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If you've got one of the nice physical books, yeah, that's sold for pay because physical things still cost money. But that's really a convenienceof-form cost. All the ideas, are free.

This came to be through the Ransom Model and the generosity of fans. The Ransom Model is pretty simple: I tell people, "I've written 10,000 words of supplementary goodness for REIGN and when I get a thousand bucks it'll be free, for everyone, forever." Nobody pays more than then want, lots of people get to freeload, and I make a decent per-word. Everyone's happy, right?

But it's a system built on trust. The fans trust me to deliver good stuff and to have it done before I start selling it. I trust my audience to underwrite it. So far, they haven't let me down.

I, however, feel like I let them down a little by not listing donors in "First Year of Our REIGN." I'm going to remedy that right now, with a master list of everyone who has rightly asked for their support to be known. Let's give them all a moment of acknowledgment.

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On a personal note, it's been a treat for me to go through this list and see just how many people have stood up for REIGN over the last couple years. The list has a lot of familiar names, people I've had the good fortune to meet at conventions or who are just known through internet posts. Some people who donate over and over and some who just chipped in for one thing that caught their eye: It all makes me smile. Thanks.

All right, enough of my maudlin gratitude. On with the hurricanes, mountainous trees, unjust societies and rules, rules, rules.

- Greg Stolze, March 7, 2009





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BLACK MOUNTAIN FREE STATE

Wider than the Anvil of Heaven, taller than Skytusk, Black Mountain rises above the plains and forests of eastern Heluso in solitary majesty. Remarkable for more than its size and uniqueness, Black Mountain soil is rich and fertile. On its lighted face it produces abundant wheat and rice, while its shadow is thick with the fungi, mosses and vines that thrive away from the sun's regard.

Black Mountain isn't a traditional nation or city, but an amalgam of both. The entire mountain is settled, but only in certain areas — the government district, the marketplace, the soldiers' quarter — is the population dense enough to meet the expectations of 'city'. It's spread out and sprawled with terraces and waterfalls and irrigation canals crisscrossing the mountain's gentle slopes. Even where it's most chokingly populated, one only has to walk for an hour or ninety minutes to reach a farmer's field. Indeed, one can walk through the soldiers' quarter and, in the middle of it, find the descendants of a stubborn farmer who refused to sell his land. The one-acre farm is walled in on all sides by tall buildings, but it has simply switched to crops that flourish in darkness.

At the summit are the pastures where the fabled Black Mountain sheep are grazed and tended and care-

fully watched. Black Mountain can feed itself, but is surprisingly bereft of mineral wealth. For trade, they offer instead their woven goods. The looms on the lower slopes work white wool brought in from the area around, but the black sheep at the summit... their wool is reserved for the sorcerers who tend them and need them to produce fateskeins.

Fateskeins can only be hand-woven from the wool of a Black Mountain sheep, and they have the eagerly sought quality of drawing things to them. Like destiny's driftnets, a properly-woven fateskein can draw wind into a ship's sails, or lure animals to a hunter's snare, or draw the blows of weapons away from the body and towards a shield.

They export fateskeins at fabulous prices, and every aggressor has been met with the threat of killing the mystic sheep, halving the province's value in a single stroke. Holding their sheep ransom, as well as being a defensible position that has sprouted many fortifications over the years, dissuades invasion of the fiercely proud mountain people.

Black Mountain is a member of the Heluso Confederacy, but far more protective of their national identity than the other three Confederate nations. The Free State is too small to support many noble houses, but it does possess two royal bloodlines. There is the line of the King and the line of the Queen, which are forbidden by law to ever mix. Every generation, rule is





divided between the King, the Queen, and their spouses (who are expected to govern with the same wisdom and authority as the rulers by blood).

As one might imagine, an unmarried King or Queen is regarded with intense interest by anyone of marriageable age and appropriate gender. The rewards for making such a match are tremendous, and with no second-tier nobility, the Queen could theoretically marry a beggar and give him the power of Queen's Consort in one stroke. (This has never happened.) The King and Queen have incentive to stay unmarried in order to keep their authority undiluted. At the same time, the healthy and affectionate rivalry between the two royal families pushes them to ensure legitimate heirs as soon and safely as possible.

BLACK MOUNTAIN GAMES

Initially, the Black Mountain Games were held every other year, and their exact purpose varied, depending on whom you asked.

Those whose views tended towards optimism, or Black Mountain loyalty, or towards accepting the simplest explanation, say that the games were founded as an opportunity for people from all over the Heluso Confederacy to come to Black Mountain and compete in sporting events, to the honor of their nations. Others, more cynical or inimical to the nation of the black sheep, consider the Games a transparent sop by Black Mountain, intended to belie the notion of Black Mountain snobbishness while in fact only providing ample opportunity for its display.

Regardless of the original intent, the Games became very popular — perhaps because they were held during the first week of Winterlock, which is just about the time that various ruling classes are beginning to lose patience with the small number of people they're caged with in their manor or castle. Now they're held every third year, and have become a phenomenon followed far beyond the Confederacy's borders.

Making the trek from (say) the far reaches of North Hold in the dead of winter is no easy task, and often it can take the larger part of a miserable month to get there, and it's a similar journey back. But often the pilgrims band together to carry trunks of supplies, pool their funds to hire Flame Dancers to melt their way, or import fire charms from the Ussient Forest to take the edge off the chill.

There is one main event for each of the Games' seven days. Magic, even to the extent of attuned competitors, is not permitted among the athletes. The first day starts the long walk. The second day lightens things up with the vertical foot race, and the ice chute competition on the third is always a crowd-pleaser. The fourth day's event is a horse race around the mountain, followed by the fifth day's comical icicle duels. On the sixth day, all feast, but none more than the competitors at the glutton's quest. The seventh day ends the competition with the glorious winter war.

In more detail, the long walk is a brutally simple competition. All who choose to participate are lined up at the same starting point, given the same woolen clothes and leather boots, and all set off on the same





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northern highway. They are given neither food nor water, and the winner of the competition is the one who gets farthest without stopping, collapsing or giving up. Speed doesn't matter, only stubborn endurance. The long walk typically ends early in the third day, but has stretched as long as the fifth. Typically, the group starts as a cluster but gradually stretches out. They usually cross the line of shadow some time around noon on the second day. After that, the race takes place in inky darkness.

The vertical foot race is more of a standard race, harsh and cruel in a different way. All competitors start at the base of Black Mountain, and the first one to reach its summit is the winner. Since the mountain is thickly populated, a route is charted through the city, and residents are forbidden to use those streets during the day. Many competitors go off that track, however, pursuing shortcuts and seeking advantage. The winner is almost always a mountain native, though the competition between two local rivals at the last race was so fierce that they hobbled each other and let an outsider beat them both. (In fact, one local couldn't finish the race after a snare set the night before cracked his ankle bone.)

From the bottom of the mount up, the competition then shifts to top down. Starting with the first freeze, a winding but mostly-straight main drainage channel is carefully wet and smoothed, with layers of ice being lovingly polished by the lucky residents on its route until it's silky and high-gloss. This ice chute gradually emerges at the mountain's base, pointing out over a broad, open field. The object of the ice plunge is to start

at the top, ride a device of whatever design down the ice (navigating some hair-whitening turns and arcs along the way) and come out at the bottom without a humiliating, injurious, or deadly crash. (The difference between the three is usually down to whether it happens early, in the middle, or towards the end.) There's no real way to time the event, so the winner is whoever travels the farthest across the field. There is therefore much debate over whether it is better to have a light racer, who creates less drag and friction, or a heavy one who produces more inertia.

The horse race is simply a horse race, though often one enlivened by snow drifts, slick patches and other barriers natural or intentional.

Icicle duels are by far the least hazardous of the Black Mountain Games. (Though the gluttons' gorge has yet to produce a fatality.) Hundreds of icicles are grown throughout the city, and competitors must choose their weapon in sight of an official. (Again, there is some local advantage to being able to cultivate your own ice blade.) Duels are fought in brackets, with each loser being forced out of the fight. If one's icicle breaks, one is out. If both competitors break their weapons, both lose. Since striking someone with an icicle is a fine way to break it, the goal is not to hit the opponent's body. Rather, it is to successfully catch a ring, roughly the size of a human eye, on your icicle's tip. The rings are all constructed to exacting size tolerances, and all are hung by a short length of chain from the duelist's sword-hand elbow. (Only one-handed fighting styles are permitted, to the great disgust of the Western Marches.)





Glutton's quest has been deemed "a grotesque and wanton gustatory rampage" by one revolted Ob-lob traveler who, nonetheless, conceded that it had "a certain compelling quality to its wasteful perversity." It is quite simple. Competitors are weighed, naked in public, at noon, and then set loose in a public banquet hall full of dense and varied viands. (Only water is permitted as a drink, however.) After four hours, a second naked weighing determines the winner, who is the person who has gained the most weight in the interim. While it is always popular to watch, especially among those who've never seen it before, repeat viewings are few after the first chain reaction vomit. This usually happens when one competitor goes too far and can't hold it in, after which it can spread to any nearby eaters. It has very rarely gotten into the crowd, but once that happens, all the spectators' fun is definitely over.

Then there is winter war. Teams of twenty are fielded by each nation, and by others outside the Confederacy for after the first few games, its reputation had spread abroad, with the Western Marches, Dindavara, Uldholm and the Sunless Plains all, in time, sending a trickle and then a flood of competitors. Each twenty-person team is given a fortress of four snow walls and a hill in the middle. At the summit of the hill is placed a banner. The instant an enemy touches your flag, your army is defeated and disbands. The winning army is that one which either eliminates all competition, or is the first to set two enemy banners at the foot of its own. Spells are forbidden, as are all weapons beyond snow, ice, and the banner staves.

With up to eight armies competing, victory is as often won through the alliances made in the first six days, often to be broken on the seventh. Though there an advantage redounds on the Confederate teams who, despite their rivalry with each other, are rarely willing to let it interfere to the point that foreigners — especially Imperial foreigners — can prevail.

The prizes for these events are crowns carved of ice. In the past, a few have been preserved through enchantment, but there's an unspoken understanding that their fragile and temporary nature is part of the point. Everyone ages, loses their strength and surety, until death and decay evaporate the body as surely as warmth melts the trophies. But the victories won and the honor given are never as fragile as that award which vanishes when worn.

CULT OF GREED

In Opetka the most common religion holds that the universe was created out of Greed, literally. The god Greed ('Sahonst' in Opetkan) created all wonderful things in order to hoard them, and only made humanity and other gods that he might be envied. (All the bad things in the world emerge from either Greed or one of the other gods spoiling things in order to spite one another.) Through various tricks, Greed's three children — Past, Present and Future — steal most of the universe from him and then beat him into submission. As he surrenders, Greed spitefully curses his three children that, should they ever all meet together again, he will arise and consume all that had ever been his.





Greed's children, fearful of this promise, gave up much of their godliness in order to hide among the souls of mankind. Periodically, they are reincarnated, and recognized by the following signs.

Past always appears as a woman who is old before her time and never ages.

Present is always a man who is two men.

Future is always an unexpected man who is his own father.

People have been identified as these deities reborn numerous times throughout Opetkan history. They justify claims of authority through varying interpretations of the prophecy one man who had taken his father's name and reclaimed his father's priestly appointment announced himself as Future reborn, while the current Kuklach Prime of the city Muhulc is adored as Present because he has two heads, four arms and three legs fused together at the trunk. Although favor is believed to follow the gods reborn, the Opetkans aren't sentimental about killing them, as in the case of the Elder of Upunzi who claimed to be Past. The destruction of the universe is just too great a risk, so whenever two reborn deities are identified, one gets killed often both.

This task typically falls to (or is claimed by) the Cult of Greed, a small sect with a hereditary priesthood and few worshippers. There is a tie between the Cult of Greed and the Opetkan War Givers, who seem to believe the Cult can absolve them of war crimes in exchange for respect for their waiting, envious master.

DEER'S GIFT

The Deerwood native religion holds that a primordial deer and stag licked salt into the forms of Heluso and Milonda, who then went on to birth all of humanity before falling into deep slumber. In recognition of these acts of creation, the people of Deerwood celebrate the day of Deer's Gift on the first day of every Threemonth.

Deer's Gift is not a raucous celebration — indeed, life goes on largely as usual, but at some point in the day it's tradition (if so moved) to give a gift to someone you know and who you'd like to know better. The crafting of these gifts occurs beforehand. Depending on personality and intentions, a deer gift may be a symbolic circlet of woven flowers made on the spur of the moment, or it could be an elaborate piece of craft taking months to create.

Often this is a prelude to romance (or seduction) but it isn't assumed to be. Even if the gift is given between an unmarried woman and man, there isn't the automatic presumption of a sexual or amorous element. In Deerwood, the notion that women and men can be close friends without that sort of undercurrent is more common than elsewhere. That said, when a husband and wife exchange deer gifts, it's seen as a highly romantic gesture.

DOUBLE ANNIVERSARY

The eleventh day of Angermonth is celebrated in the Heluso Confed-







eracy in remembrance of two events. The first is the surrender of Imperial general Vigor Threadneedle after the his resounding defeat at the Battle of Broken Point. Exactly twelve months after that, the three nations that had fought together to turn back The Empire bound themselves (along with the Kingdom of Green River) together into the Confederacy and agreed to break ground on the city of Meetpoint.

The Double Anniversary is a time of drinking, excess, and intense competition. Along the borders of member nations, this often takes the form of inter-country rivalry, "friendly" in theory if not always in practice. Horse racing, tests of strength, jousts and other, more obscure contests fuel fierce wagering and loud, day-long celebration.

On one hill in Green River, three local communities have a yearly contest for possession of a bronze cup. Elders from all three ensconce it at the summit, then carefully erect a fence around the hill's perimeter. Any who wish to help battle for the cup surround this palisade (and any who breech it before the signal are handed over to strong men of the other towns for a thrashing). At noon, the elders bang a great gong, at which point all are allowed to attack the fence in an attempt to reach the cup and bring it back to their home town. Some shoving and jeering and the occasional elbow poke occur before the tocsin rings, but most save their strength for the actual climb and struggle. No weapons, spells or animals are permitted. It's dishonorable to strike someone who has one knee or more on the ground. Other than that there are no

restrictions on what strategies can come into play.

Another Double Anniversary tradition is followed in the city of Ash Grove, much to the disgust of outsiders. Each year, the richest and most powerful of the townfolk are required to judge a "filthiest chamberpot" competition. Moreover, the award isn't small: Every living person in town is bound by law to contribute a full coin of some size towards the purse. Thus, the competition is fierce among those desperate enough to enter in the first place. It has been noted by the shrewd that although Ash Grove is by no means a wealthy community, there are few families in the direst poverty because the chamber pot prize always seems to go to those most in need.

Double Anniversary is a varied and often coarse celebration, but no matter what form it takes there is always a strong element of loyalty and nationalism. While loyalty to the Confederacy is a powerful theme, tones of patriotism to a particular country are often discords within it. The Black Mountain Free State's people disdain to compete with their neighbors, who grumble over it. Green River distances itself from the ruder conflicts and is mocked for its fastidiousness. But despite these strains, the Confederacy is a strong and compelling idea to its members, as any outsider who dares win a Double Anniversary contest is bound to discover.

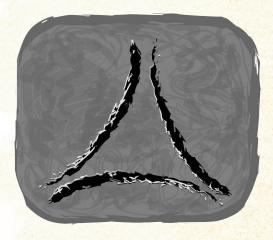




THE GODDESS CIOVLA

At least three nations in Milonda claim to be the homeland of Ciovla, the goddess of healing and kindness. Ciovla wrestled the Gravedigger Queen (or, in variations of the story, other funerary deities) into submission at the very gates of the deadworld to save the soul of a beggar girl whose life was taken in error. Her temples are widespread in many nations where varied religions are tolerated (meaning they thrive in The Empire and Upunzi, less so in the Maemeck Matriarchy).

The center of the Ciovla religion is its temples, all of which are as lavishly



A carved stone

symbol of

Ciovsa.

decorated as circumstances permit. A typical temple has an open area where any can come and talk to a priest or priestess (but not touch: The clergy are not permitted to touch the unclean except in emergency circumstances). Adjacent to this is a public bath where people can confide their minor sins and illnesses to the holy people, wash themselves, and then be forgiven. Once washed, touching the ministers is permitted, as is admission to the Inner Temple.

The Inner Temple is a small chamber (or a series of them in more opulent churches) where the faithful can be assigned penances for more serious sins, or consult on more grievous wounds and illnesses. For the most horrible of faults, admission to the Holiest Presence is required.

The Holiest Presence is the most secure room of the temple, often small but dominated by a statue of the goddess with an altar before it. In large temples, this room is constantly being cleaned: Every hour, a different novice enters to wash it, sometimes in different ways and chanting hymns specific to that time of day. In small temples, it's simply cleaned thoroughly each day. Those who are most wounded in body or spirit are brought here. The physically wounded are subjected to the secret skills of Ciovla, while epic sinners receive epic tasks to mitigate their guilt.

Some who follow Ciovla's teachings never leave the temple, but this is not required of every priestess and priest. Those who travel outside are, however, expected to cleanse themselves before entering the Inner Temple.

The healers of Ciovla are taught techniques for mending the human body







with tools and implements, many of which appear fearsome or cruel to the uninitiated. (These are described on page 81.) To learn the higher reaches (the four and five point Disciplines) the priest must visit a House of Death. Houses of Death are sort of antitemples where bodies are brought for shriving before burial. However, the bodies are cut open and explored before burial, in rituals that seek the fatal injury or cause of death, and it is by seeing the inner workings of the body laid bare that the greatest skill is attained. (After studying at the House of Death, the Ciovla worshipper must cleanse himself through a two-week fast and purification ceremony before once more passing into a temple.)

(Working in a House of Death handling corpses is a frequent punishment meted out in the Inner Temple. Houses of Death are administered by defrocked Ciovla Priests, those who have committed the gravest sins, such as betraying the faith or taking a human life. These fallen who serve in the Houses of Death can only be forgiven when they, themselves, perish.)

KUKLACH

At one time, the Kuklach of Opetka were a typical noble class. They claimed possession of the land and a divine mandate to rule, they adjudicated court cases, resolved conflicts and dispensed justice to lawbreakers. The primary difference between a Kuklach Prime and a Duke or Earl is that Kuklach were forbidden by their holy writ from marrying anyone other than a peasant. (In this case, that excludes all other Kuklach, Opetkan War Givers and members of the priesthood.) Only

the Kuklach spouse was elevated to high status — siblings and parents and cousins remained in their old station. Nevertheless, there were often material benefits to having a child or brother (or parent) catch the eye of one of the nobles. Moreover, the Kuklach often were popular among the governed class because they moved among them (at least when unmarried) and were in any event only one generation removed from commonality themselves.

The system of Kuklach/peasant marriages may have worked too well. The common people expected, practically insisted, that those married into high station lead lives of opulent luxury. The rising demands of sumptuousness, coupled with natural human competitiveness on one hand and natural human laziness on the other, led to a nobility more and more concerned with spectacle, pleasure and ostentatious display of leisure.

As the generations rolled on, the nobles became increasingly feckless, foppish, and self-indulgent. The priests took to organizing the tedious details of governance, initially in order to help the Kuklach, but eventually to supplant them. The military became involved as well, relieving the noble class of the 'burden' of maintaining social order and squabbling with the priests over who would take over the courts. (Currently, there's a smoldering stalemate on that front. In practice, the military usually claims the right to try anyone they arrest for a crime, while the priests insist that anyone can come to them for justice and redress. The priests get many voluntary requests for mediation, but asking a priest to come in and wrench you out of military jail is a much less certain endeavor.)







