a means of indirect punishment, often cast on a child of a wealthy or powerful transgressor. The ritual causes a small (4" high by 2" wide) imp face to appear on the victim's body – most often, the neck or cheek.

The horrid stigma can talk . . . and it usually does, insulting and mocking anyone it can see. The imp has access to the child's dreams and thoughts, and will skillfully use this knowledge to sow hatred and dissent.

It is possible to bandage or gag the imp; to do so in Kanost was a crime in itself.

*Duration:* 1 day.

*Cost:* 16 to cast; 2 to maintain.

*Time to cast:* 15 minutes.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 1, Planar Summons, and Alter Visage.

### *Mouth-Goes-Away*

**Regular; Resisted by HT**

The victim must be restrained and his jaw held shut while the caster makes a "sewing" gesture across his mouth. The victim's mouth disappears, leaving an expanse of smooth skin between nose and chin.

After the first day, the increasingly desperate victim must make a Will roll every six hours to keep from cutting a hole in the membrane in order to drink.

After the spell has dispersed, the victim's mouth and lips reappear. Any disfigurement done in the meantime remains; unless carefully healed, the resulting scars may detract from the person's appearance.

*Duration:* 1 day.

*Cost:* 12 to cast; 2 to maintain.

*Time to cast:* 10 minutes.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 1, Alter Visage, and four Body Control spells.

### *Despoil Seed*

**Regular; Resisted by HT**

This abhorrent spell can only be cast on a woman at least five months pregnant. She must be restrained while the caster daubs symbols on her belly, using an "ink" made from animal blood and the ash of human bones.

After the usual time, the victim gives birth to the animal whose blood was used. (In Kanost, this was a typically a jackal, boar, or vulture.) The creature is born almost mature, but smaller than a natural specimen. Its facial features are subtly distorted to resemble those of the "father." It comes to its senses an hour after birth and begins acting like a natural animal, with a child's affection for its mother.

If the caster's identity is made known, he gains a Reputation (-2, By Almost Everyone, Recognized Sometimes) as a pitiless monster. The woman's family may well become his sworn enemies.

*Duration:* Permanent.

*Cost:* 30 to cast.

*Time to cast:* 30 minutes.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 1, Alter Body, and Strike Barren.

### *Mark of Thieves*

**Regular; Resisted by Will**

The victim must be restrained while the caster uses a brush to apply blobs of a foul mixture – mucous, dung, earwax and the like – to hands and feet. Several hours later, dozens of small boils appear on the victim's palms and the soles of his feet. These burst at the slightest pressure, releasing a disgusting, slippery ichor. The victim gains Bad Grip (1 level) unless he wears gloves, and reduced Move (-20%, rounded down) unless he wears footwear. Unfortunately, wearing anything but loose bandages is painful: make a Will roll each hour to keep from removing more substantial coverings. The ooze hardens and ruins gloves and footwear after a day of use.

*Duration:* 1 week.

*Cost:* 4 to cast.

*Time to cast:* 5 minutes.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 1, Pestilence.

# K IS FOR KNOCK-DOWN BLOCKS

The last gift presented to Condor Boy by the Court of Twilight was a chest full of what appeared to be building blocks. The lad was taken aback. Why was a hero like himself being given a toy? Was it an insult? Nonetheless, in light of the other boons he had received, Condor Boy accepted the chest graciously.

As it happened, Condor Boy did play with the blocks while resting in his magic yurt, as well as during his captivity in the dungeon of the Ocelot King. He spent many hours assembling the tiny stone blocks and wooden beams into elaborate models. At first, he recreated buildings from his home village. Later, he made miniatures of the palaces and temples he had seen during his quest.

One night, after completing an especially large project that used every block in the set, he found a tiny scroll stuck to the bottom of the chest. On it was written what seemed a childish rhyme about toy castles. But by this time, Condor Boy had learned that the gifts of the Court of Twilight were never trifles. Thus, when he reached the monstrous wall that blocked the exit of the Labyrinth of Last Isle, he already knew the building set's true purpose. He constructed an elaborate model of the curtain wall, sprinkled it with dust and splinters scraped from the structure, and read from the scroll of doggerel. As he completed the last verse, he swept the model aside . . . and watched in wonder as the walls fell in a heap. In his haste to escape the labyrinth, Condor Boy left the blocks and chest behind.

The chest is made of wood laminated with colorful cloth. It measures 18" wide, 8" high, and 12" deep. The set has lost holds about enough tiny blocks and beams to recreate a large peasant's house, a small church, or the gatehouse of a medium-sized walled town.

Using the set to demolish a building requires three steps.

1. *Build a Model:* Constructing a model to the standards required for the spell to work necessitates a DX-6 roll. (A

character with a Hobby Skill in miniature building may, of course, use that!)

In addition to the blocks and beams included in the building set, the model must contain bits of material from the structure to be demolished. A greater variety of materials results in a more effective spell; treating the model with sawdust from wooden beams *and* rock dust from each wall *and* rust scraped from iron hinges works better than a sprinkle of a bit of rock dust. Collecting a minimal amount of material requires a few minutes of contact with an outer wall; a thorough job requires several days and access to the inside of the structure.

Use the following skill modifiers:

Each hour observing the structure: +4

Successful Architecture skill roll: +2

Rush job (one hour or less): -2

Painstaking job (6 hours or more): +4

Minimal additional materials: -2

Average amount of additional materials: 0

Comprehensive amount of additional materials: +4

2. *Recite the Poem:* The doggerel on the scroll must be read out loud, with feeling. This requires a Performance +4 or Public Speaking roll.

3. *Topple the Model:* This must be done artfully and dramatically, requiring a DX+4 roll. If successful, the actual building is moderately damaged; the better the roll, the more breaches, toppled pillars, or crumpled roofs occur. On a critical success, the structure is leveled! In any case, 1d×5% of the blocks and beams used to build the model are lost or destroyed.

On a failure, another attempt may be made, but 50% of the pieces used are lost and the model must be built again. On a critical failure, 75% of the blocks and beams used are lost or destroyed!

## Recreating the Blocks

Creating replacement blocks and beams requires the invention (using Thaumatology) of a new, specialized enchantment spell. This is a task of Average overall complexity, assuming that the existing set is on hand and a few pieces are sacrificed for analysis. Prerequisites for the spell include Enchantment, Power, Link, Stone to Earth, Shape Earth, and Earthquake.

Replacement pieces must be expertly crafted by skilled miniaturists from fine wood and stone. Enough pieces to

model a city wall, large church, or small castle cost \$10,000 and takes 100 man-days to complete; enchanting a set this size requires 5,000 energy. A set large enough to model a large fortress or cathedral costs \$40,000 and takes 500 man-days to complete; enchanting the set demands 10,000 energy.

Creating a second, separate set of blocks would also mean duplicating the chest and the scroll. Re-creating each of these enchantments would require a separate invention task.

# L IS FOR LUNAR BOOTS

The first of the boons Condor Boy received from the Court of Twilight were the lunar boots. He put them to good use on his journey across the Lands Beyond to the rim of the world. In the Labyrinth of Last Isle, he gave them to a young girl

whose feet were wrapped in rags. This selfless act earned him the Mantle of Compassion, the last of the tokens required to pass the bridge over the edge of the world and reach the Floating Abbey, the object of his quest.

The boots were lost to history for three ages and a thousand years. People began to doubt their existence, and indeed treated Condor Boy's saga as a mere fairy tale. Recently, the boots and many other treasures of legend were seen spilling from the belly of the Walking City after it was wounded by Szim and his Army of a Thousand Brothers. Bands of adventurers are even now tracing the dying city's path through the Panner Wastes, hoping to locate these fabulous treasures.

The boots are made of fine, pale leather. The laces are of a shimmering silver cord; each heel is a crescent of gleaming white material with an inner glow that brightens and dims with the waxing and waning of the moon.

The boots comfortably fit people between 4'8" and 5'4" high, and who weigh between 75 lbs. and 125 lbs. They may split if a larger person tries to wear them, and may fall off a smaller person (DX+2 roll every hour of moon walking to retain the boots).

The boot's real powers manifest when the heels are tapped together under the light of the moon. Until the heels are clicked together again, *the wearer only exists when the moon is in the sky*. During most days, at the new moon, and when it is

overcast, the wearer simply *isn't*. Outside observers see him disappear when the moon sets or is washed out by the sun. He appears again in the exact same spot when the moon becomes visible.

When the moon is in view, the wearer can, by simply willing it, "moon walk," striding great distances with each step. The degree of this magically enhanced Move depends on the phase of the moon:

New: Not possible.

Crescent: 100 yards/second.

Half: 200 yards/second.

Gibbous: 500 yards/second.

Full: 1,000 yards/second.

The wearer can cross any obstacle narrower than the distance noted above, and less than 1/20 that distance tall. For example, when the half moon is in the sky, the wearer could cross a river 200 yards wide, and stride over a 10-yard-high wall.

Moon walking is tiring; the wearer expends double Fatigue Points when on the march.

## M IS FOR MICE, MOUNTED

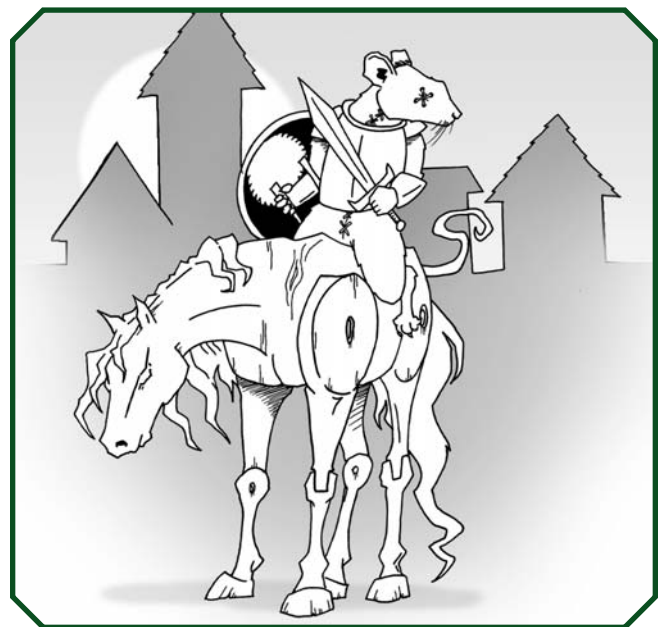
Thol Chorl, Baron of Ghiril Valley, achieved his most cherished ambition – eternal life – moments after his long-suffering subjects achieved theirs . . . to be rid of the spooky bastard.