Eventually, the Kuklach descended to the level they currently occupy: A wealthy, pampered, coddled class with practically no real authority. The military and the priesthood keep them sedated with rich food, fine wines, and staggering entertainments. In exchange, the Kuklach don't complain to the peasants, who would certainly rise up in their defense. In the past, such uprisings have occurred, mostly expressed through work stoppages but sometimes with violence.

OPETKAN WAR GIVERS

The Opetkan military class is a meritocracy. It is controlled, at each level, by those who either excel at killing or excel at getting others to defend them.

Thus, a typical Primary Leader's career would begin when he presented himself to the War Givers and asked to join. Looking him over and seeing no obvious infirmities, the soldiers would then beat him. Depending on how he took the beating, they'd either send him home with a curse or assign him to a squad.

Lowly squadders train with their gear (typically spear or axe, shield and helm) and get drilled in mindless obedience to their Squad Master. At any time outside of war conditions, a squadder can take a swing at the Squad Master. If he does, the Master fights him. Depending on the actions of the other squadders the new recruit either gets beaten senseless (thus learning a healthy dose of fear for the boss) or triumphs, gaining the right to command.

For every five to twenty squads (depending on circumstance) there is a Field Master. The Field Master gives orders to the Squad Masters and can only be challenged to single combat once per month. If he overcomes the Squad Master, he retains his privileges, otherwise he's busted down to Squads again. An officer may bounce between Squad and Field several times before the twice-yearly opportunity to challenge for the position of Assigner.

The Assigner divides up duties among five to ten Field Masters. Defense of a large city or small province would be the job of a single Assigner. When a Field Master challenges an Assigner, the Primary Leader himself has to countenance the challenge. (Some have been carried out without approval. If the troops are loyal enough, such oversights may be forgiven, if not forgotten.) The challenger and his troops go to a ritual battlefield in central Opetka, while the Assigner picks one other Field Master to bring his soldiers for the battle. The troops are given wooden weapons, wooden shields and wooden helmets, but fatalities are still common. (For one thing, it's not unusual for a squaddie to see a Squad Master injured and finish the job to advance his own career, and so on up the chain of command.) The battle ends when either the challenger or the Assigner is captured, unconscious or dead.

One route to authority, then, is to be aggressive, ambitious, and difficult to kill. But the other route, just as common, is to be a clever builder of coalitions, friendships, debts and covert agreements. The very finest — Assigners who can, once every five years, challenge the Primary Leader — are something of both. To become





Primary Leader, the Assigner must return to that same sacred battlefield and lead his entire corps of followers into battle. The Primary Leader gets to field the exact same number of troops, but he can select them from any of the armies that any other Assigner controls. If the challenger can overcome the best possible force the Primary Leader can assemble and capture the Primary Leader alive, the Assigner can seize the position. (Displaced Primary Leaders typically retire to teach at war colleges, or to just go get some rest.)

Challenges to the Primary are far from common, and successful ones desperately rare. More Primaries have died in battle, in bed, from treachery or mischance, than have ever been removed from office through a formal challenge. Every Primary is required, each month, to deliver each Assigner a sealed and signed order indicating who should succeed him if he dies or can no longer command. These documents don't need to all contain the same name. When the Primary fails, the Assigners open the orders. Whichever set is most common is enacted.

PLAINS OF THE WINÇU

North of Opetka and the Maemeck Matriarchy lie the Plains of the Winçu, a land of perpetual darkness. At one time, they were a sparse grassland, peopled by cattle-herding nomads. But 'Winçu' was not then the name of the land, nor was it ever the name of the people.

As the power and population of Opetka grew, they came in time to cast covetous glances on the lands of their neighbors. Invasion followed. It was a miserable war for the plainsmen, who were called the Inestari. They were outnumbered. Their weapons were inferior. They were not organized behind a single plan, and they faced a callous and implacable enemy. Defeat after defeat drove them further and further back, until the return of one woman turned the tide and eventually drove the foreigners out. But 'Winçu' was not the name of that woman.

Annak had lost her sons and husband to the Opetkans and had fled to the east, to the Masterless Wilds. She had, previously, been unexceptional, but when she returned she brought something with her. There was a haunted look in her eyes, as if all her fear had been replaced with a dread, placid certainty. She did not pause to speak with any of her old friends or remaining family. She simply went to the biggest, closest encampment of Opetkans and said she had a message for their leader. When she judged she was near enough to the center of the camp she said, "Now. I fulfill my part of the bargain." Then she started to sing.

What came next, was the Winçu. It took the form of green fire, and a wind, and a groan like bending metal. The fire rose, and spun, a twisting whirlwind of light and sound reaching taller and wider, spinning in place, engulfing the camp and consuming its soldiers. Plainsmen and Opetkans alike were terrified by the inverted cone of light that could be seen for miles, reaching up into the clouds. They were afraid and they remained afraid when they realized that the glowing tornado was not moving, was not dispersing, was simply circling in place.







That Winçu, the first, is still there today and is still the largest. But there are many more throughout the plains. Some are only as tall as a tree, scarcely a hand's-breadth across at the base. Others are vast enough to rival the first.

Annak was the only one to emerge alive from that first Winçu and she taught others. Soon the green columns were rising all over the plains, and where their light touched, weakness and despair could be called upon the invaders through sacrifice and song. The Opetkans withdrew, fully expecting a counter-invasion that never came. The Winçu stopped at the edge of the plains, and went no further.

Since that time, nothing has been the same for the Inestari. Plants that could never grow before in the plains' darkness flourished in the light of the Winçu. Those who bound themselves to it could touch any Winçu and sense through all of them, sometimes even traveling from one to another in an eyeblink. Messages, money and magic traveled the plains at rates unimaginable to most, and the population swelled to match Opetka. Today, the plains are home to villages, towns and even castles. Almost all of them lie within the radius of a Winçu's light, almost all the townsfolk sing to it, and periodically cut themselves to bleed for it, and make their yearly or monthly or weekly offering of an animal to it.

It is the followers of Annak, the only ones who can touch a Winçu without risking death, who insist that it is not a god. It is they who beg or demand that towns be built in the dark, where the people cannot be seen and touched by the green power. It is they who say they have spoken to the Winçu and that while they will deal with it, and

accept its blessings, and offer their own, they will never worship it and never, ever trust it.

Purefast ("Atanarhi")

Purefast is a Pahar holiday celebrated the third week in Plantingmonth. This is the rainy season in the Pahar Nation, and for the first six days of the week, people are somber and quiet. They dress in dull colors and abstain from sweets, spices and liquors. Traditionally, this is the time for making right their sins and errors of the year before — atonement, but also making amends. Asking forgiveness during the week of Purefast is more significant than doing so during ordinary time, and withholding forgiveness at Atanarhi is despicable behavior. But tradition holds that the wronged one from whom forgiveness is requested may, by right, make forgiveness contingent on the completion of some task. The greater the sin, the more momentous the task can be without rousing comment from the community.

The climax of Atanarhi week is its seventh day. All toil is forbidden on the seventh day, with exceptions only for essential persons like physicians. As soon as the rain begins, a clamor of drums, chimes and musical instruments arises from every home, and then the people rush out stark naked and yelling. There is dancing in the street, the sharing of food and drink (particularly those that have been forbidden the previous days) and a great and wild celebration.

If it does not rain on the seventh day of Atanarhi, it is a dire omen indeed. If the rain is but light, that's regarded as





a warning from the gods to mend sinful ways. A torrential downpour, on the other hand, is divine favor.

SHAMELESS DAY ("KAG UNGKRAG")

This Truil holiday is celebrated on the first new moon of Dyingmonth to observe the anniversary of Raungmüt's adultery. In the deepest darkness of the year, the Truils believe their goddess has her face so fully turned from the world that she cannot observe her children below. Any sins committed on Kag Ungkrag are therefore held to no divine reckoning.

(Mortals, of course, hold their own grudges as they see fit. But avenging a wrong done on the Shameless Day is believed to face the goddess' judgment as if it was performed upon an innocent. Many such revenges are therefore saved up until the next Kag Ungkrag.)

Wise Truils understand that you can percieve much about a community by witnessing its Kag Ungkrag behavior. When all engage in wildness and passionate sexual excesses, it indicates a group bound by trust. When there is much violence and cruelty, it is a momentary symptom of an ongoing illness — jealousy, resentment, and secret grudges can all burst into fruition during the Shameless Day. If it's a day of caution when most hunker down and keep to themselves, it shows a community of no great closeness, but with general contentment. Most groups, of course, have some violence, some caution and some libidinous outbursts.

Children born on the ninth full moon after Dyingmonth are blessed with a blameless conception and are often held to a higher moral standard than their peers. But by the same token, as adults they may find it easier to find positions of authority if they are known for being sinless born.

SOUTHPORT

Southport is a busy trading port for the Heluso Confederacy, and particularly for Green River. Goods from across the sea and up and down the coast flow through its copious and unusual harbor, the underdocks.

In addition to its economic value, Southport is a site of great religious significance to the primary faith of Green River, reverence for The Bull That Mounts The World. In addition to the massive temple atop the walled-in capital hill, Southport hosts the Field of Holy Valor where, every three years, the ruler of Green River is sacrificed on the horns of a flawless white bull bred for killing viciousness. When not used for this sacred purpose, the Field is used for more mundane sporting events, often displays of equine skill.

UNDERDOCKS

Sailing towards the Green River city of Southport, the approach looks much like any other Helusan coastal town. The city and land rise from the water as a curtain, the hills and fields spread out to the left and right. But at the bottom of this city, at the join of hill and sea, there is a black gap. Aiming the ship towards it, one can sail beneath the city like a mouse creeping under a tapes-









try. This cavern leads to the spacious Southport underdocks.

Immediately above a sailor's head is a series of fortified firing positions, leading up into the basement of the watching fortress above. Crisscrossing the ceiling are staircases and catwalks, periodically interrupted by great stone columns where ships can be moored. The underdocks are indisputably an excellent shield against storms.

Approaching the underdocks on foot, from the city above, presents a different perspective. To one in the grip of the land, the underdocks feel like a cliff face, with the surface of the water parallel to it. One can watch the boats sliding down its surface while leaning against the wall that is, to the sailors, a ceiling.

From either perspective, the underdocks are deep and dark. There are pockets and wells down there that are unexplored by the ordinary townsfolk. Perhaps the soldiers of the fortress have a complete map of those dark places. Perhaps not.

One corner of the underdocks is the largest known settlement of White

Pahar. They keep to themselves, rarely emerging to the surface and engaging in most of their trade with the fishermen and merchants who base their enterprise from the shared darkness.

USSIENT FOREST

To the north of Dindavara, up and down great slopes and in a vast valley plain, travelers are often amazed to find that the descriptions of Ussient trees aren't exaggerated. Hearing of branches thick enough to support a mansion, trunks with diameters the size of a family farm, and bark so thick that cozy dwellings are built within its folds and knotholes... who'd be blamed for suspecting a tall tale?

But it's all true.



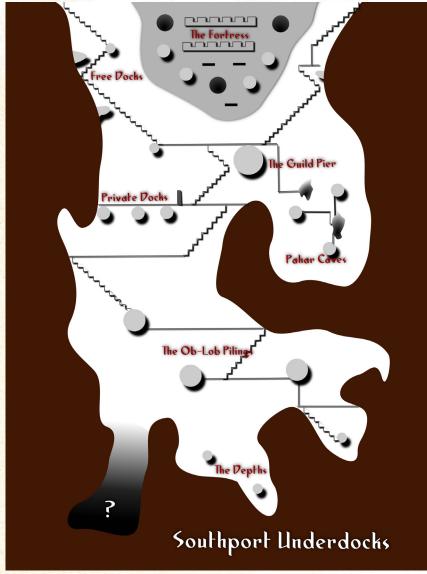




The Ussient people look like shorter, thinner Dindavarans, though their arms and legs tend to be a bit longer in proportion to their bodies. Almost all of them are, of course, excellent climbers. Some spend their entire lives in the trees, walking the branches, swinging on transport ropes, netting birds and crossing from tree to tree on rope bridges so high that the ground beneath is lost in a green canopy. There are farms around the bases of the trees, but groundlings are the butt of jokes among those who live on high.

Typically, each trunk has its separate tribe, but there's a great deal of skirmishing between them out on the tips, where the branches interlace like fingers. Full scale invasions reaching to the homes that gird the boles are vanishingly rare, but tough competition for bird eggs and hunting areas is expected even between friendly neighbors. When two tribes go to war, the trick is to sneak close enough to the foe to steal stores or destroy them, often through perilous underside travel.

In Ussient history, there have only been two cases of full conquest. The first, the invasion of the Arb tree two hundred years ago, was a special case. At that time, a powerful blight sorceress ruled the Arb, threatening the adjoining Kulia, Marn and Iylem tribes. Unable to assassinate the enchanter through normal means, the three neighbors joined forces on a risky assault from base to top. They never did catch the magician, but they claimed enough territory to shatter her political power. Since that time, Arb has been a vassal state to its neighbors, paying them yearly tribute. Though pureblood Arb folk form an underclass, Arb is (ironically) the most prosperous of the four, and extensive intermarriage has left servant Arbs rare. The other



three bicker about control of Arb, but most of the conflicts on the bark are political proxy battles (because Marn, for example, doesn't want to unify Kulia and Iyelm against it by damaging Arb). Any actual bloodletting takes place on the frontiers between Kulia, Marn and Iyelm, each of which is essentially a corner of a triangle surrounding Arb.

The other invasion took place on the northern border seventy years back. Trunk Ulbrock converted to the faith of the Ironbone Theocracy and, backed by priestly magic and foreign troops, they invaded and conquered their neighbors on trunk Breiss. The victory was hard,







and the occupation proved impossible. The Breiss wouldn't give up their native pantheon and, like all Ussient warriors, were more comfortable with secretive raids than mass engagements. The Ironbone troops could hold individual villages, but at the cost of constant vigilance, always watching the natives who smiled and nodded and sabotaged and poisoned. The Ulbrock invaders' skills matched the Breiss' at arboreal hit-and-run combat, but the Breiss troops knew every twig and knothole on the bole. The native resistance fighters also had help from all those Breiss who were polite to the occupying troops' faces, while putting insects in their beds and weaving thorns into their climbing ropes.

Ultimately, too many Ulbrock found themselves in sympathy with the Breiss, who spoke their language and shared their culture. Even with the Ironbone faith, they were unwilling to watch foreigners punish and threaten their Ussient brethren. Five years into the occupation, the Ulbrock quietly stopped pursuing the Breiss loyalists, making only a token effort. With the Breiss out of check and redoubling their attacks on the Ironbone troops, the northerners cut their losses and withdrew, telling the Ulbrock to contain their neighbors, if they really wanted to. The Ulbrock didn't really want to, given the extensive raids their home branches were suffering from neighbors because their best fighters were pinned down in Breiss.

Two generations have passed since Ulbrock's withdrawal. Tensions have eased, but there's still a lot of animosity, and almost a third of the raids from Breiss to Ulbrock end with someone dead. Ulbrock and the Ironbone Theocracy despise one another, despite sharing the faith. Each blames the other for either dragging them into a war that couldn't be won, or for losing the war through cowardice and ineptitude.

There are trade routes through Ussient lands. Tree-tribes along those roads take tribute and offer protection, while those off the road sometimes send long-ranging squads to raid and steal the metal goods and cloth flowing north from Dindavara and the Confederacy, or the furs and foodstuffs moving south.

The massive Ussient trees bear equally massive fruit, ranging from boulder to haystack size. Ussient fruit ripens from the outside in, so it's possible for the exterior to rot while the core is still unripe. It has a sweet, tangy flesh, and while the skin can be eaten, in the Ussient lands it's more likely to be dried, cured and made into clothes that have the texture of fine-grained leather. The seeds can be roasted until they crack open, and the matter inside swells out like popcorn. Some grain and corn is grown locally, but more is imported.

(For more detailed coverage of the Ussient Forest and its people, turn to page 50).

WESTERN MARCHES

W

Lying between Center and Dindavara, the Western Marches

have always been The Empire's shield against Dindavaran aggression.
Before coming into The Empire, the Western Marches had been longtime rivals (and often outright enemies) of the Sunless Plains, which border them on both the north and south.
Belonging to the same political entity





has eased their mutual distrust and contempt, but only to a point.

While the culture of the Marches exalts the ideal of the gruff and muscular warrior, its greatest contribution to The Empire is its vast and fertile farmlands. While the other nations have farms, grain and corn from the Western Marches are fundamental foodstuffs for almost every Imperial city of size.

The magicians known as the Smoke Sculptors originated in the Western Marches.

WHITE PAHAR

The so-called 'white Pahar' are a race apart, whose origins are ancient and subject to much disputed scholarship. The agreed-upon outline of their history is as follows: Many years ago, before The Empire's formation, there arose a group of Pahar whose skin was papery pale, who were born with white hair and whose eyes were an eerie red. Not all of these prodigies bred true, but if two of them had children, those children were almost invariably colorless as well.

One of the Conjoining Priests of Setekesh declared that the white Pahar were favored of the goddess and destined to tend her groves. (He, himself, was one of the whites.) Many white Pahar flocked to his banner and they soon became a powerful faction within the church. Their power rose so quickly and so greatly, in fact, that the church cracked under the strain. The white Pahar priests endorsed increasingly bizarre conjoining and often incorporated non-white humans into their fusions. This abhorrent practice turned the people, the nobles

and the government against the white priests, who were exiled from the Pahar nation forever. Even today, henpecked Pahar mommies threaten their children that the whites will come for them if they aren't good. (This has caused no end of unpleasantness for honest Ob-lob traders who made the long overland trek to The Empire.)

As for the persecuted dissidents, their problems were just beginning. They fled to the Sunless Plains, where their curious creations were welcomed but they, themselves, were just tolerated. In time, the Sunless King came to believe the strange foreigners could extend his life beyond its normal span and, when they refused (or were unable) they were driven into the Lightless Jungle.

None but the white Pahar themselves know what befell them in those deadly confines, but emerging into North Hold their numbers were reduced and their attitudes rather queer and insular. Hearing of the Ob-lobs, they migrated towards the coast, where they were as accepted as any impoverished foreigners of outlandish appearance could be.

Many of the white Pahar intermarried with Ob-lobs, or with cosmopolitan Confederates, but a few intermarried within the same strains and maintained the same religious practices — including, quite possibly, human sacrifice. An accusation of kidnapping children for abominable experiments led to their expulsion from the normally accepting city of Darkport twenty years ago. Currently, the largest known concentration of white Pahar live in the Southport Underdocks.

Matters of Color

CHAPTER 1: COINS

he Ob-lob lust for gold is so great that they wash their coins more carefully than their children.

-Nadansk Ghal,

Wu-Hra Pathmaker

The youth Chochukoti was sullen as he slouched toward his uncle's stall at the Merchant Hall. "Uncle Solistano," he said. "Father said I was to come see you. To learn... something important." The last words were accompanied by a sort of nihilistic shrug, eloquently indicating his suspicion that nothing could ever be important.

Solistano grunted. He sat behind a table scattered with papers, inkstones, quills, and coins of many nations. The disorder radiated from a well-oiled brass scale and its tiny lead weights. Just beside it was a bowl of fine Opetkan glass, decorated with rising lines of blue cobalt. The lines were tight together, running straight for most of the bowl's circumference before sprouting the lines and curves of Ob-lob writing. The writing was staggered so that the tiny letters wouldn't overlap.

The boy looked left and right before mumbling, "If it's about the ways of women

and men, I already know it all, cousin
Seenitera was going on about it after a
couple glasses..."