Chorl woke in a cold, bloodless body to find his lofty private chambers as far below the ground as they were once above it. The buried tower was also surrounded by a shell of magically impervious rock. The witch-lord ordered his terrified personal servants to chip away at the stony sarcophagus. They worked until they died of thirst, with nothing to show for their labors but a few shallow scratches. Chorl continued their work, digging until his tools were worn to nubs. He tried sorcery next, using the fat and bones of his servants' corpses to create grisly implements of black magic. The spirits the lich summoned refused to help. He had cheated and insulted many demonic creatures in his quest for immortality, and his reputation had spread throughout the nether world. The witch-baron scoured his library of magic books for an incantation that might free him, and after many weeks of desperate research, found something that might help: an archaic, unreliable earth-moving spell once used in siege warfare. Chorl cast it, putting every resource into the effort. The resulting earthquake killed thousands and leveled the city above, but it failed to free him.

The earth-spasm did let something *in*, however. Small fissures now connected the tower to an ancient labyrinth. As ages passed, mice, lizards, and other small creatures found their way into Chorl's sanctum. By the time the baron noticed the shy creatures, he was utterly mad and beyond caring about actual escape.

People eventually forgot about the evil man who once ruled the land. In truth, the feeble thing that had been the baron was no longer to be feared. He lived on, past furies all but forgotten, with no purpose beyond the pursuit of a peculiar hobby . . . taxidermy. Working under feeble illumination spells, using scavenged materials, Chorl created an idealized version of his lost realm and peopled it with mounted, stuffed mice.

A century passed, and another. The valley was resettled, and the newcomers used the stones of the ruined city to build walls and sheep pens. A group of adventurers bought a treasure map from a scholar who had researched the baron's rise and fall. It accurately guided them into the labyrinth beneath the tower, and to a weakened portion of the stone shell. They succeeded where Chorl failed, cracking a passage through the rock with alternating blasts of heat and cold. In a chamber atop the tower, they found the baron's remains slumped over his work table, fingers lightly resting on his final masterpiece. At a touch, his withered body turned to dust. The adventurers scavenged what they could from Chorl's squalid quarters. They sold the mice and dioramas to a curio shop.



## Baron Thol Chorl's Soul

IQ 14; FP 10.

### Disadvantages

Reputation 4 (Demons and evil spirits; Arrogant cheater; Always).

### Spells

Animation-20; Astral Vision-20; Continual Light-20; Control Person-15; Daze-16; Fear-20; Gloom-20; Lich-16; Lure-20; Possession-18; Soul Jar-16; Steal Energy-16; Steal Vitality-16; Summon Spirit-16.

### Notes

Spells in which Chorl has a skill under 20 can only be cast when the mouse figure is activated. The required gestures are built into the automaton's routine.

Chorl's spirit lacks a coherent personality. All that remains is a mess of obsessions, insane whims, and petty grudges. His will uses the spells available to him to act these out. A sampler of what is on his mind:

• *Dress the street urchins in silk shirts . . . yes, that's the thing.*

• *Oh, to lie in the sun on the balcony of a fine villa and be fed peeled grapes . . .*

• *To do: Get invited to a banquet at the lord-mayor's mansion; dash wine in his face. Sit down, smile, and see him squirm, knowing he is powerless over me, ha ha ha!*

• *Hmm, what would it be like to dress like a peasant woman?*

• *Paddle the governess who gave me grief so long ago. She must feel the shame I felt!*

• *Cannot see the sun . . . must dig my way out!*

• *That wench . . . I saw how she was looking at me. She refused me because they got to her. I'll find her and make her point them out to me!*

• *Mother? Mother! Don't run away . . . (Chorl's mother was a heavyset woman with curly black hair and green eyes.)*

• *Where did I leave . . . it was just . . . who took it?*

• *Even up here, the night oppresses me. Lamps from their skulls, oil from their fat. Yes, that lit my way once. It will again.*

## COLLECT THE WHOLE SET!

There are 142 mice. Each is dressed in a meticulously sewn costume and wig, and equipped with tiny toys, tools, or weapons. There are street urchins, merchants, priests and acolytes, housewives, guards, liveried men-at-arms, street-walkers, and village idiots. Thirty-five of the figures are mounted in little tableaux, 44 are parts of sets (trains of monks and units of liveried soldiers, for example), and 63 are stand-alone characters.

Each figure, group of figures, or tableau has a tiny tag inscribed with a magic word and gesture sigil. Reading the word and making the gesture activates the figure, or figures, causing them to speak, walk about, and gesture. Chorl's early

works are rather charming; one tableau depicts urchins making a daring raid on a bakery. Another, set in a house of ill repute, features the staff singing and dancing while the madame praises Chorl's good looks and amorous prowess. Figures created late in the lich's artistic career perform dramas featuring mad tirades, senseless violence, and unsavory acts. One tableau depicts a meeting of a council. The officials, whom Chorl could never find legal cause to be rid of, are shown squabbling, drinking, and speaking longingly of their plans for the evening, which out of common decency cannot be repeated here.

One of the mice, an especially pathetic-looking urchin, is special. It is a Soul Jar, which contains Baron Chorl's tortured spirit (see box). He is not enjoying his eternal life.

## N IS FOR NARMUD MARKET CIRCUS

The Narmud Market Circus has worked many venues through the years. In good times, it features dozens of acts, performing beasts, and jaw-dropping illusory spectacles. More typically, it exists as a marginal enterprise employing a handful of performers who cook their own meals and drive their own wagons. Regardless, the troupe wanders the countryside, stopping at towns to earn coins.

One thing never changes. The circus always features Khetsarmon the strong man, Awit-Tiwa the exotic entertainer, and Lunderbag Amphoranug the clown. When the circus is doing big business their presence may seem almost incidental.

The other performers may suspect that the three are a temporary replacement act, or friends of the owner who were given a contract out of pity. In fact, they are the heart and soul of the enterprise.

Lunderbag, Khetsarmon, and Awit-Tiwa have been performing for thousands of years. They started their careers busking at the fabled Narmud Market of Salybos, a powerful city-state of ancient times. The three barely knew each other, and only worked the same corner because their acts did not compete with each other. On one fateful day, a god visited Salybos in human form. He was looking for entertainers to



perform at his son's wedding. After watching their acts the deity approached and made an offer. Khetsarmon made a ludicrous counteroffer. Lunderbag vomited on the god's sandals. Awit-Tiwa, desperate for funds to purchase a new outfit, attempted to seduce him. Their would-be patron was aghast. He laid a curse on the performers: The three must wander the world performing their acts until the god's great-grandson was ready to wed. This hasn't happened yet, and may not for another few thousand years.

The trio does not age. The Plague may give them a rash and a runny nose. However, the performers can *die*, and have. By celestial decree, the show must go on. After a few days, the performer wakes up naked on the slopes of a sacred mountain overlooking the ruins of Salybos. Some unerring instinct then guides the reborn entertainer back to the rest of the circus.

The curse foils any attempt to attain permanent employment, social stability, or higher status. It also prevents the troupe from voluntarily sleeping in the same spot for more than four nights in a row. This won't get them kicked out of jail, or keep them from sleeping in their own tents or wagons.

## KHETSARMON

322 points

Khetsarmon is a juggler, acrobat, and athlete. On stage he portrays an overconfident buffoon; his act depends as much on humorous patter as on physical skill. He is actually a brave, generous, and compassionate fellow. Sometimes he does things that can only be called heroic. (See *It Still Beats a Day Job*, in box).

Khetsarmon is a handsome man with curly brown hair, olive skin, and brown eyes.

**ST** 14 [40]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].  
Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 14 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 13 [8].

Basic Speed 7.00 [15]; Basic Move 7 [0]; Dodge 10; Parry 10. 6'4"; 190 lbs.

### Social Background

TL: 3 [0].

CF: Ancient cradle of civilization [0]; Middle East [1]; Western [1].

Languages: Ancient language (Native/None) [-3]; Campaign's common language (Accented/None) [2]; Classic *lingua franca* (Accented/None) [1]; Common Middle Eastern language (Broken/None) [1]; Common Western language (Broken/None) [1].

### Advantages

Attractive [4]; Charisma 1 [5]; Resistant to Sickness (+8) [7]; Unaging [15]; Unkillable 3 [150].

### Disadvantages

Charitable [-15]; Divine Curse (Rootless existence as entertainer) [-5]; Pacifism (Cannot harm innocents) [-10]; Poor [-15]; Secret (Unbelievably old and cursed) [-5]; Social Stigma (Vagabond entertainer) [-5]; Vow (Defend the downtrodden) [-5].

*Quirks:* Gives free shows to street urchins; Preens and struts [-2].

### Skills

Acrobatics (H) DX+1 [8]-14; Boxing (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-15; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-12; Hobby Skill (Juggling) (E) DX+2 [4]-15; Lifting (A) HT [2]-11; Jumping (E) DX+2 [4]-15; Performance (A) IQ+4 [16]-15; Riding (Equines) (A) DX [1]-12; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-10; Streetwise (E) IQ [1]-11; Teamster (Equines) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10.

### Equipment

Shabby but colorful clothing; balls and knives for juggling (1d-2 cr each).

## AWIT-TIWA

317 points

Awit-Tiwa is a hermaphrodite. In spite of, and because of, her ambiguous gender, she is an object of fear, fascination, and desire to both sexes. She has the acting skills and clothes sense to "pass" as a man or a woman, but on stage she dresses and affects mannerisms of both genders. She is smart enough to know when her unusual attribute is socially unacceptable. In addition to acting as the show's master of ceremonies, Awit-Tiwa performs an act that includes dancing, contortion, weight and age guessing, jokes clean and bawdy, impersonation, and story-telling.

Awit-Tiwa insists on obtaining a wardrobe of fancy (Status 2) clothing, for each sex, when she arrives at a new venue. Despite millennia of evidence to the contrary, she is convinced that fame, stability, and riches are right around the corner. One more command performance, one more seduction, one good box-office run, and she will be able to leave her sad-sack companions behind and hit the big time. She is sometimes invited to entertain at private parties, including quite fancy ones, but the curse always ruins things in the end.

## It Still Beats a Day Job

The trio has spent nearly every day of the last 50 centuries attending to the demands of travel and show business. Life treats them well, as long as they stick with their ordained profession. But sometimes the circus stumbles on opportunity that knocks too persistently to ignore, a fortune that must be pursued, or a wrong that demands to be righted. What follows has earned them more than a few appearances in history books. Characters with Literature or History specialized in the times and places where the circus has wandered may (roll skill-2) *recognize* them as legendary or historical figures.

Heroics rarely benefit the three entertainers, and it often gets them *killed*. In fact, they have perished together more than a dozen times. For the record: impalement, wolves, crushed by calving glacier, impalement again, burned at stake, drowned in frozen lake, eaten by cannibals, decapitation, stampeding elephant, hearts torn out on sacrificial altar, swallowed up by angry earth, chopped up by bandits, more wolves, and smothered in honey.

Note that although the feminine pronoun is used with regards to Awit-Tiwa for clarity, this person has no gender preference. Her companions refer to her by whatever gender seems most dominant at the time.

**ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 10 [0]. +80  
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 10 [-10]; Per 14 [10]; FP 10 [0]. 0  
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.  
5'8"; 140 lbs.

### Social Background

*TL:* 3.

*CF:* Ancient cradle of civilization [0]; Middle East [1]; Western [1].

*Languages:* Ancient language (Native/None) [-3]; Campaign's common language (Native/Broken) [5]; Classic *lingua franca* (Native) [6]; Common Middle Eastern language (Broken/None) [1]; Common Western language (Broken/None) [1].

### Advantages

Appearance (Handsome/Beautiful; Androgynous) [12]; Charisma 1 [5]; Double-Jointed [15]; Resistant to Sickness (+8) [7]; Unaging [15]; Unkillable 3 [150]; Voice [10].

### Disadvantages

Compulsive Behavior (Clothes horse) [-5]; Delusion (Fame just around the corner) [-5]; Divine Curse (Rootless existence as entertainer) [-5]; Pacifism (Self-defense only) [-15]; Poor [-15]; Secret (Unbelievably old and cursed) [-5]; Social Stigma (Vagabond entertainer; sexually ambiguous) [-10].

*Quirks:* Dotes on horses; Enthuses about next show; Flirts with wealthy and powerful; Vain [-4].

### Skills

Acting (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Dancing (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Erotic Art (A) DX+1 [4]-18\*; Fortune-Telling (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Makeup/TL4 (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Mimicry (Voice) (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Performance (A) IQ+4 [16]-18†; Public Speaking (A) IQ+2 [8]-16†; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Sex Appeal (A) HT+5 [20]-17; Teamster (Equines) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

\* Includes +5 for Double-Jointed.

† Includes +2 for Voice.

### Equipment

Fancy clothing; fan (1d-3 cr) and baton (1d-1 cr/1d-2 cr) for performances; small knife (1d-3 cut/1d-3 imp).

## LUNDERBAG AMPHORANUG

**340 points**

It's easy to mistake "Jughead Lund" for a local wino hired as a roustabout. That's deliberate; he is actually a skilled clown and pantomime artist who plays the circus's shabby, luckless, put-upon drudge. Over the course of his act, he manages to misinterpret or screw up every task given to him, resulting in lost props, destroyed sets, and fleeing or "dead" performing animals. Outside of a few gasps and moans, and a bit of ventriloquism (which he uses during a skit in which he frantically

## A Long Dark Night on the Town

Lunderbag Amphoranug possesses a grim, deep wisdom. Spend a night carousing with him, and an adventurer might learn a thing or two.

First, the person needs to convince Lunderbag that he's worth dragging along on the performer's nightly tavern crawl. Make a reaction roll, but *subtract* Charisma modifiers and *reverse* modifiers for good looks; Lunderbag likes to hang out with his own. The interested party gets a nod on a reaction of Good or better.

Make a Carousing-4 roll to see if the supplicant can keep up with Lunderbag.

Make a Per-2 roll to find out if the adventurer can figure out that he's dispensing wisdom.

Make a Will-2 roll to learn if the person has the courage to really listen to what he's being told.

Success wins the hero a character point, which can *only* be used to buy down a mental disadvantage.

tries to rescue a squawking "little man" from a locked trunk), Lunderbag remains silent while onstage.

Most suppose Lunderbag is a bit touched in the head or in a constant alcoholic stupor. In fact, he is a highly perceptive and tough-minded fellow who has learned a lot about life and the human condition through the millennia. He only holds forth when he's out partying. (See *A Long Dark Night on the Town*, in box.)

Lunderbag is short and dumpy, with a perpetual unshaven "muzzle" and small thatch of messy black hair.

**ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40] **HT** 10 [0].  
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 14 [8]; Will 14 [10]; Per 16 [20]; FP 14 [12].  
Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.  
5'4"; 160 lbs.

### Social Background

*TL:* 3.

*CF:* Ancient cradle of civilization [0]; Middle East [1]; Western [1].

*Languages:* Ancient language (Native/None) [-3]; Campaign's common language (Native/Broken) [5]; Classic *lingua franca* (Native) [6]; Common Middle Eastern language (Broken/None) [1]; Common Western language (Broken/None) [1].

### Advantages

Pitiable [5]; Resistant to Sickness (+8) [7]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15]; Unkillable 3 [150].

### Disadvantages

Alcoholism [-15]; Divine Curse (Rootless existence as entertainer) [-5]; Pacifism (Reluctant killer) [-5]; Poor [-15]; Secret (Unbelievably old and cursed) [-5]; Social Stigma (Vagabond entertainer) [-5]; Unattractive [-5].

*Quirks:* Seldom talks; Throws voice to confuse children; Wanders town looking for useful trash [-3].

### Skills

Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Hobby Skill (Pantomime) (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Makeup/TL3 (E) IQ [1]-12; Housekeeping (E) IQ [1]-12; Packing (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Panhandling (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Performance (A) IQ+3 [12]-15; Riding (Equines)-12 [1]; Sleight

of Hand (H) DX+1 [8]-13; Staff (A) DX [2]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Teamster (Equines) (A) IQ [2]-12; Urban Survival (A) Per-1 [1]-13; Ventriloquism (H) IQ+1 [8]-13.

### Equipment

Shabby clothing; small knife (cut/1d-3 imp); silk handkerchiefs and coins for act; squeaking stuffed rat; hip flask.

## O IS FOR OAT CAKE KIT

The Court of Twilight gave Condor Boy the oat cake kit to provide him with sustenance on his long journey to the world's rim. He gave the set to a poor woodcutter he met in the Forest of Sorrows. The man's family, well-fed for the first time in their lives, later returned Condor Boy's kindness when they found him lying near death in Mushroom Valley. After nursing the young hero back to health, the woodcutter brought him to a tavern at the edge of the world. One of the star pilots who frequented the place returned Condor Boy to his home on the great steppes.

The oak cake kit went missing when the Forest of Sorrows was conquered by a goblin army. It was thought lost forever, if not just a legend, until Lady Tylee of Gray Water and her band of archivists and explorers decided to track down the "boons." They managed, after a decade of effort, to retrieve all the oat cake kit's components. Lady Tylee and her court had oat cakes for breakfast for the rest of her life. The kit was willed to one of her trusted servants.

The oat cake kit consists of the following items:

*A small cooking tripod:* Built of blackened iron, it stands about two feet high, and has chains for hanging pots and pans.

*A small black cauldron:* This heavy iron pot has two uses:

If hung from the tripod, the cauldron becomes hot enough to boil water or stew. The magical heat dies away immediately

if the cauldron is removed from the tripod, or after two hours if left on the stand.

When someone pours exactly three ladles of clear water and then taps the ladle three times on the rim, the cauldron fills with enough batter to make four generously sized oat cakes. This works three times a day.

*An iron fry pan:* In addition to a handle, the pan has hooks so it can hang from the tripod. When placed in the tripod, it heats up without need for a fire. It cools down after an hour.

*A butter crock:* This thick-walled terra-cotta crock is always cool to the touch. When the lid is spun clockwise three times, a quarter-pound of good sweet butter appears inside. It stays cool and fresh all day. The butter only appears once a day.

*A small jug:* This container is made of very heavy ceramic, with a cork stopper. The jug fills with fine orange-scented honey each morning. It has a capacity of six ounces.

*A black iron ladle:* The ladle is sturdy but otherwise seems ordinary.

*A black iron turning fork:* The fork is enchanted so that it will never drop food or get hot enough to burn the holder.

Oat cakes resemble coarse, thick, moist pancakes. Four oat cakes, with honey and butter, provide a day's sustenance for an average person.

The magic pan and cauldron can be used to cook other foods.

## P IS FOR PRIMORDIAL GROVE

*Before the beginning, in the eternal god-time, all lived in the warm breath of Aysah All-Matron. All followed her exhalation and inhalation, and were in harmony, and were one with her will and were in accord. But Xar Xarn, he of Dissonant Will, waved his cold hand through the warm breath of Aysah All-Matron, and part of the world was not with her breath, and not in accord and not one with her will. Where his hand passed was condensation, and mist, and here the first trees were, their trunks as shadows of the fingers of the hand of Xar Xarn, he of Dissonant Will. And as the mists formed dew on the trunks, the first men and animals became.*

Many creation myths feature a primordial grove. It is not a paradise where unspoiled man dwelt in bliss or a bountiful hunting ground where the gods taught skills to the first men. Instead, it is a place of raw creativity where the fabric of the world is coarse and loosely knit.