"Your cousin," his uncle said, shaking his head and grimacing. "If her mouth isn't open for wine, it's open to blather or it's open for... ugh. That's not why you're here, so you can lighten your blush. Your father wants me to show you something about money."

At that the boy perked up, before immediately attempting to quell his enthusiasm into a mature and worldly interest. "Really?"

Solistano's throat produced another rough sound. "Do you know what this is?" he asked, holding up a coin.

"Of course, it's a Dindavaran gold mark," the boy replied.

"Of course." After a brief rummage, the older man picked up another coin. "This?"

"An Imperial pound."

"If I offered you one, which of these would you choose?"

Chochukoti tilted his head. "The pound, I suppose."

"Why?"

"Dindavara is closer than The Empire, so I suppose the coin is rarer."







"Hmph." Solistano put down the mark and picked up another pound. "If I offered you these two, then which?"

A shrug. "Doesn't matter."

"Hah! You really do have a lot to learn."

The boy's blush of embarrassment, which had indeed faded, surged back with resentment.

"The coins trade one for one for one, why should it matter which I pick?"

"Sit."

Chochukoti slouched into a chair.

"On the Dindavaran coin," his uncle said, leaning in to point with stubby fingers, "We have the mountain, I think they believe their god made the world there or some such. On the back, the sword, of course. You know what 'dindavaran' means, yes?"

"People of the sword."

"And the runes?"

Chochukoti shook his head.

"Me either—not exactly. I think the mountain side has something like, 'our wealth is not gold, but courage.' The back is 'where gold ends, steel begins."

"They like their coinage dramatic, don't they?"

"The Dindavarans like their traditions, which is why you should have picked this one and not the pound."

In reply to a quizzical look, Solistano put the mark in the bowl. The level of the water rose exactly to one line, which Chochukoti could read with a squint.

"Gold mark."

"The water tells it true, is the coin as big as it ought to be?" The older man pulled the coin out and dried it with a grubby towel. He set it on one arm of the scale, a lead weight on the other. "It was, and it weighs as it should too. I call that a clean, whole mark."

He swept the weight off with practiced fingers, replacing it with another mark coin. This time, the scale slowly tipped. Looking closer, Chochukoti could see that this coin was a bit more worn and battered. When his uncle put it in the water, it seemed to him that the level rose just has it had before.

"Look closer! The level's lower. I paid very dearly to have this bowl made just so. This mark isn't a whole mark. It's been scraped."

"Scraped?"

With practiced movements, Solistano brought from under the table a small bucket and a sharp knife. With a slow smooth slice, he shaved a thin plane from the coin's smooth side.





"Scrape it too fast or too deep and the coin looks bad. Some people don't care, but you should."

"That's not much gold."

"No it's not, and it took me only seconds to get." The bucket had several similar slivers glinting on its bottom. "Shave a hundred coins and pretty soon you're talking about real money."

"Is that what you do in here all day?"

"Not only that," Solistano said, his tone hurt. "Some coins aren't worth shaving. Take the Confederate pound. A smart man can trade one bad mark for two good feddies."

"Because you can bore out from the hole in the center and it's harder to notice?"

Solistano cackled. "That's one reason, but to sell what you shave you have to melt it together, and that Confederate gold is impure. Look. The Dindavaran coin, you can mark with the back of a knife. It's soft because it has lots of gold. Can't do that with the feddy. Too much brittle stuff melted in."

Chochukoti picked up the Confederate coin. He hadn't seen as many of them.

"Why's it the same on both sides?"
His uncle shrugged. "Confederate coiners have lazy imaginations?"

"Where's the symbol for Broadlands?
There's the hill for Black Mountain, the bull
god of Green River and the trees of North
Hold, but no symbol for Broadlands."

"The hole in the center is Broadlands. It represents their secret gods."

"Huh." He put it back on the table. "If I'm offered an Imperial pound or a Dindavaran mark, which should I take?"

"Depends. A mark that's clean and complete is your baseline, but I'd take an old Imperial pound, a Grace IX or older, over a clipped mark."

"Why does the age matter?"

"Why do you think?"

As his nephew frowned in concentration, Solistano picked up the two imperial coins and put them on the scale, which tipped once more. "Yet if I gave them the water test, they're the same size. Eh?"

"So The Empire has been polluting its coins?"

"It's called 'debasing the currency.""

"Why would they do that? Everyone knows they've got more gold than the ground."

"That's why. 'Everyone knows' The Empire's coins are good. They're like the voice of The Empress in your purse, recommending your money worldwide. 'Her reign eternal first before heaven' and all that. Each of the last three Empresses has cheapened their coins. I'll give them credit though—the milled edges make them worthless to clip. Like the Uldish wreath here," he said, picking up another coin. "Shaving that's more trouble than it's worth."





"Wreaths aren't even gold, either."

"No, they're silver wrapped around a disc of gold-infused copper. They trade at five wreaths to the mark. But if you melted down that mark and those wreaths, it would take the materials in six wreaths to pay for the gold in one mark."

"That doesn't make sense. How can the Dindavarans prosper if their coins have a worse margin than their neighbors?"

"The ones who could do something about it don't know or don't care, and the ones who know don't tell and buy up wreaths whenever they can. The beauty of the wreath is that even though the raw value of its component metals is less, its complexity makes it hard to counterfeit. Clever Ulds. Its value is not only what's in it, but the trust it puts in you."

Chochukoti thought it over. "If I was counterfeiting, I guess I'd make an easier coin that's less expensive. That's only sensible."

"Counterfeiting? Counterfeiting? That's a topic for another day. Usually more trouble than it's worth, with Empresses more or less doing the job for you."

Solistano grinned and, for the first time that morning, Chochukoti smiled back.









CHAPTER 2: THE MAEMECK MATRIARCHY

The mountains around the Matriarchy are perilous and barren. The only crop natural to that soil is dead enemies.

-Prince Will of The Empire

This is the story the Matriarchs tell.

In the beginning, there was Maemeck and she made the world and put people upon it. In those days, there were ten women for every man. This was as it should be, since men can plant their seed and wander off, forgetful, while women are tied more tightly to children, who are of their very bodies. The goddess gave the women the Book of Maemeck so that they could gauge all their actions rightly, and for a thousand years there was peace and tranquility. But in time, some grew restless with their station and questioned why things had to be as they were. These were the first of the Undisciplined.

The Undisciplined were disorganized, but they had sweet words and persuasive songs, they spoke movingly of the great cause of 'equality,' never fully addressing the obvious inequities between sexes and castes. Because they lazed in indolence instead of toiling, they seduced the weak of every caste with promises of luxury and 'freedom.'

These rebels were little more than pests until one of their number stumbled across knowledge forbidden by the Book and, in his arrogance, used it. He was the first sorcerer, and with low cunning he hid his power from the wise and showed it only to his fellow troublemakers. With these secret powers, the Undisciplined came to draw in more and more with promises of dark miracles and secret joys.

All was dismay and disruption, but no true disaster until one of the Judges was led away from the right course of judgment and lost his discipline. Tempted by the promise of enchantment, which he intended to use for the good of all, he agreed to study under the Undisciplined and was soon warped away from his purpose and to their cause. Because he had his caste's gifts of leadership, he quickly came to lead the Undisciplined, organizing them to spread like weeds. Because he had his caste's gift of wisdom, he was soon the greatest of sorcerers, transforming a collection of idle tricks and fancies into tools for a horrible war.

Learn, then, from this. When a great good is corrupted, it becomes a far deeper evil than the further fall of that which is fallen by nature. Strength turned against its natural course of order is far more dangerous than weakness following its natural course of chaos.

The battle between the righteous and the Undisciplined raged for generations. Each elder who died took with



100-

THE MAEMECK MATRIARCHY





her one more memory of the times of peace. Each child born was another who knew only the strife of war and could not grasp the joys of a discipline he had never known. Those following Maemeck's true teachings fought fiercely and with honor, but they were forced back, and back, and back until they were at last confined in a ring of mountains. "Why?" they wailed, "Has our judgment failed? Why are we set to suffering by our lessers? Where is the justice that perfect judgment gives?"

At last, the goddess Maemeck heard their cries and appeared to their Judges. "You suffer because you failed," she said. "You did not see the danger of the Undisciplined before it was too late. Now, they will be with you

always, and I shall call the least dissolute among them to your land in the mountains, that they may in time be saved. As for the others, they will never overwhelm you because I shall give you two gifts and one punishment. The first gift is that the great birds who are in my image will submit to carrying you, so that you can survey your enemies from a proper position above them. The second gift goes to those Undisciplined who will join you, for this gift is

a polluted one. I will show them secret shapes that will drain the corrosion of magic out of the world and render it harmless. Finally, the punishment. From now on, women and men will be born in equal numbers. This is, I know, a burden to you, but with the Book you are far better equipped to deal with this disaster than the Undisciplined."

All came to pass as Maemeck predicted. The sudden influx of male children sundered the Undisciplined forces within three generations, turning them into a vast multitude of squabbling nations. Some retain one vestige of Maemeck wisdom, some another, but only we stand on land that has had the righteous dwelling upon it always.



OVERVIEW/VALUES

OVERVIEW

The Maemeck Matriarchy is stuffy, antiquated, xenophobic, sexist and founded on a relentlessly striated caste and level system. Its ability to conquer its neighbors is limited by its small population and the difficulties of bringing an influx of Undisciplined foreigners into their carefully balanced society. On the other hand, the Matriarchy is indisputably stable. Indeed, stability is the defining aspect of the Maemeck structure. What it does better than anything else is resist change. With its forbidding natural defenses and the strategic advantages of their flying mounts, they're not getting conquered themselves any time soon.

VALUES

Order is the primary Matriarchal value, and every rule of its hidebound society is aimed at putting people in their place, moving them to positions where their strengths best serve the rulers, and holding out enough promise of improvement to keep rebellion at bay. The Empire's recent aggression has cemented this Maemeck truculence: They were a vassal state once, and after the Bloodcutters decimated the Warrior and Judge castes, their civilization nearly collapsed. Fortunately for the Matriarchy, a few of those families were able to hide themselves and preserve the core cultural doctrines and documents from foreign pillage.



In actual historical fact, some of the Judge families that survived the Imperial occupation did so by turning into belly-up quislings. Furthermore, when the time came to drive the foreigners out, several versions of the Book of Maemeck were presented (by different families) as the central document. The disparity between the three books has been covered up and integrated and explained over the decades since the country broke free, and the books were in accord about 90% of the time anyway. But those 10% disparities concern pretty essential matters of the highest caste.

Does it matter? The families who helped the invaders have been so thoroughly interbred-with that more than half the current crop of Judges has at least one great-grandparent among their number. The bigger threat is that some scholar might find the three books and see the differences. That's why they're kept under tight guard at Stagshead.



Q.S.

Castes, Tests and Ranks



'Maemeck' means 'judgment' but despite their reverence for the concept, they don't mean the same thing by it that foreigners might. The common meaning for judgment is the ability to discern right action under duress—to know what's just or what's best in a murky situation. To Matriarchs, judgment means an ability to relate any problem to the Book of Maemeck and find a solution.

Castes, Tests and Ranks

The various interactions of caste and rank are illustrated on page 323 of **REIGN**. Keep in mind that males of any caste and rank are treated as if they were two levels lower. They retain the rights and prerogatives of their actual level—an Undisciplined male who reaches fourth rank gains his autonomy. But if he comes into legal conflict with a third level Undisciplined woman, the Judges are likely to favor her instinctively. Furthermore, many tests involve getting testimonials from (for instance) a second level Warrior or better. For those purposes, men are indeed judged at the lower rank.

The rigid Book of Maemeck is quite explicit that once a level has been attained, it can never be rescinded. A fourth level Warrior who betrays the Matriarchy may deserve death, but he dies as a fourth rank Warrior, with all the respect that implies. The text is equally clear that one cannot skip ranks. A brilliant doctor who discovers a cure for a hideous plague qualifies for the sixth level of Laborer, but if he hasn't taken the test to get to fifth, he's stuck.



Once one qualifies for status improvement, how does everyone know? The short answer is, you wear it on your sleeve, though it's a bit more complicated than that.

Every citizen in the Matriarchy is expected to have documents, stamped and sealed and composed by an empowered member of the Judge caste, that testify to the individual's proper place in society. But it's far too difficult to compare documents every time you need to know if you should look away from someone in contempt. Therefore, each citizen wears a band on her left forearm decorated with one to six circles. Wearing the band isn't mandatory, but without it you can safely be treated as Undisciplined. The number of circles indicates level of accomplishment, and the color shows caste.

Undisciplined—Black, for the darkness of their ignorance.

Laborer—Brown, for the earth in which they toil.

Merchant—Silver or white, for the coins they gather.

Warrior—Red, for the blood they spill.

Judge—Gold, for the light of leadership they shine on all.

The penalties for wearing a band indicating undue accomplishment are typically harsh but temporary—public humiliation or flogging, or both. Forging the official documents is far more grave, and is punishable by maiming, blinding, exile or (in the case of impersonating a Judge) death.



Castes, Tests and Ranks



Undisciplined

This is the caste of beggars, teachers (of anything other than specialized caste knowledge, like languages or basic math or history), entertainers and enchanters. Undisciplined are permitted to accost and speak to those of better station because, frankly, it's ridiculous to expect restraint from them. The exception to this concerns the highest of Judges. Only Undisciplined of the sixth rank are permitted to speak in the presence of a sixth rank Judge. Lesser Undisciplined must remain silent unless that Judge addresses them directly. They're expected to be (of course) without discipline, but there are limits. Sixth rank Judges get respect even from those who are expected to lack respect for anyone else.

The Undisciplined are forbidden to own land, handle weapons or touch gold.

First Rank: The lowest of the Undisciplined beg and do day labor or odd jobs. They're not trusted with anything else, really. Only rarely can they earn more than a few small coins, because no one would trust someone so lowly with any task that merits higher pay.

Second Rank: To rise above the lowest rank, the Undisciplined must receive a testimonial from someone on the level of a third rank Merchant, or greater. Once that testimonial has been certified by a Judge, the Undisciplined is permitted to enter service, hiring herself exclusively to one employer.

Third Rank: The next test of the Undisciplined is to serve a first rank

Judge (or someone of similar station) for a year without disgrace. Those who can accomplish that are permitted to learn an art or trade (though not skills reserved for Laborers).

Fourth Rank: When an Undisciplined person can amass testimonials to her character from someone of at least second rank in each caste, she can present them to a Judge and, if they are acceptable, become fourth rank. At this level, she's permitted to manage her own affairs instead of being subject to her parents or employer.

Fifth Rank: To reach fifth rank, it's necessary to get a recommendation from someone of sixth rank, any caste. At this high level, she can be trusted to manage and command other Undisciplined.

Sixth Rank: On the recommendation of a fifth rank Judge or better, the Undisciplined can be elevated to this high level. This gives the right to interact with anyone, of any level or caste, without shame.

Laborer

Laborers are by far the most numerous caste, encompassing foresters, smiths, miners, farmers, shepherds, carpenters, weavers, farriers and the like. Essentially, anyone who makes something or follows a practical trade is a Laborer. Second rank Laborers outnumber all members of the Warrior and Judge castes combined.

Laborers are not permitted to own or carry weapons, nor may they adorn their heads with jewelry.

First Rank: Uneducated, crude effort is the purview of the first rank labor-



Castes, Tests and Ranks



ers. Typically these are laborers who are too young to have risen to second. There are a few who get stuck at first due to handicap, attitude or because they angered a Judge somehow.

Second Rank: To qualify for the commonest level, a laborer must work for one entire year in the service of a first level Judge, or someone of equivalent or greater status. Once that term is verified by the appropriate Judge, the Laborer receives permission to study a specialized trade (smith, carpenter, herbalist, bonesetter, builder, etc.) and apprentice himself to one of its masters.

Third Rank: Third rank Laborers have demonstrated knowledge in a specialized field, and once that knowledge is legally validated, they are permitted to charge money for that service.

Fourth Rank: There are sets of higher standards for fourth rank specialty labor, roughly equivalent to being an Uldish master craftsman. Fourth rank Laborers are permitted to own land and hire servants for terms longer than a month.

Fifth Rank: Very few Laborers reach the fifth level, because it involves studying a chapter of the Book of Maemeck covering the laws and duties of their station. If they can pass a test on that knowledge without a single error, they qualify as fifth level Laborers, who are permitted to voluntarily travel outside the district in which they were certified. (Lower Laborers can move to other districts, but only in the service of a higher-caste employer.)

Sixth Rank: The rewards of sixth rank are rare indeed, bestowed only on those who make a significant contribution to the nation (as decreed by a fourth level Judge). Those who demonstrate their value by bridging great chasms, creating magnificent public statues or heroically saving lives can become sixth, who are the only Laborers permitted to voluntarily travel outside the nation.

Merchant

Handling money, making loans and governing the exchange of services and goods is the provenance of the Merchant class. They, and they alone, are permitted to 'engage in commerce.' (Lower castes aren't trusted to make financial transactions, while money grubbing would demean the higher classes.) A commercial action is when cash, labor, material or documents of debt change hands over something that was not made or enacted by either the purchaser or the seller. Thus, when a farmer sells his corn to a fellow Laborer, that's not commerce. When he sells it to a Merchant, that's not commerce. When the Merchant sells it to someone else. that's commerce. When a bonesetter takes pay for treatment—not commerce. When a Merchant acts as an agent for several bonesetters, directing patients away from the busy ones and managing the money for all of them, that's commerce.

Merchants are the most heavily taxed caste, and (with one exception) the higher the Merchant's level, the more taxes he pays. Cunning Merchants find that the opportunities at high ranks more than compensate for this extra charge, complain though they might.



THE SOL

CASTES. TESTS AND RANKS

First Rank: The lowliest of merchants are still permitted to act as the middlemen of commerce, and first level Merchants are more numerous than all the other Merchant ranks put together.

Second Rank: There is only one requirement for a second level license, if one is already of the Merchant caste, and that is to pay a Wealth 3 surcharge to the Judges. With the paperwork in order, a second rank Merchant can travel anywhere within the Matriarchy in order to trade. (Lesser Merchants are restricted to the district of their birth, or to a district they were directed to by a higher-status employer or a Judge.)

Third Rank: If a Merchant can stay in continuous business for ten years, he can qualify for the third rank (as long as he's paid the fee for second). It's only at third level and above that a Merchant is permitted to own a shop and hang a placard in front advertising his services. (Many merchants of lower status get around this by operating out of their homes, but the stores of dedicated purpose are held in higher esteem.)

Fourth Rank: As with the second level, the only requirement is a surcharge. However, at this point, it's not a fixed amount. It's half of all the Merchant's possessions. Naturally, this spurs many in the third level to spurts of generosity right before applying for this promotion. The Judges don't really care, as long as the Merchant isn't contemptuously open in his attempts to circumvent the spirit of the law. Fourth rank Merchants can trade internationally.

Fifth Rank: As with the fifth rank of Laborer, this level is attained by taking a lengthy test about the Book of Maemeck's laws. In this case, it's the sections on Merchant endeavors, but as with the Laborers, not a single mistake is permitted. Once the test is passed, the Merchant has official sanction to charge interest on loans. (Illegal loan operations are legion throughout the Matriarchy, and the Merchants pursue them fiercely. It must be said that when they catch someone outside their caste breaking the loan laws, they're much angrier than when it's a low-rank Merchant.)