The grove is located in a rural area. It is nestled in the corner of a broad, crescent-shaped valley. It covers about a square

mile. To the north and west are steep hillsides; to the east is a fast-running creek that feeds into a large pond lying to the south. The nearest large town is about a day away, but several hamlets lie within an hour's walk.

### FIZZ AND POP

Living creatures who enter the grove feel a "buzz," and an indescribable sensation that, like the first rush of love, is both delicious and painful. Before using any Average, Hard, or Very Hard IQ-based skill, a character must make a Will roll or do a sloppy job (-4 skill penalty).

Characters in the grove are one level more "fit" than usual. Temporarily, Very Unfit characters become Unfit, Unfit characters become normal, normal characters become Fit, and Fit characters Very Fit.



## DON'T BE CAUGHT DEAD THERE

The grove is a high mana area, and is strongly life-aspected. Zombies, animated, skeletons, and other lesser undead who stumble into the grove suffer a hideous fate: *They come back to life*. However, the surging currents of energy cannot undo the decay and wear of undead existence; after a few moments of surprise and agony, the former corpse collapses and blossoms with mold. In the space of an hour, it is reduced to a patch of brilliant green grass and colorful flowers.

Vampires, lichens, and other “sophisticated” undead feel uncomfortable when they approach the grove, and they suffer considerable pain once they enter. Increasingly difficult Will rolls are required to stay in the grove. They lose one HT permanently for each hour they spend there.

## A TALE OF TWO TEMPLES

Throughout history, the Primordial Grove has attracted people of faith and been a site of religious importance. It could be entirely controlled by one denomination, or be the ultimate prize of an ongoing struggle between competing creeds. This section describes another possibility: Two religious orders have a presence near the grove. While not openly hostile, each considers the other a distraction at best.

### *The Abbey of Scholar Olaf, Prophet of the Namer*

The Abbey of Scholar Olaf is situated on the heights overlooking the grove. The compound is surrounded by a shabby wooden stockade. Inside is a grim-looking manor built of granite and several wooden outbuildings.

An order of 10 monks lives in the abbey. They employ a cook, a carpenter, and a few laborers.

The brothers have dedicated their lives to the study of the power of words to alter and create. In addition to prayer and meditation, they engage in calm but spirited debates over the nature of words and creation. They make frequent visits into the grove to study spontaneous generation.

The brothers consider visitors an unwelcome distraction. Strangers demanding hospitality are put up in one of the

unheated outbuildings and fed scraps of bread and cold porridge. Fellow scholars may get better treatment.

### *The Namer and Scholar Olaf*

The Namer is a stern male creator figure. He carved the world and the things in it from primordial chaos with the power of words: spoken, written, and thought. Some sects insist that he is *the* God; others believe him to be a sort of artisan or, less glamorously, a subcontractor.

Scholar Olaf lived a couple of hundred years ago. The monastic order he founded imposes a decidedly grim existence on its brothers. On the positive side, he highly valued literacy and founded several academies where poor children were taught to read.

### *The Shrine of Aysah*

A shrine dedicated to Aysah in all her aspects is located just outside the grove, along the southern and eastern shores of the lake. The shrine and its immaculately landscaped grounds are surrounded by a low wall of white marble and rows of manicured hedges; these are not intended to keep out intruders but to symbolically separate the shrine from the world outside. In addition to the shrine, there are two dormitories, a refectory, a workshop, and a pavilion where pilgrims are fed and housed.

The complex is run by an order of nuns. It has 15 resident members. A dozen lay workers live nearby and walk to the complex each morning. At the height of pilgrimage season, the order hires guards, cooks, healers, and artisans.

As many as two dozen pilgrims are also present. They come to the shrine to make offerings on Aysah's holy days, to pray for a cure for infertility, or simply to spend time in quiet contemplation.

The members of the order are compassionate, hospitable, and nonjudgmental: Anyone who visits the temple is fed, bathed, and clothed. The injured have their wounds cleaned and dressed. The nuns are immensely tolerant of boorish or obnoxious behavior, but they do have their limits: Violence or moral outrages are met with a manifestation of the mother-protector, be it in the form of a mob of angry village women or the appearance of a giant she-wolf.

The temple funds itself by sales of icons, medals, and figurines depicting Aysah in her various aspects. Some of these holy souvenirs are molded clay; others are true works of art, lovingly fashioned from materials gathered from the grove.

## Spontaneous Generation

Small animals – worms, insects, amphibians, and even mice – occasionally spring spontaneously into existence in the grove. Certain substances, particularly warm mud, flour, cheese, and spilled blood, seem especially potent media for the phenomena. Writing out a creature's name with (or on) one of these substances almost always results in spontaneous generation. For example, tracing the word *weevil* in a pile of flour more often than not results in a dozen of the bugs immediately wriggling out of the powder. Carve the word *mouse* on a block of cheese, and one of the little creatures will chew its way out in short order.

Spontaneously generated creatures look and behave exactly like their naturally born brethren. However, there is something special about them: They are much closer to the platonic ideal, the pure essence, of their kind. Specimens of such creatures are highly valued by alchemists and enchanters.

Another related phenomenon – the formation of three-dimensional images of plants and animals in solid rock – is common in the grove. Almost every stone and pebble in the area features these curious phenomena, known to some as “fossils.”



## Aysah All-Matron

Aysah is a goddess, or perhaps *the* Goddess. She is a mother deity and has three aspects:

*Mother-Creator:* Usually depicted as a luminous, serenely smiling pregnant woman dressed in white robes. She cups a ball of warm yellow light above her huge belly; lambs and calves surround her.

*Mother-Protector:* Represented by a lactating she-wolf. She has a determined look on her face and holds a scimitar in her mouth.

*Mother-Nurturer:* Appears as a bipedal cow with a benign expression. She has six horns, each glowing in a different color. Hanging from her outstretched arms are several baskets, each holding a swaddled infant. She has five udders; every one of her teats is occupied by a human or beast, including an orca, a giraffe, and

## Dream Relicts

Anyone who spends the night in the grove will discover, on waking, the people and creatures that figured in their dreams standing around to greet them. Greet them in the figurative sense; the dream-creatures appear alive, but are totally inactive. They stand stock still, staring into the distance. They will not respond to question, blink if sand is thrown in their eyes, or flinch if struck.

Within a few minutes of waking, the figments will grow vague and disappear, much as the details of a dream blur and are forgotten within a few minutes of waking.

a fur-clad barbarian. Around her feet are baskets of fruit, bundles of grain, and piles of gourds.

# Q IS FOR QUINTESSENCE

Celestial quintessence is literally heavenly. It is the primary ingredient of almost everything above the sphere of air. Because elements seek their own level, and the desired level of celestial quintessence lies countless leagues upwards, it is virtually unknown on earth. Skilled alchemists have extracted bits of it from snow and ice found on the summits of the highest mountains. A certain rare mineral is a rich source of celestial quintessence (see pp. 9-11). Some cranks claim that these rocks fell from the sky, but other scholars laugh at the thought; obviously, they are kidney stones of dead gods.

Alchemists have not discovered all of celestial quintessence's properties. It is known to be a powerful catalyst for other alchemical processes; in many cases, the precious substance can be recovered and reused. The ancients reportedly made a curative elixir out of the element, the Balm of Celestial Quintessence.

Raw celestial quintessence is an airy, silvery fluid. Left to itself, it falls upwards and disappears into the sky. It swiftly soaks through wood or clay containers; even metal flasks cannot contain it for long. It is best stored in a sealed quartz bottle or "fixed" (that is, temporarily combined with another element) to form a durable solid. Suitable quartz bottles cost \$5; they come with a wooden rack that holds the bottle neck-side-down. A "volume ounce" of the pure element has a weight of about a quarter ounce.

Fixing an ounce of celestial quintessence requires a day of work in an alchemy lab, \$250 in precious metals, and a successful Alchemy+2 roll. On a failure, the procedure has to be restarted; on a critical failure half of the quintessence is lost. The stabilized material takes the form of a lustrous silver ball

about 2" wide that weighs 5 ounces. Extracting quintessence from the ball takes half a day of lab work and an Alchemy+4 roll. On a critical failure, half of the material is lost. An ounce of fixed celestial quintessence costs at least \$3,500.

## BALM OF CELESTIAL QUINTESSENCE

This ancient alchemical compound is used as a base for several formidable resurrection, flying, and purification potions. On its own, it is a superior healing unguent. When applied to a fresh wound, it stops bleeding, cures 4 HP, and draws out any poison.

The recipe for the Balm can be found in a few highly guarded codices, or it can be recreated. The challenge: Find a compound in which celestial quintessence can be contained, but that is not harmful to living creatures. The balm is an invention of Average complexity, requiring the Alchemy skill and a well-equipped alchemical laboratory. For the concept step, allow a +2 to the inventor's skill because the basic nature of the stuff is known. Allow +6 to the inventor's skill for one roll if he expends a half-ounce of celestial quintessence on experiments. Each attempt at a prototype requires one ounce of celestial quintessence.

Creating a portion of the finished balm requires one ounce of celestial quintessence (plus any expended in experiments), \$1,000 in miscellaneous reagents (including hard-to-find resins and unguents), and two days of laboratory work.

# R IS FOR RANDOM BENCHES

There's one on the grounds of the imperial palace, in a garden that only the royal family may enter.

There's one a few miles away from the palace, in a decrepit neighborhood that the royal family wouldn't enter with an

army in front of them. The bench has stood unmolested for as long as anyone can remember.

There's one on a spur of rock surrounded by glaciers, high in the mountains to the east. It's got quite a view.

## Mouth and Ear Boxes

These soapstone cubes weigh six ounces and measure 3" on a side. They contain a simple but powerful communication spell, a trigger spell, and a Conceal Magic spell.

*Mouth boxes* have a miniature human mouth carved on one face. It appears to have been caught in the act of speaking.

*Ear boxes* are much rarer than mouth boxes. A lifelike ear is carved on one side. Each box is attuned to a specific set of mouth boxes; the link is made when the objects are enchanted. A password is required to activate an ear box. Activation costs the holder 1 FP, plus 1 FP for every 10 connected mouth boxes (round up). Words spoken by a person holding an ear box are transmitted and repeated, at the level of a loud whisper, by every connected mouth box. The box deactivates after two minutes.

Mouth boxes found underneath the benches "speak" for a few seconds at the crack of dawn. The speaker sounds like an old woman. While accented, her speech is precise; she seems vaguely amused and perhaps a little insane.

On most mornings, she recites a few lines of ancient poetry in the original language. Once in a while she utters a short, cryptic phrase, such as "the day of the red flags is nigh; grief on the streets of Old Lasur" or "where gray fur rests on white marble, a gem of fire find."

There's one in a boreal forest, far to the north. A pack of intelligent wolves use it as their seat of power. Only the wolf-chieftain may lie upon it.

There's one on an island that a man can cross in 12 strides.

There's one in an oasis in the middle of the Poison Desert.

They're all the same: a slab of marble, 7' wide by 1' thick by 3' deep, resting on three blocks of the same stone. Each bench is set in a carefully tended circle of grass, clean gray gravel, or neatly raked sand.

The benches can be broken, or vandalized, or stolen. They often are. But within a week or two, they reappear.

Locals feel protective of their bench; they may not even let an outsider sit on it. (In one place, they'll *insist* visitors lie

down on it . . . right before the sacrificial knife plunges home.)

Chiseled into the underside of each bench, by one of the vertical supports, is a small (3" square) cubical hollow. On rare occasions (roll 3 or less for a bench in an urban area, 4 or less for benches found in the wilderness), there is something peculiar nestled in the cavity – a *mouth box*. Someone must look for it to see it.

## THE CARETAKERS

Observe a bench long enough – a week or so – and a caretaker will stop by to check on it. Caretakers may be men or women, but they are always old; not quite old enough to be feeble or doddering, but venerable enough that no decent person would think of attacking them. They carry a broom, a scrub brush, and sometimes a bucket of water. They are polite but dissembling.

The caretakers are hired locals who know nothing of the big picture. They receive their instructions from a mouth box which they keep hidden in their homes. These boxes speak at dusk; most of the messages direct the caretaker to clean or repair the local bench. Every month or so, the box tells the caretaker how to find a spot where a bag of coins has been left for him.

## MYSTERIES IN MYSTERIES

Extensive research reveals that the benches were built a few centuries ago. Use of History, Images of the Past, or similar spells on a bench reveals the rather mundane details of quarrying, construction, and transport. The laborers and artisans doing the work appear ordinary. There is one discordant note: At every stage of its construction, a peculiar female figure hovers nearby, apparently overseeing the job. She looks like a very young woman, but moves like a very old one. She wears a robe and wimple made of a fabric with a pattern of bright red and black diamonds. The magician viewing the scene gets the distinct impression that she is aware of his surveillance, looking back at him over the gulf of time with her lips curled in a slight smile.

# S IS FOR SHORTCUT SIGNPOSTS

Seven sets of magic signposts were created by an order of mischievous green witches called the Sylvan Sisters. When both posts in a set were properly placed, a magical shortcut formed between them. The witches put them to good use when their home turf – the Borderless Forest – was invaded by the Gray Horde. The giants and beast-men were defeated, but the cost was terrible. The surviving Sisters decided to go their separate ways. Three pairs of signposts survived the battle, and eventually found their way to other lands.

The signposts come in matched sets. They are made of a dense, strong wood treated with charms that prevent rot, turn blades, and resist fire. The message on the signs have been painted and repainted many times. The posts are 5" in diameter and 10' long, and weigh 60 lbs. Stable placement requires a posthole about 4' deep.

To function properly, a post must be placed within a few feet of a path – not a road – that runs through a dense stand of trees. A hole must be dug, and the post set in it so that it is close to perfectly vertical. It becomes an endpoint of a magical shortcut. When both posts in a set are placed, a new trail appears by each, running from the path into the woods.

The shortcut is about a mile long. The first dozen yards at each end run through the familiar world; past a certain, hard-to-discern point, the path makes a sharp turn and enters a pocket universe. It is a pleasant place, a tame wilderness where it is always a sunny warm afternoon. After emerging from a copse of trees, the trail skirts a small meadow, crosses a stout stone bridge over a clear swift stream, and winds through a stand of towering redwoods.

After passing through another meadow, it leads into another stand of trees, and finally back out into the real world, by the other signpost.

There are a few excellent campsites along the trail. There is plentiful small game, and the stream's water is cold and pure.

Each pair of posts is bound to its own, nearly identical pocket universe; it remains in existence when the posts are pulled, isolated from the real world until the shortcut is reestablished.

## Extradimensional Exiles

A few weeks after returning from a particularly successful adventure, the player characters come to suspect that someone has taken an interest in them and their affairs. They are followed by a beggar who is far less addled than he appears. An urchin tags after them, pleading for details of their adventures. Every tavern the adventurers visit has an overly friendly merchant or soldier of fortune who insists on buying the party a round of drinks and invites them to recount their recent travels. None of these people are especially *good* at being spies, and if cornered, they quickly confess that they were recruited by a pair of charming old ladies.

The women are the last surviving Sylvan Sisters. If they determine that the adventurers are competent, reliable, and of good character, they appear personally and explain their plight.

Long ago, during the war with the Gray Horde, five of their sisters and a band of allied faerie-folk used a magic

shortcut to flee a squad of bog giants. One of the brutes tore out the signpost by the entrance, intending to use it as a missile. The entrance path disappeared, baffling the giants and stranding the sisters and their friends in the magic land beyond.

What happened next took decades of magical detective work to piece together. The uprooted post was used to splint the broken leg of a wounded giant. When the Gray Horde was defeated, the giant – with the post still bound to his slowly healing leg – made his way back home to the Ghostblack Islands.

The Sisters reveal that they have the twin to the missing post. If the adventurers agree to travel to Ghostblack and retrieve the other post, the witches will – after rescuing their sisters from the magic shortcut land – give the characters both posts and a fortune in herbal potions, healing salves, and charms for protection against wild animals.

# T IS FOR TAVERN PUZZLE

As described in *The Tragedy of Lasson and Giral* (see *F is for Fabulous Pavilion*, pp. 11-12), the leaders of Erutappet tried to save their city by convincing the mercenary leader Captain Lasson that there were things there worth saving; specifically, the beautiful Giral. Their plot to make the two fall in love almost succeeded, but a rival for Giral's affection distracted the pair with "snares and diversions."

Lasson's diversion was a diabolically difficult tavern puzzle. It was a good choice; he spent most of his free time in taverns. The captain wasn't a drunkard; he simply liked the ambiance. Rounds of lusty singing, wenches who didn't mind hearing raunchy jokes, arm wrestling, the occasional brawl . . . that was living!

The puzzle still exists. It consists of a rectangular chain-mail bag clamped in a triangular frame. The mouth of the bag is cinched shut with a complex lock; two "portholes" in the bag allow players to inspect its contents, a very nice-looking dagger with a jeweled hilt. It's doubtful that this is the prize that tempted Lasson, but mages can sense formidable enchantments on the blade.

The puzzle itself is not magical in nature, but its parts have been reinforced with the Shatterproof enchantment (minimum stats for each part: DR 4; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous); HT 12; HP 4). Some of the puzzle's parts, such as the outer clamps, are of crudely wrought iron. Others are precisely shaped polished steel.

## THE VENUE

Almost anyone can solve the puzzle if given enough time. Anyone with a good set of tools could hack it open. The trick is to place the puzzle in a venue where time is limited, distractions abound, and cheating is rewarded with ridicule and a thorough pounding. In other words, a tavern, preferably one with a strict management and lots of rough-and-ready regulars.

The barkeep should set, and the patrons enforce, a limit on how long each customer gets to work with the puzzle. He may limit the number of times a week a customer gets to try, and may even refuse to let casual visitors test their skills against the device. The regulars may demand the challenger down a drink after each step, and tear the puzzle away if the player spends too much time thinking and not enough tinkering.

## True Friend

The weapon is a very fine quality dagger. Inscribed on its blade are runes spelling out "true friend." The gems in its hilt are worth \$500. It has the Quick Draw and Defending Weapon (+2 to parry) enchantments.

The tavern owner eventually finds another prize to put in the puzzle.

## SOLVING THE PUZZLE

The puzzle has three challenges. Each is described below, but the actual solving of the puzzle can be abstracted to a series of IQ and DX rolls:

At the beginning of each challenge, the puzzle solver must decide on a strategy. This takes about three minutes and requires an IQ-3 roll. Characters with the Mechanic or Engineer skill can use their knowledge to examine the puzzle before deciding on a strategy. A successful roll against either skill allows a +4 bonus on the IQ roll to formulate a strategy. On a critical success, the strategy is a superior one; make the challenge's DX rolls at +1.

A failed strategy becomes apparent after three DX rolls. This wastes time but is instructive; a new strategy roll can be made at base IQ.

On a critical failure, the strategy backs the puzzle solver into a dead end. This won't become apparent until after three DX rolls. He must *undo* the mistake by making three successful DX rolls in a row. This restores the puzzle to its starting state.

Once an adventurer decides on a strategy, he must make three successful consecutive DX rolls in a row. Each test takes a minute.

The third challenge requires a Will roll as well, to continue working the puzzle despite great pain. Adjust Will for High or Low Pain Threshold. Failing the Will test causes an injury . . . see the challenge description.

### *The First Challenge*

The frame that encases the bag consists of three clamp-like structures. Each must be opened and removed in turn. The clamps are held shut by locks operated by sliding and triangular blocks threaded on a steel bar. The blocks are of different sizes; some slide into and even through the others.

### *The Second Challenge*

The mail bag is held shut by wiggling steel rings through a maze of stout wires. A certain number of rings must be delivered to each of the maze's four branches.