Sixth Rank: The reward of being a sixth level Merchant is a drastically lowered tax rate—back to what was paid at first. But to attain this, the Merchant has to give all his money and possessions to the government and, starting from scratch, earn enough to give them Wealth 3 again. Of course, many Merchants get around this fairly easily with a spouse's help, but as long as the initial sacrifice is big enough, the Judges turn a blind eye. Disdainful of commerce they may be, but the Judges still aren't about to turn down a pile of cash.

Warrior

The Warrior class serves not only to defend against foreign incursions (or grab land from nations that would just misuse it anyhow), but also as the armed will of the Judges. Blasphemy, fraud, insurrection and failure to pay taxes are all investigated by the Judges, who also declare guilt and pass sentence, but the sentences are carried out by Warriors. In large cities, Warriors and Judges often oper-

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Castes, Tests and Ranks



ate in pairs to keep the peace and enforce the law.

Warriors of any age are the only ones permitted to routinely carry weapons. Even children of the caste are often given a symbolic club or bow. They are forbidden by law to ingest alcohol or barkwater.

First Rank: The lowest Warriors aren't even assigned to a unit or a duty. The only right exclusive to their station is the right to enter a training Collegium and receive instruction. Most Warriors leave first level by puberty—sometimes before.

Second Rank: Completing the coursework of the Collegium usually takes 2-3 years, sometimes as many as four and very rarely just one. Those who emerge have undergone physical training, harsh mental discipline, and rigorous weapon drills. With graduation, they're assigned to an army, a unit, a squad and a regional station. They go there, join that, and do what they're told.

Third Rank: After serving three years at second, or after accomplishing something distinctively brilliant or courageous, a Warrior can advance to third level, the rank at which she can command a squad of ten of her fellow Warriors. She may be reassigned, but not typically. This is the lowest level at which a woman can begin to train with biauchris.

Fourth Rank: After five years commanding a squad, or (again) after notably meritorious service, the Warrior may be advanced to fourth rank, at which point she faces the choice of either advancing up to the level of unit command (which puts her at

the helm of five to ten squads), or of entering the Master's Academy.

Fifth Rank: Completing the Master's Academy course in tactics and strategy rarely takes more than two years, more often getting over in one. Graduates earn the title of 'General' and are considered capable of leading an entire army. (In actuality, there aren't enough armies to go around and many Generals wind up chafing under the command of someone who's theoretically an equal.) Generals are also qualified to teach at either the Collegium or the Academy.

Sixth Rank: Only one Warrior can occupy the sixth level. It's the position of Foremost Commander of Maemeck Armies and to qualify, a General must either be universally acclaimed by all other Generals in the nation, or be appointed to the job by a trio of sixth level Judges. Foremost Commanders can only be removed by death, voluntary retirement, or conviction of high crimes. Absent those factors, all the Judges in the country acting in concert lack the authority to expel one against her will.

Judge

The smallest, best educated, ruling elite of the Maemeck Matriarchy is the Judge caste. Only they are permitted to read sections of the Book of Maemeck that don't concern their own station. Only they are permitted to touch originals of the Book. Certain elements of the Book of Maemeck can only be read by a Judge—indeed, can only be *looked upon* by the holy Judges.

First Rank: The callow youth of the Judge caste still have the right to



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CASTES, TESTS AND RANKS

handle the holy books, though it's a right they seldom get the opportunity to exercise. A first rank Judge is under tremendous pressure to advance from everyone else in his class.

Second Rank: All the Judges' tests are written examinations about the Book of Maemeck and its laws. All the tests must be passed flawlessly. To reach the second rank, the Judge must pass a test verifying her command of the laws governing the Undisciplined. Success at that test entitles her to hear the complaints of the Undisciplined and render decisions.

Third Rank: The next test for Judges is over Labor law, and passing it entitles them to render judgment over Laborers. Some Judges of this rank also serve as a high court for particularly difficult cases involving the Undisciplined.

Fourth Rank: Mercantile law is a long section of the Book of Maemeck, and one not clearly written. Nonetheless, those who master it are entitled to judge Merchants and be done with the sordid affairs of the working and frivolous classes. They can also review and overturn the decisions of lower Judges, as can all Judges of higher level.

Fifth Rank: As one might expect, the test for rank five is on martial law. In contrast to the Merchant book, the laws of war aren't terribly complicated, though this in turn leaves some situations maddeningly vague. Only fifth rank Judges and above are permitted to read the Inner Laws of Judgment.

Sixth Rank: The highest rank of Judges are those who have mastered the Inner Laws. In addition to carry-

ing authority over any Judge of lesser level (as well as anyone of any other caste) they are the ones who make decisions of policy for the entire nation. There are currently nine Judges of rank sitting in council and directing the Matriarchy.

CULTURE

A nation that disdains its poets, musicians and painters by exiling them to the lowest social class is, understandably enough, deficient in original poetry, music and paintings. Sculptors, being classified as Laborers, have it a bit better, and it's possible for a talented singer or storyteller to rise to the highest ranks of her caste... but that doesn't change the fact that it's the lowest caste.

Most music in the Matriarchy is communal, meaning that people get together, sing, and beat on homemade drums. Construction of instruments is regarded with suspicion, if not disdain, so only the most passionate Laborers study the skill—often to their heartbreak when they get hold of an Opetkan instrument or, even worse, an Uldish one. Realizing that their craft is far more advanced and honored elsewhere can be crushing. Or infuriating.

The only public spectacles that the Book endorses are yearly religious plays (or, as the Judges call them, 'historical plays'). Enacted by the Judge caste themselves, these performances are often lavish affairs, each striving to outdo the previous season's, and the previous year's. It doesn't hurt that the plays, though burdened by stilted language, have gripping narratives. These plays are...



The Giving of the Book: Short on actual conflict, this performance shows Maemeck descending from the sun in flames to teach her human children the ways of proper judgment. There is much rejoicing, both in the play and in the audience. Since this festival takes place during the icy Dyingmonth, the opportunity to go to a warm place is welcome. (Fire is always a prominent theme in The Giving of the Book, so much so that there have been some tragedies when effects get out of control. This is one reason that almost every Hall of Judgement in the Matriarchy is made of stone.) Each of the play's three acts is punctuated by Judges passing through the audience and distributing gifts of food, drink and coin, which also contributes to its popularity.

The Rise of the Undisciplined: The pleasant weather of Threemonth brings the performance of "Rise of the Undisciplined." While presented as a comedy of errors with copious slapstick, there are edges of genuine shock and evil that slice through the narrative every now and again—often when a foreigner, seeing the play for the first time, least expects it. It chronicles the first, feckless disobedience to the Book and how this gradually poisoned the lives of all who turned aside from Maemeck's widsom.

The Sorcerer: The swelter of a Matriarchal Fruitingmonth is an apt setting for the third play, a hellish tragedy. In stark contrast to "Rise of the Undisciplined," "Sorcerer" chronicles the hubris and treachery of the first Judge to fall away from the Book. A magnificent figure, the sorcerer

makes compelling and seductive arguments for his position, pointing out every flaw and problem with the Matriarchal system. But at each turn, he's offered a chance to leave his evil ways, repent his errors and understand his (carefully countered) mistakes. In his pride, he refuses them all, becoming a greater thrall to magic and chaos. The play ends with him slaying the younger daughter who won't join him and laughing madly over her corpse.

Maemeck's Return: The autumn of the year hosts the autumn of the 'historical' Matriarchy. Opposed on all sides by the Undisciplined and their sorcerous master (now wholly evil) the faithful Judges stage a final defense and are, at last, rewarded for their faith. Their goddess reappears to bless them with quelling and biauchris, which figure prominently in the final battle against the sorcerer. (The Undisciplined sorceress who defies him with her newly-learned quelling is his older daughter, who followed him right up to the point that he killed her sister. Throughout the final play, she's regarded with suspicion and mistrust, until she gives her life to protect the Matriarchy and is posthumously elevated to her blood caste of Judge.) This play is always held outside, so that the charge of the biauchris can be enacted with real birds. (Their riders are the only actors in these plays who aren't Judges.)

Cuisine

The fundamental unit of Maemeck cooking is the goat. Goat meat, goat milk, goat cheese or goat butter are featured at nearly every meal. Lamb is a close second. Accompanying



this is thick black bread made from the valleys' scruffy wheat (or, for gourmets, light white bread from imported Winçu grain). The Maemeck mountains have an abundance of plants with edible leaves, so salads are popular spring through fall. There's also a common starchy sweet tuber (the halnack) that gets put aside for winter, or made into a sort of bland, crunchy candy (halnacku), or gets distilled into a syrupy, thick liquor that looks almost like blood and is blindingly rich in alcohol. This beverage, called halnackeck, is by weight the most lucrative export from the Matriarchy. It's particularly prized (of course) in The Empire, where the war with the Matriarchy makes it extremely hard to get.

Clothes

For daily wear, almost everyone wears pants, usually loose wool tucked into leather boots. Broad leather belts constrain a loose, low necked tunic. The shirt's loose sleeves are typically held by leather bracers on the forearms, where caste circles are displayed. Woven caps with ear-flaps and chin-ties are common in winter, while woven grass hats are used in the sunlit summers. Scarves are worn in winter, kerchiefs in summer.

Robes and gowns are formal wear. Most often, they're worn in a caste-appropriate color, with the circles on the sleeve embroidered as delicately as the wearer can afford or accomplish.

The clothes of the lower five castes are remarkably similar in outline, differing primarily in detail. Undisciplined often decorate their belts, brac-

ers and boots with tooling, pigment or polished metal details. Laborers eschew such fripperies, taking pride in the quality of the repairs to their garments. High level Laborers dress in imported cotton, but make a point of repairing any damage or wear, often with eye-catching embroidery. Merchants are ostentatious in the color of their clothes, and take pride in outrageously long and brightly colored neckwear. Warriors have no particular sartorial code, except for the biauchrus riders. They are the exclusive owners of their steed's molted feathers, and they often use them as components in cloaks or gowns.

The Judges break the pattern, dressing exclusively in robes. Some are elaborate and splendid (most often those of the men), while others settle for quiet luxury. Hats and head-dresses are typical, usually designed to emphasize height and grandeur.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

It is, if nothing else, stable. Whatever outsiders may think of the caste straits of the Matriarchy, the principles laid out in the Book of Maemeck are a powerful engine of social order. Everyone has hope for improvement, but very few reach the highest levels where there are no new realms to conquer. The Judges generally agree with one another because they're in the superior position. The Warriors enforce the rules because they're indoctrinated from childhood with notions of honor and courage: To them, judging seems like listening to people whine all day. Similarly, the Merchants have a nice mix of privilege and freedom.





If they lack the accolades of the Warriors, neither are they risking their lives. The Laborers are often too busy to complain, and like the Merchants they aren't getting killed or having to master reams of complicated law texts. The Undisciplined are, in many respects, the most liberated of the castes. The price of their relative freedom is poverty and contempt, but it's still freedom.

The greatest political challenges to the Matriarchy are external. Once an Imperial territory, the Matriarchy was stiff and standoffish to their great neighbor for generations before The Empire decided (rather capriciously) on war. Despite some specious claims of diplomatic offense, treaty violation and reneged debt, few doubt that The Empire's attack was purely mercenary. Taking the Matriarchy puts them next to the bounty of the Plains of the Winçu, which could affordably feed enough troops to carve out a piece of Opetka down to the sea. Great as The Empire is, it has no ports, yet.

The people of the Plains are good neighbors to the Matriarchy. For one thing, the Matriarchy's poor fields and reliable mines make them a good trade partner for the Plains, who have an abundance of crops to sell, but little mineral wealth. Propping up a nation that stands between them and the rapacity of The Empire is, certainly, another reason for the Plains to forgive any past Matriarchal aggression.

That leaves Opetka, a notoriously poor neighbor. But there's nothing like a restive Empire to make for strange bedfellows. They trade with the Matriarchy, they send their spies into The Empire from Maemeck lands, and they share what they learn when they think it's likely to hurt The Empire. It has not escaped Opetka's notice that the Matriarchy is single-handedly holding the world's greatest army at bay, and that's the sort of thing that puts a damper on any envious eyeing of the Matriarchy's mines. On the other hand, there's a faction within Opetka that thinks a stab in the back is best delivered to someone who has all she can handle in front of her.

THE MATRIARCHY AT WAR

The traditional military categories are foot soldiers, specialized troops and enchanters. The Matriarchy is skewed towards elite units: The Warrior caste ethos ensures it. It also ensures that foot soldiers are, one on one, often better equipped and motivated than their enemies.

Even the poorest troops are likely well-equipped, given the nation's wealth of iron. Breastplates, steel helmets and metal shields are standard, along with a war-pick and several javelins. Given the passive function of queller runes—they just stall other effects—foot soldiers may turn up with one sketched on their shields or engraved into their helmets. Sometimes, fraudulent quellers swindle soldiers with phony runes. Ironically, confidence in these empty sigils often serves just as well as a real rune in encouraging soldiers to charge a sorcerer.

Many of those Warriors survive to pursue deeper skills, leaving behind the role of "mass on the battlefield" to specialize in siege artillery, stealth scouting, guerrilla tactics or fighting in the mountains. Most obviously, the



biauchrus riders provide battlefield intelligence, serve as heavy cavalry, bypass tough terrain and, last but not least, scare the hell out of enemies.

Maemeck sorcery is limited to variations on a theme, and that theme is "no sorcerers allowed." They have some effects that take out individuals, but for the most part they just offset the advantage held by The Empire or the Plainsfolk, or anyone else who expects to pull a magical surprise out of their pocket at a decisive moment.

The Matriarchy's arcane tactics are built around not needing sorcerers to accomplish anything, other than ensuring that the other side's sorcerers don't accomplish anything. Fighting defensively in the mountains has a similar chilling effect on numerical advantages: A massive army is far

less effective when it's broken up into chaotic bubbles by unyielding terrain. Maemeck forces do poorly when outnumbered on a broad flat plain, which is why they rarely venture onto broad flat plains to fight. Instead they fall back, let the experts do what they do best (kill people and escape unseen) and let the mountains do what they do best (kill people and just lie there). The crowning touch is the air corps, who can blithely ignore the terrain that so constrains and confounds invaders.

The Matriarchy's victories against The Empire have made them confident, almost cocky. Trying to fight another country without mountains to hide in or large, established zones where magic is impossible... many Matriarchal Generals fail to appreciate just how different that sort of conflict would be.



Shedding blood is forbidden to Judges, leaving them ritually impure. A Judge found guilty of enacting violence on another, of any caste, is considered Undisciplined until purified in accordance with the Book. The purifications involve quests and ordeals, of increasing difficulty for each level of Judge.

The one time a Judge can kill without guilt is when carrying out a death sentence she herself passed. *Only* Judges may take life in the name of Maemeck law. This still leaves them soiled, so few Judges speak the final sentence. If a Judge becomes haunted as the result of an execution, it's considered obvious proof of misjudgment. Haunted Judges can never be redeemed.





MATRIARCHAL CHARACTER CONCEPTS

- ...the Warrior boy who always dreamed of riding a biauchrus...
- ...Undisciplined gigolo who married into the Judge caste and has just become a widower...
- ...cunning forger born in the Laborer caste, masquerading as a prosperous Merchant...
- ...wounded biauchrus rider back from the front lines of The Empire...
- ...Judge who has lost faith in the Book of Maemeck...

MATRIARCHAL COMPANY CONCEPTS

- ...Queller conspiracy against the upper classes...
- ...Merchant spies in The Empire's pay...
- ...Undisciplined criminals given the chance to escape punishment by crossing the border to spy in Opetka...
- ...diplomatic envoy to Upunzi...
- ...a small village near the Imperial front where rubies have just been found...

MATRIARCHAL PLOT COMPLICATIONS

- ...civil unrest erupts throughout Opetka...
- ...crop failure in the Plains of the Winçu means a lean year ahead...
- ...The Empress sues for peace, on the condition of a high ranking male Judge permanently going to her chamber of consorts...
- ...the biauchris get sick...
- ...the Laborers enact a work stoppage over a law in the Book of Maemeck that they claim is unfair to them...



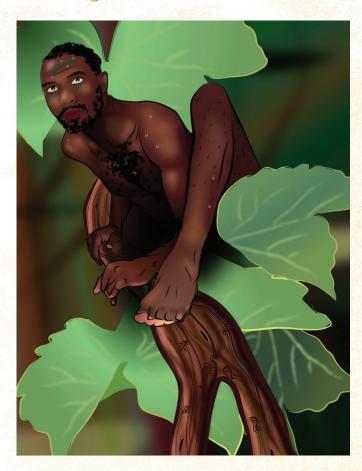
In addition to common Imperial names, there are some names from the old language. (Other than a few names and phrases, that language is dead except to the Judges, who mostly read it. Even the tests and laws for lower castes have been translated into Imperial.)

Male	Female
Boe	Gijini
Joho	Halneckeck
Kulnick	Rura
Nold	Tirl
4/3	31 32 T //



CHAPTER 3: THE USSIENT TRIBES





This is the story the Ussient Tribes tell.

Before we were us, there was nothing here but waiting potential, the seeds of worlds -- how many, no one can say. In time, there came to be time, which at that time was also light, and both time and light were known as Wirtref. Wirtref found the potential of worlds and ate some, and in that act ensured that they would never come to be. With that act, Wirtref created death, and had to give the part of herself that was time away to Death, who was named Moess.

Wirtref and Moess did not eat all the world-seeds, however. Many they

buried for later, since there was now time unfolded from light and Wirtref knew that Moess would claim even her if she did not eat. But as time passed, Wirtref found Moess tiresome and they quarreled. With neither willing to relent, Wirtref at last agreed to separate that part of it which was light, and let that part illuminate their disagreement, deciding between them.

That part which was light became known as Sied, and it said they were both equally at fault. Unwilling to accept Sied's judgment, both went away. Sied sat in the sky and did nothing until one of the hidden seeds sprouted and became a world. It is our world.

The seed of the world brought forth many fruits, and the two greatest were humankind and the Ussient trees. The trees are great for their size and their value, envied by all other nations. Mankind's greatness lies in its boldness and its ability to grow, to become greater than it is.

In time, one of the people who lived amid the Ussient trees decided to go up to the sun and ask it all it had seen. Since, at that time, Seid was closer to the world than now, she was able to climb to the top of her tree and jump to the sun from there, though it was a long jump and dangerous. Finding this human in his lap, Seid asked who she was and she said her name was Rusu. She asked him to tell her all he had seen, and Seid, who had long been lonely, did so. So charmed was the sun by Rusu's attention and

THE USSIENT TRIBES



curiosity and courage that he asked her to be his bride, but Rusu said no. Then the sun moved farther from the world, so that she could not return, and asked again. Again Rusu said no, and moreover accused him of violating hospitality. Seid replied that it was she who had violated his home by jumping on him uninvited and that this transgression put her person under his authority. (In the many years since his creation, Seid had become corrupted by loneliness and by watching all the ills of the world and its people.)

Worried, Rusu pretended to relent and said that her willing compliance would surely please him better than ongoing resistance. Seid asked how he could win her consent and the love he craved, and she said that first he must apologize. He did. Then he must promise never to do it again. With some hesitation he agreed. Finally, he had to agree to move closer to the world, for his distance had created a time of ice and the people were suffering.

Seid refused, fearing that she would simply jump away when she had the chance. She, in turn, said she could never love him if he could not trust her, and he replied that she could ask anything else. So Rusu asked for his power of light and warmth, so that she might send it to the people below. Reluctantly, Seid agreed. But Seid had never known himself without the light and the heat, and he quickly became chilled and cried out in the darkness. He begged for the return of his light, but Rusu refused and, seeing his

weakness, drove him from the heavens. Frozen Seid crashed to the sea far to the north and west, which is why those lands are always cold.