### *The Final Challenge*

The dagger is held inside the bag by a clamp. To free it the player must insert five fingers – two from the left, three from the right – into cylinders hidden deep in the bag. At the end of the cylinders are small wheels that must be simultaneously turned, in opposite directions. Doing this correctly causes small, sharp spurs to jut into the cylinders. This is painful and extremely disconcerting, but giving up is even worse; pulling out before the job is done causes the spurs to dig into the player's fingers. This isn't enough to sever or cripple the digits, but causes considerable pain and temporary disability. (Treat as having a Missing Thumb on the affected hand for 3d6 hours.)

## IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED . . .

One can get clues to the puzzle by watching others work it. Make a Perception roll (with penalties for noise and distractions) for every full evening spent observing. On a success, he gets a cumulative +1 bonus for future *strategy* rolls.

A character receives a learning bonus for each session he himself works the puzzle. Each failed strategy roll is worth 1 point; each successful strategy roll is a 1/2 point. Succeeding in a challenge is worth 4 points. Total the points to find the bonus to IQ rolls for the character's *next* attempt at the puzzle; halve the points to find the bonus to DX tests for the *next* attempt. Half of any old learning points accumulate for the next round.

Puzzling while drunk isn't easy. See pp. B439-440 and p. B428.

# U IS FOR UNBELIEVABLY OLD BEER

Not *the* oldest. Someone drank that – specifically, the goddess Teek Ar-Ham, who *invented* the stuff, and her consort, Noht, Lord of Spears. Who can blame them? Created from the waters of the Great Sky-River, it must have been desirable drink indeed.

The *second* oldest batch of beer was made by virginal temple brewers who learned the recipe from Teek Ar-Ham herself. It was consecrated by the goddess as a coronation gift for King Seshep of Moranx. Drinking it would bring long life, the strength of will required to lead armies, and the wisdom necessary to a stern and just ruler.

The temple brewers sent 10 amphorae of beer to the coronation. One leaked in transport, creating the Oasis of Metter. Another was stolen and found its way to the bandit-king of the Iron Crags. After drinking it, he foreswore villainy and founded

the Lustrous Order, whose kindly hospitality has saved countless people lost in the stark arid wastes of southern Moranx. The royal family consumed two vessels of the sacred beer during the coronation festivities. The new king ordered the rest reserved for his heirs. Moranx prospered under the Seshep Dynasty's wise rule, and its armies – personally led by the god-kings – brought home mountains of treasure.

No amount of sacred beer could prepare Seshep IV for the coming of the Snake Legion, the Tanners of Men's' Hides, and their leader, the Bastard of Phuwkut. Seshep IV and his wives fled into the wilderness after the inhuman hordes overran the capital. When news of the final defeat and ruin of his country reached the king, he reportedly cried so copiously that his tears filled a nearby valley, creating salty Lake Kyzyl.





Two amphorae of the kingly brew are hidden deep in the ruins of Seshep's palace. They lie in a storeroom cluttered with vessels containing desiccated olives, precious resins, and whale oil. Nearby, in dust-filled granaries, a dozen or so of the foul creatures that destroyed Moranx lie encysted, waiting for intruders to disturb their slumber.

## TEEK AR-HAM'S BEER

An amphora weighs 50 lbs. and holds five gallons (40 mugs) of beer. It is a musty, cloudy liquid, swirling with grainy

sediment and reeking of the aromatic gums used to seal the vessels. It is obviously strong and heady, but after several thousand years, it has become rather "skunky." However, the real barrier to drinking the brew is not its taste, but the fact that it was intended for consumption by god-kings and their highest advisors and lieutenants. Common folk, and even lesser nobility, experience fear and searing self-doubt as the stuff enters their mouths, though they do experience some benefits (see below). Drinking more than a sip requires a Will roll. Roll after attempting to down each mug; on a failure, the imbiber gets only a mouthful before he slams down his tankard (wasting half of it), falls to his knees weeping, and will never try again. On a success, he quaffs the mug and may try for another . . . if there is enough. Apply the following Will modifiers:

- First mug (16 oz.): -2
- Second mug: -4
- Third mug: -8
- Fourth mug: -12
- Megalomania: +4
- Status: +/- status level
- "Royal" blood, known or not, if current status 1 or lower: +2

A sip of the beer (no roll required) acts as a restorative, curing any diseases, acute or chronic, mundane or magical, in short order. The *next* new disease the imbiber drinks will run its course in half the normal time. Unlike the effects below, future doses have the same effect.

On finishing his first full mug, the drinker becomes Fit, and gains an impressive glow of health that bestows Charisma +1; this effect lasts five years. A person may only receive this benefit once.

Successfully downing two mugs at a sitting gives the imbiber Administration and Strategy skill bonuses of +4. This lasts for 10 years and can only be had once.

Drinking three mugs of the beer at a sitting delays the effects of aging and extends a person's life by 15 years. A character may only get this benefit once.

Finally, anyone who downs four mugs gets a Leadership skill bonus of +4. This effect lasts 15 years.

# V IS FOR VANDERLAN'S FABULOUS ARMORY

Count Eril Vanderlan's military career began at age 14, when he started tagging along after the town watch. The men sent the eager boy on humiliating and pointless errands in hopes he'd stop pestering them, but young Eril persevered. In the space of a year, he impaled a mad dog, captured an infamous pickpocket, and foiled an arsonist. By the time Eril was 19, he was in charge of the watch. Two years later he was a sergeant in the king's army as it marched into Upper Lacron. By the war's end, Vanderlan was a knight and was chosen to accept the sword of King Yutrecht at the surrender ceremony.

Vanderlan was forced to retire when his leg was shattered in a riding accident. The grateful king granted him a small but

prosperous fief. He married, adopted his sickly brother's children, and settled gracefully into the role of rural nobleman.

The count maintains one tie to his days of martial glory: He is an avid collector of weapons. Dozens of specimens hang in Vanderlan Manor's great hall. More valuable items are displayed in the count's parlor. Vanderlan shows distinguished visitors every item, and he tells them everything he knows about their origin and history. This can go on for hours. The countess will "rescue" visitors (assuming they made a good impression on her) by distracting the count with some official business.

## SAMPLES FROM THE ARMORY

Most of the count's specimens are ordinary weapons of the sort that men-at-arms and lesser knights might carry. A few are carefully crafted masterpieces taken as loot on the Lacron campaign. Lately, the count has been importing unusual arms, made by outlandish people in lands far away.

### Anchanipee Throwing Disc

This cunning weapon was created by the natives of an isolated archipelago in the middle of the fabled Sunrise Ocean. They used the weapon to hunt the islands' stealthy arboreal octopus. It consists of two discs of fibrous coconut husk (assembled from wedge-shaped slices) glued together, with shark's teeth protruding from the perimeter.

### Kar Fon Dagger

Far to the north, in the Great Icy Ocean, lies a mountainous island. Here live the Kar Fon, a race of men with great dish-shaped ears, large black eyes, and two thumbs on each hand. They are said to be skilled artisans, and make tools, armor, and weapons suited to their unusual form.

When Count Vanderlan learned about the Kar Fon, he began to seek out their handiwork. After much waiting and considerable expense, he was presented with a small, unadorned dagger. He was satisfied; the strangely knurled hilt was clearly built to fit in an inhuman hand.

### Shame Hurler

Like the prodd, this weapon is a crossbow that hurls projectiles rather than bolts. In addition to pebbles, the shame hurler can lob tiny woven baskets containing dung or other foul sub-

stances. It was employed by the citizens of Giromonte to demoralize the fanatical Budzub warriors threatening their kingdom. While they did not fear death, the invaders could not stand the thought of entering the afterlife in a defiled state. A fanatic splattered by pig dung would often quit the battlefield to undergo ritual cleansing.

Vanderlan's niece has learned how to weave the small baskets in which the shame hurler delivers its cargo. The count uses the weapon to humiliate retainers who disappoint the countess during her household inspections.

### Show Swords

The young noblemen of Menar are famed for their swordsmanship, strong sense of honor, and remarkably short tempers. Their frequent duels were tolerated in times of peace; besides reducing the number of troublemaking scions, the noblemen who lived to inherit their fathers' estates tended to be both skilled and level-headed.

King Enorsson knew that times of peace didn't last forever. He realized that the constant dueling had sapped his army's supply of skilled officers. He came upon the notion of *show swords*: fabulously elaborate, wicked-looking weapons carefully crafted from lacquered balsa wood. Only a few clans of master artisans were allowed to make them, and the prices set inordinately high through taxation. Duels were decreed to be over when a combatant's precious weapon was shattered. The death-rate among the kingdom's scions plummeted, and the royal treasuries swelled. Nobles defeated in these bloodless duels were quietly encouraged to accept a military commission. Most understood this as a face-saving excuse to leave town until their shame was forgotten by. Menar soon had an army that was fully staffed, well funded, and led by officers eager to redeem themselves in battle.

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## Vanderlan's Weapons

### Ranged Weapons

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Bulk	Notes
1	Throwing Disc	thr-1 cut	1	0.5/1.5	0.5	1	T(1)	-	6	-2	[3, 4]
3	Shame Hurler	thr+2 pi	2	x15/x20	6/0.06	1	1(4)	-	6	-6	[1, 2]

[1] Damage shown is for a stone or lead bullet. Filth capsules cause thr+1 cr damage and dispense a foul substance; they weigh 0.12.

[2] Use Crossbow skill.

[3] Use Thrown Weapon (Shuriken) skill.

[4] Breaks on roll of 12 or less when it hits anything but flesh, cloth, or wood.

### Melee Weapons

TL	Weapon	Damage	Reach	Parry	Cost	Weight	ST	Notes
2	Kar Fon Dagger	thr-1 imp	C	-1	-	0.25	5	[1, 2]
2	Small Show Sword	sw cr	1	0	-	3	9	[3, 5]
	or	thr cr	1	0	-	-	9	
2	Large Show Sword	sw+1 cr	1, 2	0	-	4	9	[4, 5]
	or	sw+1 cr	2	0	-	-	9	

[1] Roll DX+2 when readying the weapon; on a failure, the user mishandles the strange grip and it must be readied again!

[2] Use Knife skill.

[3] Use Broadsword skill.

[4] Use Two-Handed Sword skill.

[5] Weapon is +4 to break. Breaks on a roll of 5 or less when it hits anything harder than leather (DR 3 or higher).

Vanderlan's collection includes five show swords. Two are broadswords, three are two-handed swords. All have wide blades with swooping edges, wicked hooks, and intricate engravings. One of the broadswords has seen action; its five fragments are

mounted in a velvet-lined case. A scroll included with the collection claims that the sword was used by a hot-headed scion who challenged King Enorsson himself. The count someday hopes to add the king's intact sword to his collection.

## Lacron's Revenge

Because of his injuries, King Yutrecht did not personally surrender his sword to Vanderlan. That hateful duty was performed by Comte Hercht Gascule, a captain in Lacron's navy. Gascule took an instant dislike to the gloating Vanderlan, and swore to someday discomfit the man.

Years later the Comte learned of Vanderlan's hunt for exotic weapons. Gascule, now a merchant-adventurer, decided to supply them. With the help of some friends and many bottles of good wine, he invented a dozen outlandish

weapons, along with details of their origin and use. The Kar Fon, the kingdom of Menar, and the Giromonte are all fabrications! Gascule hired artisans in foreign ports to manufacture the items, and he arranged for Vanderlan's agents to discover and purchase them.

Comte Gascule has had so much fun inventing weapons and arranging for them to enter Vanderlan's collection that he has not planned the denouement of his elaborate joke.

# W IS FOR WOLF SCROLL

Merchant-adventurer Langer von Handersson (see *The Annals of Count Katydid*, pp. 4-5) bought the Wolf Scroll from a fur trapper. He hung it in his study and promptly forgot about it. When he returned from his next voyage, he discovered that his servants had hidden it in an attic. When questioned, they admitted being afraid of it. They swore that the scroll *changed* from time to time. Rather than upset his staff, von Handersson sold it to a curio shop.

The scroll is about 3' wide and 6' tall. Any trapper or tanner recognizes the material as the preserved hide of a very large wolf. The surface is crowded with cartouches, each containing several lines of north-country runes. They spell out nonsense phrases that seem more like growls, whines, and grunts than words. Some of the characters and border work were written in flat black ink; others were scribed in what might be blood. The topmost cartouche occupies the full width of the scroll; the cartouches immediately below are somewhat smaller, and so on to the bottom sets, which are a few inches wide.

Many subtle, unique Information spells power the scroll. A magician peering into its past will learn that it was created by an ambitious shaman. Each cartouche contains the true name of a member of a certain pack of giant, semi-intelligent wolves. The large cartouche at the top represents the pack leader; young pups are listed at the bottom. The names on the scroll disappear as old wolves die and new ones are born; they change position to reflect the named wolf's current position in

the pack. The shaman used the creatures' true names to command them.

The pack dominates a large swath of far northern land of Kanharry (see *E is for Essum's Barge*, pp. 9-11). Their territory is rich in gems, bog iron, and placer deposits of copper and gold, but few treasure hunters dare enter. The creatures rarely venture outside of its borders, although they have, in lean years, extorted tribute payments of dried meat from villages to the south.

A handful of modern-day shamans and hermits have befriended the wolves.

## BIG, BAD WOLVES

While capable of speech and a modicum of reason, the giant wolves live much like their animal cousins. They do wear bits of copper jewelry, and when the moon is full, they recite the pack genealogy before indulging in a group howl.

The wolves are skilled hunters. They have learned to be cautious when dealing with humans and other intelligent prey; they are quite capable of arranging ambushes and capturing lone intruders for ransom.

<b>ST:</b> 16	<b>HP:</b> 16	<b>Speed:</b> 6
<b>DX:</b> 11	<b>Will:</b> 11	<b>Move:</b> 10
<b>IQ:</b> 6	<b>Per:</b> 13	<b>Weight:</b> 400 lbs.
<b>HT:</b> 12	<b>FP:</b> 12	<b>SM:</b> +1
<b>Dodge:</b> 8	<b>Parry:</b> 9	<b>DR:</b> 2

**Bite (13):** 1d cutting. Reach C.

**Cuff (13):** 2d+2 swinging. Reach C.

**Traits:** Bestial; Discriminatory Smell; Hidebound; Night Vision 2; Quadruped; Sharp Teeth; Temperature Tolerance 1.

**Skills:** Brawling-13; Intimidation-10; Stealth-10; Tracking-13.

**Notes:** Older pack members know a pidgin form of the local human language (Broken/None).

*They swore that the scroll changed from time to time.*

# X IS FOR XAO-QUI NECKS

The scholars of the Xao-Qui Brotherhood recognize 13 spiritual “lands” of enlightenment. The highest of these is *tnu hushior min* (“Diamond-Gold Island”), a mental state so rare and precious that to experience it too often would sully and disgrace it. It is the goal of every monk of the order to leave his current incarnation in this pure and detached state. To this end, members of the order are trained to snap their own necks when they enter *d’noc min* (“Shore of the Island”), a “gateway” through which higher spiritual states are reached. This leaves them free, in their last moments of consciousness, to slide serenely and painlessly into a final, and perhaps eternal, moment of illumination.

The Brotherhood offers services that allow its members to practice this unusual skill. One of these is preparing corpses for cremation. The local villagers appreciate the monks’

solemn and respectful technique, little knowing that while cleansing and anointing the departed, novice monks are analyzing the structure of the deceased’s neck. One of the trainees snaps the vertebrae before the body is enshrouded.

The order also offers a method of painless execution. The service is expensive and generally reserved for high-status criminals allowed a dignified end; the “compassionate discreditors” have dispatched traitorous generals, embezzling palace eunuchs, disloyal imperial concubines, and a deposed emperor. After being seated on the executioner’s lap, the condemned is placed in a relaxed state with the help of soporific incense, a deep-tissue massage, and rounds of chanting. When the monk senses that the victim has reached *xap gurun min* (“Tranquil Naive Island”), he swiftly snaps his or her neck.

## Bring Me the Neck of Master Runputchee!

Lem Chomody, second degree master of the Esoteric College of the Spiral Way, maintains an extensive network of snitches, scavengers, and snoops in caravansaries along the Spice Trail. One of these scoundrels recently brought him a stolen *linso kukko*. Chomody was about to dismiss him without payment when he sensed magic in the dummy head. It turned out to be a reservoir of magical power; not a great deal, but enough to raise interesting possibilities.

After learning all he could of Xao-Qui teachings, Chomody theorized that a practice neck absorbs a small portion of mana when its owner achieves the *d’noc min* state. The older and more experienced the monk, the more mana it would hold. If the theory was correct, the *linso kukko* of a brother who had achieved *tnu hushior min* would be especially potent.

Chomody became determined to get his hands on more of the curious objects. Unfortunately for him, the wizard has good reasons to avoid the monastery’s neighborhood.

### The Mission

Lem Chomody has asked his network to summon adventurers who might be interested in gathering *linso kukko* for him. In addition to a generous stipend, he offers a bounty for each neck: \$200 to \$500 for those stolen from live brothers, or \$1,000 for a deceased monk’s neck. He also puts his network of contacts at their disposal during their journey.

When they arrive in the vicinity of the monastery, the adventurers are met by a guide. He knows the regional dialect, and he spent his youth running a trap line in the valleys surrounding the monastery. He is confident that he can reach the gulch where the order dumps the bodies and gear of departed brothers. Getting there requires a day of strenuous hiking and a bit of mountain climbing. It is a treacherous place, full of sharp crags, slippery moss-covered rocks, and a stream of icy melt water. Most of the refuse washes downstream, to a shadowy valley full of

dense stands of bamboo. It is also inhabited by scavengers who have become warped by the emanations of the castoff necks. The deep, gloomy pools that the stream empties into are patrolled by a monstrous carp, as ferocious and cunning as its scales are bright.

### The Prize

Lem Chomody’s theory is correct; the necks do collect mana. Each one contains from 1 to 3 points of mana, depending on how old and enlightened its user was. This mana does not regenerate. (The necks of novices and young initiates contain no mana.)

When a monk’s own neck is broken as he reaches *tnu hushior min*, his practice neck absorbs even more potent mana. The salvaged neck of an ascended master is effectively a low-grade Powerstone. It has a capacity of 2d+2 and a replenishment rate of 1/2 point of mana a day.

### Unintended Consequences

A dying monk who achieves *tnu hushior min* leaves something else behind in his neck: a dark, troublesome id-spirit (treat as an Astral Entity, p. B263, with Telesend and Mind Probe). This leering, spiteful, lusty thing telepathically jeers and threatens anyone who uses the neck’s mana. It becomes an unwelcome eavesdropper and commentator on any mental communication the user makes; the magician can force the voice from his thoughts with a Will-2 roll.

Items enchanted using the neck’s energy are tainted by the spirit. It moves every 2d days from the neck to each tainted item and back again. It haunts the dreams of anyone who wears an item where it is resident. (Roll Will+2 to get a good night’s sleep.)

A successful Exorcism+2 roll, or use of any magic that repels or banishes spirits, removes the spirit from all of its haunts. This also destroys the neck’s ability to regenerate mana.



The monks have developed another way to practice neck snapping. Initiates are issued a *linso kukko* ("Beloved Passage Guide"), a cleverly designed dummy head and neck that straps securely over the monk's shoulders. The replaceable vertebrae are made of a pasta-like composition resembling human bone. The monks practice neck-snapping during their morning and evening mass prayer sessions. Visitors to the monastery can witness several hundred men sitting in lotus positions, with their own sharply bowed heads almost concealed by eerie featureless leather puppet heads. During each session a few of the monks – those that manage to reach *d'noc min* – reach up and snap their practice necks. Rather than entering *tnu hushior min*, they instead slip into *tnu aurot min* ("Emerald-Silver Island"), a sort of meditative consolation prize.