As for Rusu, she was the first human to become a goddess. She tried to return home and show her people the secrets of light and warmth, but try as she might, no matter how she damped her flame she could not keep it contained. Causing disasters and forest fires, Rusu saw there was no longer any place for her in the world. Sorrowing, she returned to the sky and set herself far from the forest, where she would never have to look upon frozen Seid again. She still practices her dimming and cooling nightly, and every winter she longs to return to the world of her birth, but inevitably her inner fire returns in the spring, leaving her trapped out of reach.

As for Seid, some say Moess came and consumed him before falling to the blade of Nictus, the Man Who Became Death. But others say Seid still waits in the frozen wastes, plotting his revenge on Rusu and on the race that spawned her.

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VALUES

OVERVIEW

The massive trees of the Ussient forest are sparsely populated by insular tribes, each typically claiming a single tree as its vertical domain. These tribes, while less mechanically or culturally sophisticated than their neighbors to the north or the south, necessarily have a healthy rate of magical study. Their dominant local magic form mimics the qualities of fire, often to the near-exclusion of fire itself. Warming oneself with magic is far safer than fire, when one's whole world is wooden.

For every fool who persuades the world he is wise, there are ten who would be wise - had the world not persuaded them they were fools.

-Ussient Proverb

The Ussient tribes value ambition and personal excellence, but also loyalty to their home tribe. To be Ussient is to be expected to work hard and pursue the greatest heights of whatever skill, duty or profession one picks. The only segment of society immune to this pressure are the groundlings who live around the base of the tree, growing crops and tending gardens. To leave the high-pressure life on the trunk for "a muddy life watching corn grow" is seen as a disgraceful surrender by most Ussient tribesmen, and this contempt for farmers remains unabated when they travel abroad.

RELIGION AND AMBITION

The Ussient tribes worship a pantheon that varies somewhat from tree to tree, but the universal feature of their deities is that they were all, previously, human. To an Ussient, foreign religions often seem to be based on the questionable premise that inhuman entities have any interest in worship from mankind. Instead, they believe that humans of exceptional accomplishment may, with enough luck and courage, supplant the original gods (as Rusu did with Seid) or kill them outright to usurp their position (as the conqueror Nictus did to the original death-god Moess, becoming the god of death and warfare). With sufficient excellence, any mortal can become immortal and demand the

Culture



respect of all the dwellers in the forest. Thus they believe that their history's greatest magician became the goddess of magic and their greatest climber became the god of ascent (to whom one prays for the strength to one day become immortal oneself).

A byproduct of this belief is a limited respect for the aged. All the ascended gods achieved their greatness before the age of thirty summers, and many other great Ussient who failed to surpass death were killed before that age. Thus, if you live to be gray haired, it must be because you were too lazy to become immortal when young, or because you never accomplished enough to spur someone into killing you.

CULTURE

The Ussient trees keep their history in the form of epic chants, with literacy only recently leading to written (or carved) records. These lengthy, superlative-laced, heavily internallyrhymed stories give their form to reports of current events and future predictions. When an Ussient wants to make a name for herself through some daring exploit, she typically announces it beforehand in a public, rhymed boast of what she's going to go do. If she succeeds, she modifies the song to reflect that it happened and that version is, thereafter, accepted as fact. If she fails, there's some good-natured teasing and, if her brag-song was particularly good, it may still get sung in a sort of wistful and ironic way to recognize her at later occasions in her life. On the other hand, if she backs out of her dare due to cowardice, she is shunned and disgraced.

The Ussient songs are often backed by woodwinds, drums and hammered wooden chimes similar to marimbas. Often these instruments are works of art even when silent, for the Ussient are unparalleled woodcarvers.

Their carvings often exaggerate and stylize the features found in nature, so that the mouths and eyes of their portraits of great leaders are three or four times larger (or more) than any such feature found on a normal human. There is a subtle vocabulary to the patterns used to emphasize features and details: Each ascended god has a simple shape associated with him or her. Including Nictus' pattern on a statue indicates that the person portrayed was a warrior, or died in a war, or had some other close and important association with death.





Cuisine

Some farming occurs on the ground around the trunks, grains and corn where there's sufficient light, salad greens and large mushrooms elsewhere. Ranching and herding have never caught on, since the terrain simply won't support it.

The dietary staple is the Ussient fruit, which is as vastly scaled as everything else about the trees. These boulder-sized fruits are completely edible, though the skin is bitter and is more often tanned for clothing than consumption. The flesh rots from the outside in, so that one fruit can be eaten off of for a month or two once the skin is pierced. As for the seed at the core, if cooked it pops like popcorn and provides an oily, robust treat.

The third leg of the Ussient diet is hunting and scavenging. Birds, large and small, are snared with nets or shot with arrows (often tethered). Nests are raided for eggs, some of which can be of great size. While nothing in the forest is the size of a



biauchrus, some of the birds of prey can weigh as much as a grown man and, if unable to carry him, are more than capable of knocking an egg-thief over the side of a branch. There are also squirrels, snakes of all sizes and the squirrel's massive relative, the cruscius. While squirrel-shaped, they typically weigh as much as a human adult. There are packs of carnivorous monkeys to hunt and eat (if you're desperate — they're quite tough and taste rotten even when fresh). Food that doesn't run away is also available in the form of edible molds and fungi on the dark sides of the trees, but they're an acquired taste — some are poisonous, so pick carefully.

Clothes

Clothes indicate social status and can subtly indicate beliefs. The lower one is on the tree, the more likely one is to wear *ucrim*, the leather of the Ussient fruit. The more prosperous peoples living higher in the branches are likely to supplement ucrim with imported foreign fabrics like cowhide or pigskin, cotton, wool or (very rarely) silk. At the highest branches, where the leaders and the bold dwell, foreign trifles are shunned, but status is displayed through feathers, snakeskin, or fur and leather from the cruscius.

The shape of these clothes is almost always pants and a long-sleeved shirt, with shoes optional among any but the groundlings. These garments are laced along the sides to keep a tight fit. As a matter of practicality, clothes worn in the trees need to offer as much freedom of movement as possible, but close garb keeps out of the way when one has to move. The exception to this are the top-tier dwell-



ers who wear less practical clothing as a silent boast about their physical prowess. Up there one may find short capes, feather ruffs that spread behind the head, colored fringes and elaborate headwear.

While not as sanguine about personal nudity as the Deerwood culture, the Ussients see less shame in bare flesh than (say) the Truils. Nakedness is often an enhancing factor for competitive endeavors. Racing to the top of the tree is an adequate contest. Challenging someone to race naked ups the ante.

Jewels and gold are regarded as curiosities, pretty but with no inherent use (other than trading with foreigners, of course). This indifference to the wealth of the earth (which the Ussient forest largely lacks, not that one could mine it easily) endears them to their northern Ironbone neighbors. They're more likely to adorn themselves with jewelry made of wood, which is lighter, easier to replace and more meaningful. Wearing the wood of your home tree is worthy. Wearing the wood of an allied tribe is fine, though it shows a close connection to that foreign tree. Wearing the wood of a rival is only permissible if it was taken as a trophy, either won in a wager or claimed as war-booty.

Art on page 42 based on "Warbot" copyright 2007 by Marcus Ranum http://mjranum-stock.deviantart.com/

ECONOMY

Trading between tribes is limited, as most of them have the same resources and a lean season for one is the same for all. A more prosperous tree with

better light for its groundling farmers may sell an excess to neighbors, but by and large the trees are self-sufficient. They have to be.

Instead of raw materials, then, most trade is conducted for crafts. For example, the tree Ugust grows in clay soil near a great river. While it is stunted compared to many in the forest, its potters are the finest in the region and often trade their wares for fruit to supplement their diets. Another tribe, on tree Siess, is several days' journey along ground paths (or through uninhabited trees) from its inhabited neighbors, but Siess lies near trade routes to Dindavara and the northlands. They are therefore able to trade to travelers for metal implements, which they then exchange with Ugust and other tribes. Many trees have specialized or unique assets of this type, and they form the basis of their economies.

Trees that don't have such benefits often resort to raiding. Stealing from someone within your own tribe is a shameful thing, unless he's your recognized rival and you bragged about how you were going to rip him off beforehand. But taking stuff from other tribes — which is raiding, not stealing — is honorable and a fine way to gain social status. Excessive raiding of one tree on another is looked at askance and may lead to more severe reprisals, but light robbery is considered the price of doing business, like a soft tax. When raiding one another, Ussient tribes often rely only on lashes, blunt arrows, and clubs. While enduring a heavy beating to protect your property is highly esteemed — indeed, Ussient bandits have been known to beat people un-



conscious and then leave them their goods intact as a sign of respect — it's also understood that some people are going to take a lick or two and then quit, without any particular shame. Thus, Ussient raids are almost universally conducted without fatalities. Deadly weapons are only brought out when one is interfering on their close property. Some trees don't even consider their groundlings worth defending with lethal force.

POLITICS

The Ussient prize valor, exalt conflict, and offer regular praise to Nictus, their god of death and warfare. So it's shocking, really, how stable and peaceful the tribe and nation are, on the whole.

The Dindayarans have tried to take Ussient trees in the past, but crossing the Grave of Fools is a good way to diminish your army. Fighting a vertical war against people who are used to it is another. It's a tribute to their determination, and to the tireless Burai soldiers who distinguished themselves in the forest fight, that they forced three tribes to abandon their home trees and flee deeper into the groves. But what the invaders took, they could not hold. They had not the climbing skill nor the inclination to patrol the far branches, and with those ceded to the displaced tribes (and to many other Ussients who came to try themselves against the strange foreigners) the harassment drove them out. A similar history against an Ironbone incursion secures their northern flank. As for the Mountain Rider Truils, they've



THE GRAVE OF FOOLS

The Ussients' preferred trading partners are the Truils. Despite the distance separating them, there is great demand in the Truil wastes for Ussient fire talismans, while the tree-dwellers can never get enough of the Truil's hornbows and their drug Kratig, which the Ussient refer to as "the Taste of the Hero."

Prices for these commodities are driven through the roof by the trade route one must follow between the Truil Wastes and the Ussient forest. It starts with the dark forest, Ussients that never fruit for lack of light, cursed trees where no human dwells and the cruscius have no fear of man. After that, the path lies across a plain the Truils call the Cold Barrens. Considering what the entire Truil Waste is like, it should tell you something that they single out this plain as particularly chilly and singularly lifeless.

The most commonly copied map of the area was laid out by an Ironbones explorer and evangelist who wound up lining the bellies of a Blue Face tribe after passing through Mountain Rider territory with a rapidly-dwindling party. His map was traded to Dindavara, where it was translated into Dindavaran and copied. On that map, the uninhabited plains lying between Ussient, Truil and Dindavaran terrain is labeled, "The Grave of Fools."



Culture



no interest in seizing tree-cities their mounts can't climb.

Tribe on tribe rivalry, conflict, and violence are common. In fact, they're so common they've become culturally encoded and ritualized. The tribes fight like brothers — viciously, with long-held grudges and incessant picking at perceived weakness, but with no real desire to kill. Raiding, robbery, duels and mockery are common. Deaths from fights, especially from falls on moving tree limbs, are accepted. Deliberate fighting to kill? That's a story that's going to carry.

Tribalism

Your tree is your tribe, to which you owe primary loyalty. Betraying your brother for the good of the tribe is low, but not nearly as low as betraying your tribe for your brother. Marrying between tribes is common and accepted, usually to cement a trade or political alliance. In such deals, one family typically makes the more generous concessions, while the other family sends their child (son or daughter, it matters not) to live on the other tree. Such people are regarded as members of the tribe, but always with a little suspicion — or a little extra patience.

Governance begins informally, but grows a level of ritual continuity towards the top. People who successfully complete impressive brags gradually move higher on the tree. If their new neighbors accept them, they've ascended in social class. If they're rejected, scorned, mocked and have garbage thrown at them, they crawl back down in disgrace, often

lower than they started. But if the higher-ups reject someone popular with the lower-downs, they risk their own position. Higher-ups gain and maintain status by solving problems humbly brought to them by lower-downs. Someone at the top branch who is never asked to mediate a dispute, punish a criminal, solve a mystery or undertake a daring journey is someone whose time has passed. They become irrelevant and forgotten which is, for an Ussient, the greatest disgrace.

Many problems, then, are solved by appealing to a higher-status Ussient (and offering a generous tribute in recompense). Among the highest Ussient tribesmen there are official duties with ornate regalia, ceremonies, rituals and prerequisites. The particular offices vary from tribe to tribe, but the most common include High Priest, Supreme Judge, or Warlord. Which office truly leads the tribe depends, in equal parts, on the charisma and cunning of the officeholder, and on the historical importance that tribe has habitually given to religion, judgment, or martial prowess.

Religious Power

Taking an extremely optimistic view of the perfectibility of humankind, Ussient worship has an almost collegial tone, rather than the awed and adoring approach common nearly everywhere else. Every Ussient has fantasized about becoming divine, if not actually planned on or attempted it. While brags and daring exploits generate immediate social currency, they're also considered a potent



religious tool. The gods are powerful and can subtly or directly influence the world to protect and reward those who praise and entertain them.

Priesthoods, then, are those who claim to have hidden knowledge of what their god or goddess likes. Those who are permitted to join (admitted due to family connection, status, or lavish offerings) are tu-

was greeted by a woman of ghastly aspect, scarred more hideous than any battle-veteran, her very flesh marped and run like a river's frozen rapids. I was given to understand that she had got thus of her own will, but my grasp of these brutes' tongue is yet imperfect. I believe they said she had sung a song, an ancient boast, that she would give herself over to fire for their sun-saint. By this she became their priestess. While appalled by such barbarity in pursuit of a false faith, I could not help but admire her courage, mad or misquided as it might be. I have fought five duels, two unto death, and malked into each mith steady hand. But when this fire-priestess met my gaze, I shook.

-Rutan Xingshao, Dindavaran explorer and diplomat

tored in the best ways to please their goddess or god, and what the deity's goals among mortals are. Moreover, each priesthood has a body of secret lore about their patron's mortal life, which is considered essential for understanding which sacrifices please, what heroism impresses, and what jokes amuse the ascended mortal. Naturally, priests of Nictus value deeds of arms and attract warlike supplicants. The goddess of sorcery has followers who prefer study and prize inner strength. Rusu the Sun Goddess' religion stresses athleticism, cunning and mastery of fire — not just magically mimicked flame, but the real thing, dangerous and natural. Each tries to please their patron through deeds of greatness done in their names. Often these brags, quests and dares are performed upon local rival temples and religious persons, rather than against other tribes' churches. In at least two cases, religious tensions within a tribe have escalated to deadly warfare that left their tribes all but vassals to neighboring trees.

The Shade Societies

The open route to power in the great trees is through fame and renown, but not everyone's skills and temperament fit them to the arrogance of public greatness. For the subtle, the shy and the devious, there is another route to influence, rarely discussed but all the stronger for it.

Almost every inhabited tree has a Shade Society, a group who meet in secrecy, act in darkness, and protect their view of the social ideal through any means they deem fit. They are self-appointed bogeymen, silently



watching for those who break their unspoken laws. Those who step out of line may get a warning, or they may get poisoned and thrown offbranch in the middle of the night.

To some, particularly the groundlings, Shade Societies are admired as protectors of the humble. To others, usually those with a view towards changing their tribal society, the Shade Societies are self-righteous and retrograde vigilantes, afraid of the future and hiding behind anonymity.

These conspiracies add members through invitation only. Often they hoard secret knowledge, particularly knowledge of spells that help them keep their tribe in line. Some are little more than unofficial clubs where the influential meet to privately discuss their use of soft power. Others are regimented cabals where each member knows only four others at most. Still others have layers of secrets and initiations, leading (in at least one case) to hidden worship of Seid the Fallen Sun.

Whatever their nature, the Shade Societies are hardly ever discussed among the tribesmen, and never to outsiders. This made it quite puzzling to one Ironbone envoy who had become fast friends with an up-andcoming young sorceress. The enchantress was cheerful, confident and energetic until the day she found a small leather packet slipped in among her belongings. Inside it was an animal claw and a quantity of red dust. When she first saw it, she turned pale. She left her foreign friend with no explanation. Four hours later, she went to the edge of a branch with several of her family members, apologized to them, and hanged herself.

No one would even talk to the Ironbone priest after that. The Sisterhood of Claw and Dust was mollified and did not expand its vendetta.

Warfare

General Stead's famous pyramid has bulk troops, elite warriors and potent sorcerers as its three corners, each favored against one of the others. The Ussients are passably armed with enchantment: Their local magic is easily adapted to warfare and it's widely known. As for elite individuals, their entire culture urges people to become commanding leaders with unparalleled skills and total self-confidence. There are warriors and adventurers who are better trained, but it's hard to find anyone more eager for a life of intense, total conflict outside the Lightless Jungle or the mad ranks of a Sunless poleaxe regiment. Moreover, the Ussient god-chasers are cheerful about it.

The forest falls short of massy numbers. Compared to fruitful plains like Green River or Center, the food density of the Ussient forest is far lower and, accordingly, the population is much less. On the other hand, the forest is an almost perfect terrain to negate the advantage of numbers.

As mentioned back on page 44, conflict between tribes is formalized and, while violent, is almost never indiscriminately so. The people acting out against rivals are ambitious and eager for their individual honor, and there's no honor in slaughtering civilians, nor any real tactical advantage. Even if a tribe had the will to mobi-



lize many of its adults into an army, they'd face the problem of actually getting to the core of an enemy tree. It's the same problem that has stymied foreign invaders, because there are really only two options.

First, they can go along the ground and seize the enemy's lowest holdings. This cuts the food supplies of the tree-dwellers, but only in the long term, and besieging an Ussient tree isn't easy. Trapping enemy forces above the groundling level is fairly simple, as there are usually few ramps and ascents, but the same choke points that make it easy to keep them in makes it easy for them to keep you out. Eventually the loss of food from the ground farms can become telling, but unless the invader also closes down the trade routes where the target's branches touch those of other trees, the defenders can break the blockade with long-lasting Ussient fruit. Moreover, taking the low road puts you under your enemy. A low-lying branch from an Ussient tree can stretch ten horizontal miles. If any part of your army is under it, they're vulnerable to arrows, fire, weighted spears and anything else the people upstairs can lay hands on.

The other alternative is to attack along a branch, fighting from tree to tree. The problem here is that you either have to split your forces between several branches (which is a logistical nightmare and requires magnificent leadership to yield a coordinated strike) or concentrate on one branch and face a horrible bottleneck with only a tiny percentage of your troops fighting at any time. If your troops are outsiders unaccustomed to doing battle high up in the air, on a platform that may be oh-so-slightly moving, and they're facing hit-and-run raids from people who know every inch of the terrain and have spent decades tunneling through the bark, it's much, much worse.

But while the Ussients are superb on defense, and can raid each other in a way that's culturally meaningful but never economically disastrous, they can't expand beyond the forest. They just don't have the numbers, the metal supplies or the know-how to take even a single Confederate or Ironbone city.









Ussient Names

Male	Female
Crike	Edebe
Dram	Irstro
Ecstron	lvis
Eiss	Luss
Nissed	Moni
Nonik	Noss
Refran	Schomi
Taive	Subuco
Talt	Rusu
Tatch	Runick
Vessen	Ussus
Vurvie	Utura

Ussient Character Concepts

- ...fire mimicker, recently returned from a rich and hazardous trade expedition with the Truils...
- ...shy but brilliant musician, blackmailing the famed heroes whose brags she, in fact, composed...
- ...widow who married for love and moved to a new tree, only to have her husband murdered by the local Shade Society...
- ...athlete who hears messages from Rusu when he dreams during the winter months...
- ...groundling who secretly cleaves to the Ironbone faith and spies for the Theocracy...