Actual attempts to reach *tnu hushior min* occur during small, late-night meditation sessions. Most monks make the final, fatal attempt when they are quite old and feel they have done all they could to serve humanity. Still, it is rare that a month goes by without a meditation session being interrupted by a sharp *crack* and the thud of a body hitting the floor. A brother's passage is an excuse for dancing, a late-night snack of rare delicacies, and the ringing of ceremonial bells.

The Brotherhood teaches that the body of a monk who dies experiencing *tnu hushior min* is so totally drained of spirit that no special rites are required. His corpse, meager possessions, and practice head are simply tossed into a crevasse near the monastery.

## Swift End

Hard

The monks' ability is a limited form of the Neck Snap technique (see p. B232). It can only be employed from behind, on a victim who is completely unresisting. Effectively, this means a sleeping, drugged, or *willing* target. Knowing Neck Snap at ST or higher gives a +2 bonus to Swift End; knowing Swift End at DX or higher gives a +2 bonus to Neck Snap.

*Defaults:* DX-6; cannot exceed DX+4.

*Prerequisites:* ST 9+, Meditation.

## PRACTICE NECKS

*Linso kukko* are made by a family of craftsmen who live in a village a short walk from the primary Xao-Qui monastery. The awkward objects weigh about 20 lbs. Cost ranges from \$60 to \$120, depending on the monk's size and the amount of padding and trimming required for a comfortable fit. Replacement neck bones cost \$5.

Outsiders will be charged *much* more, at least \$200, for a *linso kukko*.

The family also makes leather armor of superior quality.

# Y IS FOR YURT-BUTTON VEST

Condor Boy kept one magical boon after completing his quest: a vest whose magic buttons could transform into yurts. His son and grandson used the vest on their own adventures. When Garrick Keensight (as Condor Boy was named when he came of age) was old, shrunken, and frail, his children draped the garment over him. Its familiar weight inspired him to recount his fabulous adventure one last time. Garrick peacefully passed on as he uttered the last word of the tale. He was buried with the vest and other souvenirs of his life. Decades later, an earthquake damaged Garrick's tomb. Laborers hired to repair it are believed to have taken some of its treasures, including the vest.

*The ultimate compact shelter.*

The vest is made of a sturdy canvas-like cloth, quilted for warmth and well sewn. The buttons are bronze, about 3/4" across, and have a picture of a yurt stamped on the front. The vest started out with 31 of them; three on each of the four pockets, 16 down the front, and three that secured a removable hood. Twenty-seven remained after Condor Boy's adventure, and his son and grandson used another two.

To activate the spell, the button needs to be removed from the vest and tossed high into the air. Before it hits the ground, the thrower must wrap his arms around himself, pretend to shiver, and shout "Ooh, I'm cold!" three times. If he succeeds, the button turns into a *small* yurt, about 3' across. However,

the shelter grows as people enter. It expands to 6' in diameter as the first person enters, 8' across after a second has crawled in, and 10' with the third. The diameter increases by another foot as each additional person enters, up to a maximum of 15'. (More people may enter, but the shelter becomes no larger.)

The yurt offers excellent protection against wind and rain. Insulation is provided by shaggy yak pelts; warm blankets cover the floor. A panel in the roof can be untied to let out smoke. (The traditional clay hearth is not included!) The yurt offers no more protection against enemies than an ordinary yurt; barbarians can cut through its walls, giants can stomp it flat, and dragons can set it on fire.

An undamaged yurt can be folded back into a button, but this takes some delicate work. The chief folder must make three DX+4 rolls. Each step takes 10 minutes. The following modifiers apply:

Very windy: -4

Wind and rain storm: -6

Each person helping: +1 (maximum +4)

Large yurt (10'-12'): -2

Very large yurt (13'-15'): -4

On an ordinary failure, the whole process must be started again. On a critical failure, the yurt is damaged and the enchantment broken. Torn panels and broken poles can be repaired, but the result is an ordinary yurt.

If three successive rolls are made, the yurt returns to its button form. It must be held tightly until it can be sewn back on the vest.

# Z IS FOR ZOKKEE'S PAPYRUS COMPANIES

General Melluk received the Papyrus Companies as a retirement present. They let the crippled hero relive the glories of combat by leading a company of magical troops into battle against another force of enchanted warriors. Visitors who Melluk respected – or whom he thought could use a lesson in humility – were invited to challenge him to a game. The Papyrus Companies stayed in the family for many generations before being presented as a gift to Prince Aramand, who lost them in a dice game. The set's current location is unknown.

The Companies are packed in a beautifully made wooden chest. Its ebony sides have silver and brass inlays depicting soldiers in battle. The inside is divided into square bins about 5" on a side, plus cylindrical slots for two papyrus scrolls. The scrolls contain an activating spell, in the form of a ritualized battlefield roll-call.

Stacked in the bins are nearly 280 squares of papyrus, preserved and stiffened with a clear resin. Half of the squares are stained purple, the rest yellow. Each has a stylized picture of a warrior:

- Swordsman (25 of each color).
- Spearman (74 yellow, 72 purple).
- Archer (29 yellow, 30 purple).
- Standard-bearer, with a trumpet and a short sword (1 of each color).
- Officer, with a breastplate and ornate sword (3 yellow, 4 purple).
- A horse, with a robe draped over its saddle (1 of each color).

Before the game begins the pieces are laid out on a large field in the desired battle formation. The designated captain straddles the piece depicting the horse and robe, unrolls the scroll, and reads from it. On completion of the incantation, the papyrus tokens transform into living soldiers, ready to fight and die at the captain's orders. The horse token turns into a live horse, ready to be mounted; the robe it carries marks the wearer as the leader of the company.

While the officers will provide some direction, the broad strategy of the battle is up to the captain. The officers listen to his directions and see that the soldiers carry them out . . . even if it results in defeat and death. The game is generally fought until one side captures the other's standard. The soldiers carefully avoid harming the enemy captain, but strangers barging onto the battlefield can easily be injured or even killed.

The soldiers, living or dead, retain human form until the losing captain hands his sword to the victor. They then turn back into papyrus tokens, ready to be packed away for another game. Tokens that are damaged (beyond slight nicks, chips, or stains) lose their powers and will never transform again.

## THE TROOPS

The soldiers know their captain's native language (Native/None) and share his basic cultural knowledge. Their

costumes and style of arms vaguely resemble uniforms worn by soldiers of the leader's homeland.

While competent and disciplined warriors, the summoned troopers know nothing of campaigning or the basics of a soldier's life. They *can* be used on a real battlefield, but only if *one* of the companies – yellow or purple – is deployed. Soldiers of one color who catch sight of those of the other will feel an overwhelming urge to confront their ancient foe. In any case, the officers will complain about being matched against real troops, and the men will mutter doubts about their captain's wisdom.

### Archer

**ST 10; DX 12; IQ 8; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 8; Will 13; Per 13; FP 13.

Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9.  
5'6"; 160 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Duty (Captain; Extremely hazardous; 15 or less); Obsession (Confront soldiers of other color; 6 or less); Fearlessness 3.

**Skills:** Bow-15; Brawling-12; Shortsword-13.

**Equipment:** Regular bow (1d-1 imp); shortsword (1d cut/1d-2 imp); light shield (DB 1); leather pants (DR 1); leather jacket (DR 1); pot-helm (DR 4); hip quiver with 20 arrows.

### Spearman

**ST 12; DX 11; IQ 8; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 10; Will 13; Per 13; FP 13.

Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9; Block 9.  
5'10"; 180 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Duty (Captain; Extremely hazardous; 15 or less); Obsession (Confront soldiers of other color; 6 or less); Fearlessness 3.

**Skills:** Brawling-12; Shield-13; Shortsword-12; Spear-13; Thrown Weapon (Spear)-14.

**Equipment:** Spear (1d+1 imp); shortsword (1d+2 cut/1d-1 imp); large shield (DB 3); leather pants (DR 1); leather jacket (DR 1); pot-helm (DR 4).

### Swordsman

**ST 12; DX 11; IQ 8; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 10; Will 13; Per 13; FP 13.

Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9; Block 9.  
5'10"; 180 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Duty (Captain; Extremely hazardous; 15 or less); Obsession (Confront soldiers of other color; 6 or less); Fearlessness 3.

**Skills:** Broadsword-13; Brawling-12; Shield-13.

**Equipment:** Broadsword (1d+3 cut/1d imp); medium shield (DB 2); leather pants (DR 1); leather jacket (DR 1); pot-helm (DR 4).

## Standard-Bearer

**ST** 12; **DX** 10; **IQ** 10; **HT** 10.

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 1; Will 14; Per 14; FP 14.  
Basic Speed 6; Basic Move 6; Dodge 9; Parry 9; Block 8.  
5'10"; 180 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Duty (Captain; Extremely hazardous; 15 or less); Fearlessness 3.

**Skills:** Brawling-11; Musical Instrument (Trumpet)-12; Shield-11; Shortsword (A) -12; Staff -12.

**Equipment:** Shortsword (1d+2 cut/1d-1 imp); light shield (DB 1); steel breastplate (DR 5F); leather pants (DR 1); leather jacket (DR 1); barrel helm (DR 6); staff (1d+4 cr/1d thr) with banner; trumpet.

**Notes:** Unlike his fellow soldiers, the standard bearer doesn't feel compelled to seek combat with the other-colored enemy. He will fight fiercely if cornered.

## Officer

**ST** 12; **DX** 12; **IQ** 12; **HT** 11.

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 14; Will 14; Per 14; FP 14.  
Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 9; Parry 10; Block 10.  
5'10"; 200 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Duty (Captain; Extremely hazardous; 15 or less); Fearlessness 3.

**Skills:** Shortsword-14; Shield-14; Brawling-12; Leadership-14; Tactics-12.

**Equipment:** Shortsword (1d+2 cut/1d-1 thr); light shield (DB 1); steel breastplate (DR 5F); leather pants (DR 1); leather jacket (DR 1); barrel helm (DR 6).

**Notes:** The officer doesn't feel an overwhelming urge to personally attack the hated other-color enemy.

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