Ussient Company Concepts

- ...war-priests infuriated by social laxity and decaying morals.
- ...Shade Society conducing a long-term clandestine campaign against a putative ally.
- ...revolutionary conspiracy masquerading as an ancient Shade Society.
- ...followers of a brilliant speaker and idea-man, dealing with the dirty realities their master ignores.
- ...fed-up groundlings ready to revolt.

Ussient Plot Complications

- ...the trees are getting sick. Can an Imperial wood-sorcerer save them, or an Ob-lob oracle see a solution, or does an answer lie in the legendary Library of Salck?
- ...dozens of Ironbone priests are flooding the forest. They're on the losing side of a political fight and have been effectively exiled.
- ...a mixed band of Truil refugees has moved into an uninhabited tree near the Cold Barrens. Should they be expelled, aided or traded with?
- ...an Ussient tree, dead for centuries, falls and sets off tremors that collapse buildings and drop unripe fruit from other Ussients. Are the rumors that it was bored through by demons accurate? Are there resources to scavenge from it? What about the closest trees, most damaged by the disaster? Aid them... or conquer them?
- ...the Confederacy invades.



CHAPTER 4: THE USSIENT FOREST





Seen from afar, the mighty
Ussients resemble bushes
more than tall pines or mighty
oaks. Their trunks, often completely covering an acre of land,
look proportionately short until
one realizes that squat outline is
days' away and reaches four miles
into the sky.

Radiating around the base of a mature Ussient are branches eight to ten miles long. Starting a fifth of the way up from the ground, they trace an arc from trunk to tip that rises, then levels out, then descends. Often the ends are only a few thousand feet lower than the point where they attach. In some cases, low-lying branches actually touch the ground, forming a secondary route to the core. While these ground touches are often beneficial, since they can support a secondary colony of groundlings

and give their produce access to the tree, they also provide a weakness in the usually well-protected Ussient settlements, simply by offering a second front for invaders in numbers. Fortunately, most trees with these arboreal highways are nearer the center of the woods.

Rarely are main branches level with one another. Rather, they tend to grow in a staggered pattern, radiating around the trunk in roughly one-sixth arcs, with each branch a quarter mile higher than the previous. It's something like a spiral staircase progression, with a strong taper, as both length and width dwindle quickly towards the top.

The precious Ussient fruit grow in clusters, most thickly towards the ends of the lowest branches. However, the higher a fruit grows, the fuller its flavor and the thicker its skin (making for more durable leather).

The trees grow in clusters of twenty to thirty, usually separated by small rivers or outcroppings of stony hills. The trees that thrive are usually about six to eight miles apart, meaning that there are often several points where the lower branches cross, approach, or even touch. These are valuable trade routes and the launch points of many raids and brag-quests.

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Ussient Construction



Ussient saplings sometimes sprout in the shade of the elders, when a cruscius or other herbivore gets to a fruit before the humans do. These trees rarely grow taller than a normal pine before the plainsmen fell them for wood. Often, they don't even get a chance to sprout more than one or two branches. The tribesmen know that once the third or fourth branch comes out, the tree is doomed. Starved of light by its parents, it dies from the top down and, if not dealt with, becomes a fire hazard, a dried-out hollow where chunk-biting monkeys can nest.

Some bold types have brought Ussient seeds to foreign soils and planted them, with indifferent results. While solitary Ussient trees have grown in the Confederacy and the Western Marches, they never fruit. Moreover, the oldest of these transplants is fifty years old and only a hundred feet across in diameter.

USSIENT CONSTRUCTION

The typical house throughout the known world starts at the ground, perhaps with a dug-out foundation, and then builds upwards with piled stones or cut timber. While the Ussients build some structures this way, at least as many are made by boring into a wooden surface or by building outward from a great trunk. Even when they start with dirt, the

vertical spirit often infuses their architecture.

On the Ground

Groundling homes would look fairly familiar to outsiders, but there are still differences. Without typical-sized trees as a basis, they use shaped timbers stripped from the mighty Ussient's bark or from exposed roots. This often leads to houses with curved walls, reaching upward in a beehive shape. The bottom floor is for what livestock the farmers hold, and possibly a grain storage chamber with a secondary, external door. A staircase then winds around the building, spiraling upward to a balcony encircling the second floor. The "everyday door," facing the sun, opens to the family's living quarters, which are often one large room separated by curtains. On the opposite side, in the darkness, is "Nictus' door," leading to a single room, usually only large enough for a single bed or pallet. When someone in the family falls ill, he is sequestered in this room until well. With particularly dangerous or virulent diseases, the patient is served through a small window cut into the door, like a prisoner. This room is a ritual space where relics of dead relatives are stored and displayed (typically their severed life-cords), where prayers to Nictus are made before battles, and where corpses





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Ussient Construction

are prepared for their final journey from the tree tops.

The more fortunate groundlings have homes tunneled into giant tree roots where they've arced up out of the soil. These homes are larger, with the family's interior space divided into actual rooms, though often with interior windows from one to the other.

Various outbuildings are constructed of stone or dug into the ground, but even the most earthbound of Ussients like to have some height where they sleep.

Along the Trunk

The inhabited trees are almost all follow the same pattern. Two broad staircases gird the trunk, cut into the bark by decades of toil and re-cut yearly to offset the wear of hundreds of footfalls. One staircase spirals up the tree to the right and the other to the left, usually with the center of the groundling settlement stretched between the two entryways. Often the beginnings of these roads are actually tunnels, readily defensible, easy to seal, and with periodic murder holes in the ceiling. Eventually, though, they emerge into the open air, wide enough for a cart. Travelers climbing upwards stay close to the trunk so that their journey is infinitesimally shorter. Those descending go on the outside edge because,

if they fall and catch themselves

with their life-cords, well, it's on their way. Whether rising, dropping or moving evenly, the higher one's social status the closer one walks to the rim. Really arrogant god-chasers walk the edge even when going up.

These twin staircases intersect at the level of the first branch, where the largest cluster of homes and businesses is located, usually around a public amphitheater (or "boasting place," in the Ussient tongue) hollowed out of the crotch where the branch attaches. Often homes line the staircase, on the inside only. These dwellings are bored directly into the tree's bark, and usually divided into one long central chamber with smaller rooms branching off it. Having a home that's the sole property of yourself, your spouse and your children is a minor luxury, but an attainable one. Since homes built into the tree can pass from generation to generation, they're durable and eventually one is bound to open up in your price range.

Other structures are home to extended families, separated by doors, stairways and (for families with silent feuds in their past) surprisingly long corridors. Long-established families with no ambitions to rise can dig deep enough to reach living wood and have their own springs, as explained below in the section on water management. But it's more common to expand upward or downward, because windows only save your lampoil costs if they're cut in exterior walls.

These dwellings also have a door for Nictus, but this is never accessible from the stair-road. Often a separate stairway leads up over the primary door to the chamber reserved for the



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Ussient Construction



ill, the dead, and those preparing to fight.

Branch Homes

Homes built out on the branches are halfway between the horizontal groundling layout and the vertical design of the trunk hugger. The flattest top surface of the branch is the main road. Stairways wind down off this road, carved out of the bark and curving down to a home's main entrance, which faces away from the road. The simplest of these dwellings are dug out like trunk lodges, only the door for Nictus is usually lower -farthest from the road. Often, however, the wood excavated is formed into blocks, which are used to build walls up on top of the home. Stacked and pegged together, and after many years grown into the surface of the branch, these "top houses" usually have doors facing the road and are used for businesses separate from the residences. Sometimes a ladder and trap door connect them, but more often not.

It is not unheard-of for longtime branch residents to tunnel under the road, preparing hidden barriers that can be pushed upward from beneath a layer of leaves to surprise an enemy raiding party, or even trapdoors for launching attacks. Most locals know where these occasional pitfalls are and know that they're only armed to entrap during a crisis. They never, ever, ever talk about them to anyone they haven't lived next to for years. When a new spouse moves to a tree, acceptance comes when the neighbors casually mention where the trapdoors are, as if in passing. This usually takes about twenty years. On the other hand, when someone who's trying to ascend is told, it's often a sign that his neighbors think he isn't moving higher. Ever.

Shade Societies love hidden passages along branches (and between trunk residences for that matter, but they're simpler to bore horizontally on the branch -- on the trunk, you can only reach your neighbors easily). It's rare, but more than one established and influential family has expanded its home, digging inward, only to find a tiny crawlspace where someone had lay, listen to their private conversations. Naturally, by the time these spy holes are found, they've been long abandoned and usually thoroughly bricked up, the eavesdropper having heard the construction approaching. But the angry families often explore the network of tunnels



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Ussient Construction

as far as they can before falling prey to deadfalls, ambush or impassible barriers.

The higher one goes on the tree, the more likely one is to find these listening tunnels.

A WORD ON WATER

Ussient leaves are broad and act as makeshift funnels. The dwellers in the trees have aped this design to build rain-collectors, both public and personal. Their system of channels that use gravity to take rainwater to central collection points are elaborate and often beautifully carved, if not as reliable and clean as the stone aqueducts of Uldholm.

The one luxury the farmers possess is ready access to well water and the forest's clean rivers and springs. By the time rain water has reached a common pool, it's often pretty brackish and dark. Private collectors -- especially the ostentatious ones of foreign copper or bronze -- are much better, but don't gather nearly as much water. This is why most trunk and branch communities supplement their supply with either water hauled from beneath in kegs, or by processing sap.

The tree sap is close to the surface in areas where new leaves grow, farther out on the branches (where, conveniently, it's hardest to haul casks of groundwater) and higher up at the top. Low trunk families have to dig deep indeed to reach the living wood and bleed sap out of it, but many find it worth it. Some sap-wells have been in place for decades and are bored far into branches.

A good tap can produce several gallons of sap a day. It can be drunk straight if you don't mind the syrupy consistency and acrid tannin flavor, but more often it's separated. Churns, as for butter, drive the heavier water to the bottom and force the nectar to the top. The water is available for drinking (rarely bathing -- it's too pure for any but the most lavish to use for so base a purpose). The nectar, in turn, can be pressed to squeeze out a musky, foul-smelling liquid that, when fermented, is equally potent at getting one drunk or creating bursts of flame. The remaining residue is a key ingredient for a decently strong glue.

THE FOREST'S DEVICES

While the tribes are regarded as somewhat backward and primitive by their neighbors, there are a few devices and technologies in which they have, by choice or necessity, become adept.

Ropemaking

The native Ussient tongue has one word for "life" and "rope." It is rare to find any tribesman in the branches without a forty-foot lifeline. The rope is made the stringy cores of new-budded leaf stems, cut off when they're still only wrist-thick and stripped down to fibers about the width of a tooth. These are cured, treated, pounded to remain supple, and then woven into ropes.

In most trees, children's hair is not cut until they reach their maturity, at which point their closest relatives



Ussient Construction



braid the hair into a rope for them, their personal cord of life. Dyed fur, thin leather thongs, or pieces of colored foreign fabrics are worked in to the rope in patterns unique to tribe and family. Twice yearly, in the fall and spring, there are festivals of life in which all Ussient examine their ropes and mend or strengthen them, often incorporating human hair. In addition to their own, they might weave in the hair of a close family member, a friend, or a defeated enemy. Thus, having someone steal a lock of your hair is a defeat. Hair thefts are more respectable when they're the outcome of a lost fight, more humiliating when it's the result of trickery or stealth.

For all the care they pay their rope, it's really no stronger than the hempen cords common elsewhere. It's just a matter of careful craftsmanship and close attention. Usually, the Ussient carry their personal cords tied in a recursive series of slipknots. This effectively makes the rope thicker and about a quarter as long, until either end is pulled, at which point the knots unravel, returning the cord to its full length as long as it's under pressure. At the end of the rope, one carries a grappling hook so that, if thrown off the tree by wind, violence or misfortune, there's a chance to fling the hook and catch something. If the hook is dropped, the tribesman might grab high before the rope has much of a chance to unravel, but the longer he takes to get it caught, the nastier the shock is going to be when the slack goes out.

Ussient funerals often strike outsiders as barbaric affairs, since bodies are taken to a high and sacred place and then flung outward into the void.

Consigned to the sky, the family then cuts the life-rope in half, ties the opposite ends together, and hangs it in their lodge's sick room.

Lightfalls

The lightfall was invented by an Ussient traveler to foreign lands named Soessiem Urtaq. In her native tree, she is worshipped as a goddess of ingenuity, though this is disputed elsewhere (particularly in her tree's nearest neighbors).

Soessiem was an herbalist and while traveling throughout Heluso studying plants, she became fascinated by maple flyers. These winged pods fell farther and slower than other naked seeds. As a woman with ambitions to live up high, she started experimenting with ways to retard the rate of a free-falling descent.

Lightfalls are flexible wooden frameworks, with a stretched leather or fabric covering to mimic the shape of a wing. This is set into a well-greased socket. When a load is lashed to the socket and dropped from a precipice, the wing whirls violently on a horizontal plane. In this way, the speed of descent is reduced.

Riding a lightfall is dangerous, and the farther you ride it the more likely it is to come to pieces from the stress. People do it, it's a popular and impressive brag feat. But people die doing it, too. Far more often, lightfalls are used to drop material from upper branches to the ground, or to another branch if a tether has been run through the center of the spinner.

Recently, some followers of Soessiem have removed the socket and used





Ussient Construction

lightwings to drop liquids, achieving a powerful centrifuge effect. They use it to clarify liquor and strain out the sediment.

Manwings

Once Soessiem constructed maple flyers at human scale, it was inevitable that someone would try the same thing with bird wings. This resulted in numerous disasters and deaths until one of Soessiem's priests traveled to Uldholm to consult with Stormtongues about the sensation of flying and their personal observations of when wings functioned and when they didn't.

Eventually he learned enough that some sorcerers, distressed at the loose tongues of their fellows, imprisoned him in a high tower. This was not, it emerged, the wisest course. Using a fire charm to crack the stone of his window during a snowstorm, he escaped with a home-made lightfall (though he suffered permanent damage to his sense of balance from the twirling). Returning home, he con-

structed a sort of large kite, balanced so that a man might hang beneath it and, if not fly, at least glide for short horizontal distances along the ground.

When deployed from miles up on an Ussient tree, greater distances were within its reach, and the manwing raid was born. These devices still cause dozens of deaths every year, but those who do master their use are universally admired and often permitted higher access on the trunk. Manwings are usually one-use items, but the most daring and skilled can use them either to travel from their home tree to a close rival, where they raid, steal or perform other dares, or to escape from such boast-worthy exploits.

The largest group of manwings ever launched at the same time is eleven. Nine of them even landed within a mile of each other, and all eleven pilots survived.



Matters of Color





Dear Mother and Father,

I write this with my own hand, although there are servants here whose script is far more beautiful. I wanted to reassure you that I am comfortable here. How could I be otherwise? When I mentioned in passing that I had slept unwell, that night a matron came to my chamber and lay down first, so that the sheets might be warm and smell of a mother's comfort. There are servants to massage my arms and back should they become sore, servants to wash my feet when they are warm, to style my hair in any fashion, should I desire it. There are servants whose sole purpose is to be available for entertaining conversation. In the most discrete fashion possible, that bed-warming matron let it be known that she could sit by my side, stroke my head and speak pleasingly of trifles until I drifted off.

The palace is unimaginably beautiful, and carries its grace like a shaken fist. I find myself in the Hall of Statues when my time is my own. It is immense. I have wandered for hours and seen only a fraction of what's there, the cream of The Empire's artistic plundering mixed with the flattering stone portraits of courtiers long forgotten. It is the same with the fountains, with the paintings, with the gardens. The palace is a city of opulence built around one woman. Any conceivable luxury is available, that she might have the option. When she chooses not to exercise those options, we are next in line.

You may question why your lovely daughter left Pahar for a life of total obedience, even unto the sharing of chewed food. There are some here who are fanatics - willing and even eager to martyr themselves for The Empress. Others serve out of pride, happy to know that servants quake when they pass and will spring to honor their lightest whim. But for me... I had to know. The Empress is as good a ruler as any other, and I have long prided myself on my skill with the sword. But at the bottom of it, I had gained inklings of what the Trimson Guard was doing with their enchantment and I just had to learn the truth of it myself.

I wish you would come and visit me, or even stay here - one of my fellow guards has nearly thirty members of his extended family living in the palace on his stipend. But I understand if you do not. Please write me, even if you cannot bear to look on what I have become.

Your soving daughter, Éria





The priest was bent over his crops, content with their progress, pausing now and again to pull one of the weeds that grew as unnaturally fast as his mushrooms and bleached-white vines. Then he furrowed his brow, hearing the dogs bark. Someone must be coming.

He turned, straightened and strode towards the single entry to his holy grove. It was nothing but a gap in a thick hedge, but that hedge had long thorns, envenomed to give interlopers a painful itch from the slightest scratch. Standing there, timidly edging back from the dogs was a slender young woman with black skin and an uneasy expression. When she looked up at the priest, it deepened to fear.

He held out his hand in a consoling gesture and called the dogs to his side. "Please," he said. "Don't be afraid. What brings you to the holy place of Setekesh?"

"I..." she said, then looked away, then down. "I need help," she said. "My mother," she started, then tried again with, "My father said you..."

"Please," he repeated. "Come in with my welcome. It's clear you lack ill intent. Refresh yourself in the temple. Rest. Then tell your tale."

> "I have a seed," she said, holding it up.

The priest knelt down beside her and looked in her hand. "Plant it then," he said.

She burst into tears.

8003

The girl introduced herself as Dyer and she hadn't expected the priest to be so large. Her father hadn't warned her. She knew the reputation of the Setekesh cult -- magicians devoted to a goddess of magical abundance, twisters of flesh and experimenters with animal nature. The hounds of the grove had not only snapped their teeth at her, but waved short, sharp antlers.

She had expected monsters, but hadn't expected the priest to be one. In feature, he was human enough, though his skin was a shade she had never seen, somewhere between sand and rancid butter. He had an impossibly tiny nose and eyes with pointed pits at the inside corners. *She had heard people of his race described* and seen drawings, but never met one. Certainly they weren't known for being giants.

Dyer was tall and sturdy, but the priest was easily twice her height. He was younger than she had expected, with a tidy black and white beard and a simple robe of coarse green cloth. His enormous hands had stubby proportions and dirt under the nails.

"What brings you to this refuge?" he asked, leading her inside. For a moment, Dyer didn't answer. Her head was back, staring at the ceiling far overhead. It was open to the sky at the front. That roof, the walls around her, the doorways into other chambers and the altar at the front were all of wood, but living, rooted, twisted and entwined by no human hand. Despite being grown and still growing, they indisputably formed a hall, windows, seats and a front table. All was





proportioned for her vast host. When she climbed into a springy, moss-cushioned seat, her feet dangled like a child.

"That seed. It was from a dyers' vine, unless I miss my guess? Rare," he said. She nodded.

"How is it that you share a name with it?"

"My parents... long ago, they visited a seer, who told them their fate would hinge upon dyers' seed. My father..."

"Knew it was a powerful medicine for the grim chill," he said. "Ah. Hoping to cheat fate, he gave you the name, thinking some child of yours might instead..."

"It didn't work," she sniffed. "My mother is very sick."

"Ah. So you make the pilgrimage here, where it could grow so swiftly that the ear could catch the sound of the vine swelling." He smiled. "Even now, it probably sprouts."

"Thank you so much! I've been so worried... everything's gone wrong..."

"There there," he said, as she started to cry once more. He reached out and plucked several midnight-purple fruits off the wall. "Here. Have some of these. You must be hungry from your journey. Have you traveled far?"

"From Deerwood," she said, biting into the fruit. "My father said you knew him. His name is Laws Winter."

The priest raised an eye. "That is a name I have not heard in some time. Why did he not come himself?"

"He tried." She almost began to sob again, but controlled herself with a visible effort. "He's had to hide in the forest for years. The army... they want his spells, they're afraid of him. But they could never find him."

"Certainly, an adept of the wood in trackless forests. Do you, too, follow his path?"

She shook her head. "I tried and tried. I could feel the flow, even draw it in me, but I could never shape it, never tame it. The climbing vine spell, drawing strength from a plant's roots, borrowing a tree's unbruising skin... I couldn't master any of it."

"It can take years of practice," he said. "Where is he now?"

"They took him! We needed to move fast, we couldn't take the long route through the woods. We tried to get through at Passford, hiding, but they found him and when they saw his green eyes they asked him questions he couldn't answer. He pretended not to know me and I slipped away."

"You've come all the way from Passford unaccompanied?"

Dyer lifted her chin. "I'm a fully grown woman," she said. "I can take care of myself."

"So he gave you directions to this grove, hidden far in the dark, and told you that his old friend Ishanki would take care of your troubles?"

"Yes." She smiled at him. "And I'm grateful."



He gave a shy smile and made a minimizing gesture. "Let us go look upon your seedling," he said, taking her hand to help her down. They walked to the north side of the temple, and she smiled broadly to see the dyer's vine already poking through the soil.

"You say you have the sense," he said.
"Do you feel anything here?"

"I haven't really paid attention," she said.
"I'm sure you, your dogs..."

"Obviously. But try. Tell me what you find."

Dyer closed her eyes for a moment and said, "Oh my. Yes, the flow is strong here, stronger than I've ever known. It's... it's knotted and tangled..."

"Good..."

"Over in that corner? Is that right?"

"Let us go see." He smiled, and when they'd made their way through the bounteous garden she stopped at the sight of a ropy vine with a single melon swelling out from it. Even as she watched, the fruit swelled and distended grotesquely.

"Not long now," he said softly in her ear.

"What is it?"

At that moment, the fruit split, revealing a pulpy, fleshy interior and something moving within. Her host stepped eagerly forward, drawing a pair of leather gloves from his belt and putting them on. With uneasy awe, Dyer watched him lift a snake from within the fruit.

"You have heard of the deadly Turem viper, yes? It was difficult to acquire one for use as a dalaq-ta..."

"A dalak...?"

"...but worth it. Through sacrifice and the grace of the goddess, I have created a new serpent, one with all the qualities of the viper, but gifted with the obedient nature of a hound." He carefully stroked the serpent, which writhed around his hand in pleasure. "A viper that adores like a puppy. What tricks will we teach you, little one?" He clucked at it, then whistled once, sharply. "Will you crawl and hide in the rooms of the heathen and heretic, waiting to deliver your deadly bite? Or should I sacrifice you for a threefold conjoining, giving your offspring wings or the color shift of the chameleon?"

Something in his gloating tone made Dyer uneasy, and when she looked around she realized that his antlered hounds had gathered and were sitting, panting, patient. She began to edge back from them when the priest turned.

"Poor Dyer," he said. "Truly, misfortune walked backwards into your home, for it came with both hands full." He gently set the viper down by the rind of the fruit and took a step towards her. "First your mother falls ill. Your father, at long last, is captured by his enemies. And you, coming in trust to your father's old partner in infamy, are met instead by the righteous minister who replaced him."

"Ishanki?" she said, voice trembling.
"I don't..."

"That name is not mine."

Dyer spun to flee. The dogs howled as they launched themselves after her, but her deceptive host was faster. With one long stride he was upon her, his massive



arm swung across the back of her head, and then she was in darkness.

8003

"My name is Nasdin-Yeh," he said as Dyer came to consciousness.

"What?" Her head throbbed. She couldn't think. Her arms and legs were bound. She couldn't move.

"I am Nasdin-Yeh," he said, over a rhythmic rasping sound. "My title is 'Purifier' and I have removed the traitor Ishanki from this plot of sacred land. Unlike him, I am loyal to our great Empress. Unlike him, I have never fallen from the true practice of Setekesh's rites. Ishanki and those like him, the weak-willed and sentimental, have infected the recognized church, driving the truly dedicated and principled into hiding and shame. But our loyalty to the Empress cannot be hid and when we have gained her favor, she will drive out the pretenders and restore us to glory!"

"Why did you tie me up?"

He sighed, and the sound of scraping paused. "I'm trying to show you the larger importance of yourself, and me. Do you think it was an accident that led you here? If it is difficult, in this rural exile, to procure a viper for my conjoining, how much harder is a proper human sacrifice? Your father's fall to grief, your mother's illness, all these things are the will of the goddess!"

"Then your goddess is evil!" Dyer said it before she could stop herself, before she thought how the priest might react to blasphemy. To her relief, he only laughed. "You think me evil for pursuing the greatness of my faith and my Empire. I think you evil for attempting to follow the footsteps of your nature-rapist father. Laws Winter," he sneered, "Master parasite, sapping the strength of nature for his own selfish gain." The grinding noise began again. "I suspect our relative positions show where the favor of the gods truly lies."

"What are you going to do to me?" she asked, her voice small. Her vision cleared, and she could see he was sharpening a knife. No, in his hands it was a knife. If she held it, it would be a sword.

"You, one human from a teeming multitude, are by yourself... nugatory. Forgettable. Unimportant, as one drop in a rainstorm. But what if an eagle had the reason and memory of someone so ordinary?" He turned a speculative eye on her, and Dyer felt her skin crawl. "I have a cat," he said. "It has been gifted with the poison bite of the rattlesnake, which is not so swift or sure as the viper, but it suffices. Cats are, of course, impossible to train. But one with your mind..."

"I'd save my first bite for you." Dyer tried to sound threatening. It didn't do much good.

"If you were to remember, I'm sure. But the hybrid can begin its life of service with an empty mind, one it will





be my duty and my pleasure to fill." He squinted at her, tested the knife edge, then looked at the patterns of light and shadow on the floor. "Tomorrow is soon enough," he said. "I'm truly sorry that you must, necessarily, suffer the trepidation of the wait. If you like, I can give you something to help you rest."

"Another blow to the head?"

He winced. "That was unkind."

8003

To his surprise and her own, Dyer eventually fell asleep. The exhaustion of her travels, coupled with a long hopeless cry, had tired her to the point that weary terror could make a seamless transition to uneasy dreams.

She woke to a flexing of her secret sense. It was not sound or light that woke her, nor touch or taste. It was not the scent of the breakfast that Nasdin-Yeh had made himself, but a feeling within, flowing, swelling.

Dyer knew this sensation. Someone nearby was drawing in magic, preparing a spell. Her father had taught her what this eerie, bodiless knowing meant, but the movement of power here was... strange.

When her father had failed to teach her the spell that would drain the strength out of a root and into her own muscles, the flavor of the force had been wild, coarse but vital. It had reminded her of pine scent. This power was vibrant, but it had a focus and intensity she'd never felt before. It entered the temple, not with the abandon of a daisy field throwing forth blossom, but with concentrated elegance. It felt, to her, like an army marching into Nasdin-Yeh's will.

"What are you doing?" she asked. He ignored her. He was chanting and brandishing the huge knife. Dyer threw herself forlornly into her struggle against the bindings on her wrists, but it was futile. A night of confinement had left her hands mostly numb. If she hadn't been able to break the bonds before, certainly she wouldn't now.

Instead of muscle, she tried to contort herself and slip free. When that failed she called out to Nasdin-Yeh that she was hungry, that she was thirsty. He ignored her, Dyer became tired and, to her surprise, she found that she was getting hored

Yes, bored. She was waiting for a giant to cut her open, doubtless in some religiously symbolic way, but as she kept waiting for it all he did was chant, pray and gesture, over and over. To distract herself, she turned her attention to the flow of enchantment, and while that was diverting for some time, once she grasped the pattern he was weaving, she figured it would probably take until nightfall for him to complete it. Hours and hours, with no food or water.

She was tied around a tree that was at the front and in the center of the verdant temple, big around as one of her thighs, rising through the open ceiling to loom overhead like an upraised fist.

"Priest," she croaked with her dry voice.
"I need a pot."

No reply.

"I need the pot," she repeated. "Surely you don't want me to just let go on your temple tree here. Do you? Isn't that sacrilege?"



He said nothing, but she could see him glancing over his shoulder, reluctantly. More importantly, she felt a waver in the pattern of his energy. Narrowing her eyes, Dyer started to squirm and twist, reaching for the drawstring of her pants. When, through painful stretching, she got it between two fingers, she pulled until the knot released. She started to work the waistband down to her hips.

That did it. She felt the pattern of magic falter and then scatter, disorganizing into the normal background babble of unbound power.

"What are you doing?" He spun, his eyes dark and annoyed.

"I'm not about to soil my clothes," she said.

"You...! Oh, very well." He picked up his knife, cut her bonds and roughly led her outside, whistling up his dogs as he did.

Dyer watched and thought and hoped hard, but there was no time and no chance to mount an escape. The dogs were around her, the monstrous minister gave her no privacy. But she saw something that gave her a little taste of hope. The dyers' vine was taller.

ROCS

"You must think yourself clever,"
Nasdin-Yeh said, pacing in front of her.
"You're not. Tomorrow will do as well as today, and hunger is only going to make you weaker. Your bright little mind will be emptied and put in a creature of my choosing, and you, or the best part of you, will serve holy Setekesh."

Tied around the tree again, Dyer paid only half attention. If she pushed with all

her might, she could make the tree sway. The movement stilled as it pulled against the other limbs and tangled vines of the temple walls, but there was a fruit above her and she was hoping that with enough effort it might drop.

He turned back to glare at her and she stopped. "What of water?" she asked him. "You can't sacrifice me if I die of thirst."

He opened his mouth as if to argue, but then shrugged and left. He returned with a cup, small as a thimble in his massive hands and only half full, but he held it to her lips. It wasn't in her mouth, soothing her swollen tongue, nearly long enough.

"More?"

"Why? So you can insult me clearly?" He snorted and left.

It took her another twenty minutes to get the fruit to fall, and ten more to maneuver herself to it and it to her lips. It was delicious.

8003

The next day, Dyer tried to distract him again, but he ostentatiously stuffed his ears with cotton before beginning his chant. She called to him -- filthy names, blasphemy, sexual suggestions -- but his ears seemed truly stopped, and her voice was weakening anyhow. She frowned, passing the fruit's remains between her hands. It was a smooth wad, round and slightly spongy.

As he had the previous day, he faced the entry of the temple, then processed to the front, past her, studiously looking away. She turned and saw only his massive back. If it went as yesterday, he'd be occupied there for at least an hour.

Dyer whistled.

It took her a few tries before a curious dog poked its nose into the temple. She smiled and whistled and made kissing faces at it. It came closer, cautiously, and she waved the fruit pit for it.

"Fetch?"

She tossed it, best she could with tied hands, and apparently its nature was not so distorted that it had no taste for the chase. It ran the pit down and pounced.

"Bring it back now," she said, her coarse voice as encouraging as she could make it. Soon her wrists were tired and aching from the contorted throws, but she hoped the dog was her friend. Gritting her teeth she began to tease it -- pretending to throw but holding the pit back in her hand. Soon it was barking and jumping back and forth. It had eyes for nothing but that fruit core, dripping with slobber.

There was a game children played in Dyer's town, trying to kick a ball through a hole head-high on a wall. She'd always been good at it and, as the dog leaped and twitched she squirmed until her bound ankles were near to her bound wrists. She dropped it, caught it, worked it between her two feet...

...the dog was watching, entranced...

...she knew she'd have only one chance as she turned her body to aim...

"GO GET IT!" She convulsed from hips and thighs and snapped her feet forward in a double kick, sending the makeshift ball arcing towards Nasdin-Yeh's back. He turned just before it hit him, and flinched back as his own creature jumped up. She felt his attention snap and she smiled. The spell was lost for another day.

She didn't smile long. He hit her very

Dyer did not fully wake. She slid from deep unconsciousness to a wordless muddle of images, her mother coughing out the red leaves of the dyer's tree, her father's back as the soldiers led him away, a kitten with rattlesnake fangs and Nasdin-Yeh looming above it all, no longer house-height but vast as a mountain or an ocean...

She opened her blurry eyes, but the sense she relied on more was that extra attention, that attunement to the pulse of the world and every identity in it. She felt the march of power and it was easy to tell where the priest was, and he was swollen with it like a tick, he had drunk far more of it than previously. Everything sounded false, distant and echoing, and all she could see were smears like a painting in the rain, but her sense of touch seemed heightened. She felt the twined vines around her wrists, not just on the surface but the pattern of power moving through them. She whistled for the dog, but the only attention it drew was Nasdin-Yeh. He turned and glared, and even paused in his prayer.

"You'll not cozen my hounds again. They're leashed."

Even as he spoke, Dyer could feel his draw was uninterrupted. She leaned back against the tree, then forward, and nothing happened. She tried again, and again, and then she lost herself in the movement, rocking like a child in mother's arms, full of food and comfort and waiting for nothing. She rocked and rocked and felt the tree start to sway in her rhythm. Then it was so simple to reach down to its roots



and drain them, consume them, just as her father had taught. How had she never understood? It was so simple! Why wasn't everyone a sorcerer?

She inhaled a tiny fraction of that questing, stone-splitting strength and she leaned back hard when the tree was at its farthest extension, and she heard it crack.

It fell slowly, its roots instantly decayed through as if by years of worm-bore. She clutched the trunk and the other spell, the armoring one, it was easy too. When the roof cracked and sticks showered down, they bounced harmlessly off her. She laughed as the ceiling collapsed, and cast the third spell. It pulled the climbing prowess out of a creeper for the enchanter's use, and with that strength gone, the vines confining her turned to dust.

The temple was only partially fallen, its roof down but its walls mostly intact. She heard Nasdin-Yeh groaning and snarling, saw a heavy heap of wreckage start to heave as he struggled to get past it to her, but she was too quick. With her borrowed strength and power of easy climbing, she scampered up the north wall and through the hole.

She looked down at the dyer's vine. Curiously, she felt nothing as she uprooted it. She heard the priest blundering out the front, screaming that she wouldn't escape him, that there was only one gap through the thorns, but she didn't pay attention. It was the work of moments for her to climb the barrier he thought impenetrable.

She was hurt and hungry, dizzy and delirious. She had an angry giant behind her and a long journey in front, but none of that frightened her. Her mother was ill and her father imprisoned, but she laughed as she ran through the forest, laughed at

the knowledge that this burst of energy would fail and she would likely collapse. Somehow, none of it troubled her, for she'd done it. She'd learned her father's lesson. She was an enchantress.



Matters of LAW

CHAPTER 1: AFTER THEM! (PURSUIT AND EVASION RULES)



Fight scenes are a staple in action films because they're exciting. But the neglected younger brother of action tropes is easily the chase scene, and—having grown from wargames—RPGs are more likely to have detailed fight mechanics than chase rules.

In the spirit of giving *REIGN* expanding optional mechanics, *After Them!* was built for games that skew more towards skullduggery, secrecy, and

maneuvering behind the scenes. With it, I hope to combine tense and quiet games of cat-and-mouse with parkour-inspired bounding through cities.

THE LEAD

Much like combat, each character chooses how she's going to try to escape (if pursued) or close to capture distance (if in pursuit). Players roll. Widest sets go first, Height breaks ties. Eventually, one side triumphs. Which side that is depends on one key factor: The Lead. (It rhymes with "bead" not "bed," just so you know.) The pursuer wants to reduce Lead to zero and get his hands on the prey. The quarry wants to increase Lead to ten. If a chase round ends with Lead at ten, the runner has escaped.

Lead often means physical space, but not always. It's possible to amass Lead ten in a tightly enclosed space simply by hiding so effectively that searching isn't going to uncover you. This has the disadvantage of trapping you until you act or he leaves, but it can be done.

Lead is changed by rolling dice and applying sets, just like everything else in the ORE. When Lead hits zero, either party can initiate hand-to-hand combat. When it's one, the sides are close enough, with a sufficient view, to start shooting arrows or throwing dishes.

Chapter 1: After Them! (Pursuit and Evasion Rules)



It's possible to have multiple leads, if more than one person is chasing a runner. If one person tries to chase two or more runners who've split up, the pursuer has to pick one to follow.

Gaining vs. Offsetting

Any action taken in a chase can be used in one of two ways. It can gain, or it can offset. Gain means you're changing the Lead. Offsetting means you're trying to prevent others from changing the Lead. Gain's like making an attack in combat: It's an active attempt to change the situation. Offsetting is like dodging or parrying. It makes the other fellow's attempt to gain into an opposed contest, with Gobble Dice, as described on pages 15-17 in *REIGN*.

Usually, you want to gain. In fact, if you don't explicitly say you're trying to counter what the other team is doing, it's assumed you're gaining. Offsetting prolongs the chase without the chance of improving your lot. On the other hand, when you do turn it into an opposed contest, you can use all your Gobble Dice even if your opponent rolled Wider. Keeping someone in sight isn't as timedependent as avoiding a kick to the shin. Indeed, many actions on both sides of the chase rely on reacting to an opponent's actions. So you may want to use some offsetting actions when pursued by many people, or as a multiple action with gain, as just one example. This is especially true when someone's getting a big equipment advantage (see page 72). If you know that a set is going to net him W+2 Lead, it may be in your interest to offset. Assuming you both get pairs, spoiling his set keeps the +2 equipment bonus from kicking in,

instead of putting you two to the bad when his great horse or whatever steamrolls your gain set.

In combat (the other big extended resolution mechanic in ORE) a Skill usually attacks or defends. You can't block with your Fight Skill or kick someone with Dodge. Pursuit is different. Any Skill you can bring to bear can either gain or offset your opponent.

When you get a set past your opponent with a gain maneuver, you can change the Lead by a number equal to the Width of your roll.

GANGING UP

Sometimes you have multiple thieves running from one cop, or many people searching for one escapee, or you have a small group trying to escape the prison together. Lead works just fine for one-on-one, but what do you do with more?

The answer is, you have multiple Leads. If there's a group that wants to stick together, there's a Lead between that collective and their competition. If many are chasing one in a big clump, it's one Lead.

Splitting up is where it's at with chases, though. If three people split up and there are only two pursuers, one escapee automatically gets away. Each chase group can only keep one Lead at a time. The hunter who pursues two rabbits probably loses both. When two hunters separate to pursue one rabbit, they each have a Lead, and any sets the rabbit rolls apply to both Leads.



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So what about hiding a whole group who flee together? Shouldn't that be harder than hiding one person? Yes it should and, yes, it is. A group only gets one action per turn, and they roll the lowest relevant pool possessed by anyone in the group. If you have two people fleeing together and only one is really stealthy, the klutz's Stealth pool comes into play. The blatant guy probably gives his sneaky friend away. It's the same with moving fast. A fast and a slow guy moving together are stuck at the slow guy's top speed.

There are some very important exceptions to this "Lowest Pool" rule, however, and they involve Sense and Knowledge. When a group uses a Sense or Knowledge Skill for their action, they roll the highest pool available from its members. Just because you're blind, it doesn't impair your eagle-eyed buddy. Similarly, your own stupidity isn't going to blunt his tactical excellence.

it's a little more complicated. Sometimes you want to use a Skill with a lower pool because it might let you **trump** your opponent.

Trumping means that even if you failed your roll, something about your tactical decision put you in a better position. If you can predict your opponent's action, it gives you the edge.

Trumping works just like Rock, Paper, Scissors. If you pick Rock and he picked Scissors, you trumped him. If you pick Rock and he picked Paper, you lost the advantage. If you both pick the same thing, neither one trumps.

Easy enough, right? The question is, what does "paper" mean in the context of a chase? Good question, and one I'll address right after I showcase the fabulous prizes that reward a successful Trump.

Effects of Trumping

If you trump your opponent, you get a choice. You can defer gratification, or take your benefit right away. The instant payoff is a point of Lead. Get a step closer or farther, your choice. (If it takes Lead to 10, the chase ends even before the roll!) If you wait, you can add a die to the next roll you make in the chase, or offset one die's worth of penalty. (Nice for those multiple actions.)

You can only pick one trump effect per round, even if you trump multiple opponents. If you choose the instant Lead change, you can change only the Lead between you and the trumped party. If you choose the next-turn die bonus, however, you

TRUMPING

If that was all there was to these pursuit rules, they'd be short, easy to use, and terribly stagnant. Every contest would devolve to "This is my best Skill. I use that" over and over. But



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SORCERY

There are any number of ways to bring magic power to bear on a chase including (but not limited to) flying away, creating a cloud of inky darkness, changing into an animal or whipping up an instant trap out of smoke and cunning. There are no listed sorcery moves listed because Sorcery could be Rock, or Paper, or Scissors, depending on how it's used. See also the boxed text "It... It's Not on the List!" on page 71.

get it to whatever you roll. (This makes the die bonus a lot nicer if you're facing many pursuers.) But if you Rock out and two opponents picked Scissors, you still only get the die bonus or the Lead change. You can't get one of each. Only one effect per round. That's simpler.

Furthermore, if Lead is already 0, trumping can't take it into negatives. In that case, just take the die bonus, if the chase even continues.

WHAT TRUMPS WHAT?

Rock represents direct, forceful action, like trying to overcome through direct brute force. Paper is an attempt to change the circumstances of the chase, usually by falling back on authority, organization or planning ahead. Scissors is intuitive adaptation, trying to gauge, moment by moment, the optimum choice for the circumstances.

Abstract, isn't it? Here's a breakdown, tactic by tactic, with appropriate pools.

Pursuit Tactics

Rock-Physical Effort

Sometimes you can win a race just by running faster. In fact, you can win a lot of races that way. If you're quick enough, you may get your hands on your runner before he even has a chance to do anything cunning.

Body+Athletics: Dive in the moat and swim across instead of going all the way to the bridge. Shove heavy obstacles aside, or jump over them.

Body+Endurance: Keep jogging along effortlessly while he's gasping for air. Hold your breath and charge through a midden to get a shortcut.

Body+Run: This is obvious, right?

Coordination+Climb: Scramble over obstacles, bypass a lengthy staircase, follow when he climbs.

Coordination+Ride: Like Run, only you have a mount, which is the most common equipment advantage (see page 72).

Paper—Order, Reason and Force of Personality

If you're observant, you can find the hidden. If you're smart, you don't need to follow because you can figure out where he's headed. If you're commanding, you can get other people to do the sweaty work of chasing.

Charm+Lie: Confound the city watch into helping you search. Tell passersby that he's a spy from a foreign land.



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Charm+Plead: Implore someone to tell you which way he went or beg someone to stop him as he runs past.

Command+Inspire: Motivate a crowd to seize him as he dashes by.

Command+Intimidate: Clear the area so that you can find him or get a straight line of pursuit. Strike such fear into his heart that he stumbles.

Knowledge+Tactics: If you have followers, instruct them to fan out and look for clues, or surround him, or clear the way before you.

Scissors—Perception and Intuition

Sometimes pursuit isn't about covering distance, it's about concealment and deception. The fastest horse in the kingdom is only going to carry you farther from success if you can't spot the runner for what he is.

Coordination+Stealth: Fade into the background and shadow him so that he thinks you've given up, or can't tell which direction to run from you.

Sense+Direction: Intuit where he's going and figure out a shortcut. Head him off at the pass.

Sense+Empathy: Determine which of the identically-masked revelers is acting furtive. Gauge the crowd to see who's acting startled by a sudden appearance or disappearance.

Sense+Hearing or Sight: Find his hiding place. Spot him in the shadows. Spy the tail of his cloak as he darts around a corner. See through his disguise. Hear his footsteps on the roof.

Sense+Scrutinize: Track his footprints.

Figure out which window he went through. Notice the flaw in a disguise. Catch his scent.

Evasion Tactics

Rock-Physical Effort

Run. Climb. Jump. The uses of the body in putting distance between you and a tracker are obvious, right? Just in case though, here are some possibilities.

Body+Athletics: As you run, pull over obstacles behind you to trip him or make his mount shy. Jump chasms he dares not cross. Break down doors. Swim across a river to break your scent trail.

Body+Endurance: Outlast him, plain and simple. Go through a broiling hot crematorium without getting scalded. Get down under the water and hold your breath until he runs past.

Body+Run: Oh, you know.

Coordination+Climb: Turn it into a rooftop chase. Scramble over a wall his horses have to go around. Get down into the sewers (if there are such a thing) and give his scenthounds real fits.

Coordination+Dodge: Go through a hazard he can't pass. Start a brawl and then escape it as he crashes in.

Coordination+Ride: Steal a horse, a dunim or a biauchrus to escape.

Coordination+Stealth: Duck into the shadows momentarily to escape their gaze. Cover ground behind his back with ghostlike silence.



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IT... It's Not on the List!

The Skill applications in these tidy categories aren't comprehensive and aren't meant to be. They're guidelines. Players who come up with novel ways to use a Skill to throw a pursuer off track or flush out a hiding enemy don't deserve a "No, you can't do that!" response, but rather "Cool! Roll it!" But when a player manages to justify rolling Coordination+Expert (Weaver), how does that mesh with trumping? Is it Paper, Scissors or Rock?

One approach is to simply judge whether it's operating through blunt physicality, presence and intellect, or quick-witted craft. The other is to simply make the unexpected trump-neutral—it neither give advantage nor gives advantage away. Pick whichever seems most reasonable and don't let the decision break the flow of play. Debating whether this particular application of Knowledge+Lore can qualify as a Rock move is not constructive for everyone's fun. So players, if you feel your GM has made a poor judgment, shrug and suck it up. One trump ain't everything.

Paper-Knowledge and Planning

A chase is an ever-evolving conflict, and it's difficult to plan in advance. But if you can, you can set traps for those who pursue, or arrange other surprises to give you the advantage. Some examples follow.

Command+Perform (Theater): Adopt a practiced new persona—different posture, voice and mannerisms are easy. Costuming on the fly is harder, but not impossible. Better, of course, to have a disguise prepared beforehand (for that equipment advantage). It's especially amusing if you change your look and sound, then cry out, "He went that way!"

Coordination+Expert (Sailor): Get on a boat and take to the water.

Knowledge+Tactics: Command your followers to block him, or clear an avenue of escape, or clear a false route while you sneak the other way.

Knowledge+Student (Local Area): Exploit a little-known aspect of the geography to hide or avoid pursuit.

Sense+Direction: Go in circles to con use him, then use your own superior sense of location to get past.

Scissors—Creativity and Adaptation

Not everyone anticipates a stalker, and not everyone has the speed to escape through pure physical competence. Some need to get inventive, exploit any passing advantage, and generally think outside the cage.

Command+Intimidate: Make an Unworthy pursuer hesitate, flinch or momentarily dive for cover. (Probably won't work on more competent opposition.) Stampede cattle towards him. Create a civilian panic to let chaos disrupt him.

Command+Inspire: Get a crowd to resent him, hurling spittle and abuse as he runs by. (This requires a fairly good rationale, however.)

Coordination+Stealth: Find a hiding spot and burrow deep into it. Change your appearance in and fade into the crowd. Set a false trail to send him on a wild goose chase.

Charm+Lie: Convince bystanders that you're a legitimate authority who needs their assistance.

Charm+Plead: Play on the sympathies





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"Release the Hounds!"

The easiest way to handle it when someone has hunting animals (particularly dogs) is by having the trainer roll his Expert: Animal Trainer pool, typically with Knowledge or Charm or Command, depending on his method. The animals themselves can provide an equipment advantage, as described below.



of nearby people to get them to hide you.

Knowledge+Tactics: Figure out his followers' search pattern and slip through its weak points.

EQUIPMENT ADVANTAGE

Often, people in a chase think, "Oh, if only I had some rope!" (or a ten foot pole or a different cloak). They think this because people are tool-using animals and it's instinct to look for something that helps you do the job. The rules for this are pretty simple. If you have some sort of object or situational advantage that relates to the Skill you're using, it adds points of Width to the set (or sets) you use. It's just like a weapon in combat. Typical equipment bonuses should be in the +1 range, while a really good one gives you +2. Examples follow.

-Set of hunting dogs: +1 to Width of Scrutinize sets.

- -A horse: +1W to Ride sets (in addition to permitting the use of Ride at all).
- -A simple prepared disguise: +1W to some Stealth or Perform rolls.
- -A set of 10-15 obedient followers without any particular training: +1 to Width of Sight, Intimidate or Inspire. Permit some Tactics rolls.
- -A racehorse: +2W to Ride sets.
- -A crewed racing boat: +2W to Expert (Sailor) rolls.
- -An elaborate prepared disguise: +2W to some Stealth or Perform rolls.

RESOLVING PURSUIT ROUNDS

Pursuit operates in rounds, just like combat, in order to simplify timing (just like combat) and, just like in combat, the round is a fuzzy unit of time that can bend and stretch to accommodate momentary needs. Indeed, pursuit not only works a lot like combat, it can transition into combat seamlessly when Lead hits one or zero. To understand how this is done, let's break it down phase by phase.

Declare

This is where the biggest difference arises. Trumping demands simultaneous declaration—otherwise, declaring last lets you trump your opponent into the ground without rolling. Besides, in hand-to-hand combat the ability to sense an opponent's move in less than a second is far more criti-



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cal than when you're ten feet apart and you need to decide whether to jump the gap or climb down into it. Therefore, the Declare phase works like this. You decide which pool you're going to use, and how, and you put the appropriate number of dice in your hand. Then you play Rock, Paper, Scissors. (If you have a big pool, keeping them in hand may be tricky with Paper or Scissors. It's your own lookout for being so buff. Oh fine, you can hold the dice in your other hand.) Trump effects go off as soon as everyone describes their action, before the dice even hit the table. Once those one-point Lead changes are dealt with, pools get rolled.

Roll

Pools are rolled, sets are sorted—it's the typical ORE thing. Remember that some pools can be amped up by previous trumping.

Resolve

Again, it's bog standard ORE. Widest sets go first, Height breaks ties. Timing matters less in chases, so if you're using a Gobble Die maneuver, you can Gobble against sets that are timed quicker, as long as your Height is sufficient.

Example: Rahn is running and Juris is getting close. For whatever reason, Rahn decides to offset Juris' gain. He rolls and gets a 2x10. Juris gets 3x5. Neither trumps. If this was hand-to-hand combat, Rahn would be screwed, but since it's a chase, he can use his Gobble Dice immediately, ruining Juris' set and keeping the Lead static.

EXAMPLES

A Simple Pursuit

Agdala doesn't like it in the seraglio, and the certainty that her new master is going to "try out the new girl" when he gets back in port is enough to spur an escape. Agdala has the following relevant pools: 3d in Hearing, 4d Climb, 8d Stealth, 6d Run, and 4d in Plead. The master's right-hand man is named Nirim and in addition to collection of gardeners, maids and footmen who can be cajoled (or cudgeled) into service he has 6d Sight, 3d Tactics, 6d Intimidate, 5d Direction, 6d in Run and 4d in Ride.

Agdala plans her escape carefully, pinning a silk sheet into something resembling the local robes and stashing another sheet (knotted to ease climbing) between the garden wall and some bushes. She slips away from the bath attendants: The GM rules that she just needs a simple Stealth success for that. In the garden, she throws her rope ladder to the top just as Nirim glances out a window.

Declaring at the same time, Nirim's player is going Paper: Nirim is bellowing that one of the harem girls is escaping. Get her! But Agdala's player anticipated a Paper move, because seeing the rope would so clearly lead him to think Rock. She went Scissors and uses her Stealth to ease around behind the bush, creeping back towards the interior door while letting them think she's already over the wall. Her Lead is now 1. They're both using Gain.



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They roll: Nirim wants to use his 6d Intimidate, but the GM thinks that's a nonstarter. The staff are already terrified of him. He needs to direct them to where she actually is and tell them what to do about it. That's Tactics, 3d. Agdala gets to use her hefty 8d Stealth pool. Shockingly, Nirim gets a pair of tens. Less surprisingly, so does Agdala, in addition to 3x1. She asks the GM if the rope ladder gives her an equipment advantage and he says sure, it's a persuasive piece of evidence that she's over the wall. Nirim's player curses.

The 3x1 goes off first and, with a +1 equipment bump, Agdala can crank her Lead to 5. When Nirim's 2x10 goes off, he cuts it back down to 3, but it's still a nice beginning for her. Next round, Nirim goes Rock by running down the steps and heading towards the wall—which is, providentially, on the opposite side of the house from the stables. Agdala goes Scissors with more sneaking. He trumps, but instead of changing Lead right away, he says he's going to position himself for a +1d bonus next round. They roll.

Just as he got an unlikely good result with a bad pool, Nirim gets a bad result with a good pool—no sets! Agdala gets a 2x9 and a 2x4. She can only use one, picks the 2x9 and puts Lead back at 5.

Round three, Nirim has a bonus, so he falls back on Paper with a Tactics roll (now 4d), telling all the staff to drop what they're doing and fan out, and someone bring him a horse! He's hoping that Agdala stops sneaking after using it twice, but she's sticking to the Scissors she's good at. In fact, she declares a multiple action—two

gains. She describes this as getting deeper into the house and trying to disguise herself as a servant. Having trumped him, she too decides for a bonus on the next round. She rolls her Stealth pool, penalized for trying to do two things at once, and gets only a 2x7. Nirim gets nothing. The GM decides that Nirim gets his horse next round or the round after, depending. Agdala's set goes, pushing Lead to 7.

Nirim Papers by bellowing that if Agdala gives up now, no punishment—otherwise, the Excessive Beauty Treatment! (This, he explains in an aside, is a painful process of scraping and hot water to prevent blemishes and ensure a glowing skin tone.) He's hoping to Intimidate her so that she gives up or, at least, makes a mistake. Agdala also Papers: She's going to pause, listen and figure out where they're going so she knows which direction to run. No trump, time to roll.

She's got 4d in Hearing now and, with a squeal of delight, rolls up a pair of tens. Nirim, with no sound effects, gets a pair of threes. She can raise Lead to 9, but he can immediately drop it back to 7. His horse arrives, though.

Next round, both of them Rock.
Nirim's is a Ride roll, intended to
gain ground with a quick gallop
around the perimeter to get the lay
of the land. Agdala chooses Run and
stresses that she's still in her harem
gear—bangles and beads and wisps
of gauze. The disguise sheet, she's
holding to her stomach. Her plan
(she explains) is to let them see her
wearing the distinctive clothes before
she tries to quick-change.

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They roll, her 6d and his 4d. He gets nothing, while she gets a pair of eights. Lead's now 9. Almost there. Next round she picks Rock, using Stealth to duck behind a door while Nirim rides past. Nirim thought for sure she'd do Scissors to get in costume, so he picked Rock with Ride again. No Trump, just a pretty desperate difference in pools. She gets 2x10, 2x3 and 2x2, while he pulls out a 2x6. She cranks Lead to 11, but his horse adds a point to his Width, so he can pull it back to 8. The GM decides that he hasn't seen her, he's just happened to put himself in a good position to block her.

Cursing, Agdala goes for a multiple action, double gain Scissors maneuver—one to change her look and one to move behind Nirim and get into the streets of the city. Nirim picked Paper too, using his Sight pool to scour the landscape for a sign of her.

He rolls his 6d, she rolls her 7d. Neither gets a set. He's got grit in his eyes. Her disguise is falling apart and she doesn't get a chance to bolt. Lead stays at 8.

Nirim opts for Scissors with a Direction roll. He wants to figure out a choke point and beat her there on horseback. Agdala picks Rock. She's going to Run back *into* the estate, slamming the gates behind her, then maybe make her way to the stables or find a better costume. Because she trumped, she decides to push Lead to 9.

They roll. Pair of sevens for her. Pair of ones for him. Lead stays perched at 9.

Nirim jumps off his horse, wrenches open the gate, and runs after her (Rock). She's going to ground in the house (Scissors). Wincing, he decides to use his Trump as a dice pool increase next turn. They roll.

Pair of threes and a pair of ones for her. Nothing for him. With a sigh of relief, Agdala sneaks to the laundry room and gets a great disguise while he hastily recalls the servants to seal up the grounds. When he deploys them to search the house top to bottom, Agdala mingles in with them, goes along with the ones checking the perimeter and (making good and sure that no one's watching this time) actually uses her rope ladder to get over the wall and escape.

"That's It? It's Over?"

As you can see from the Agdala/Nirim example, there can be a disconnect between what the rules say happened and what the narration seems to indicate. In this case, it could seem like Agdala still has lots of rolls to make to assemble her costume, fool Nirim, climb unseen and such. But the fact of the matter is, without a point where the mechanics say, "No, it's over, let it go!" it's possible for GM or player to extend a chase almost indefinitely. Rather than let one person sandbag the game (even with the best of intentions) the Lead gives you a way to resolve and be done. At 10, the runner gets to describe a fairly plausible way that he gets away. At zero, the chaser can initiate combat, or the runner can surrender.







A Game of Cat and Mouse

Meckler the light-fingered has 6+MD in Stealth, 5d in Lie, 5d in Sorcery and 6d in Hearing. Bee the thief-taker has 7d in Sight, 4+MD in Scrutinize and 5d in Tactics. Her right-hand man Oamp has 7d in Run and Athletics, along with 5d in Climb. Meckler has infiltrated the duke's estate, walked past the rubies and coins (well... all right, he pocketed the rubies) and stolen the duke's greatest treasure, an enchanted walnut.

The GM has agreed to give Meckler one Stealth roll as a head start, because he prepared for this heist so carefully. He assembles only a lowly pair, so Lead starts at 2. He's making his discreet way out when Oamp checks the chamber, sees that the rubies are missing, and sounds the alarm.

Oamp and Bee are (it's established) working separately. Upon declaration, Oamp's doing Rock, racing around looking for a thief. Bee is using Sight to Scissors out anything unusual. Meckler is using Stealth to disappear (Scissors fashion). Oamp has trumped Meckler and chooses to drop his Lead to 1. They roll. Masterful Meckler gets 3x8. Bee gets nothing. Oamp gets 2x8. Meckler can therefore increase both leads by 3 points, getting to 5 with Bee and 4 with Oamp. Oamp can immediately drop that back down to 2, however.

They declare. Meckler uses Hearing (Scissors) to determine where the search is and where it's going. Oamp proceeds with Rock again, stomping up and down the stairs looking for

the burglar. Bee goes Paper by using Tactics to deploy the guards. Because Meckler trumped Bee, he can either widen the gap or raise his pool next turn, and he opts for the bonus. Because Oamp trumped Meckler (again) he drops that Lead to 1 (again) and actually sees him—at least for a moment. The GM and players decide that Meckler's up on a widow's walk around the house, while Oamp is down below on the walkway to the carriage house.

They roll. Meckler gets two pair, nines and sevens. Oamp gets a pair of fives. Bee gets a pair of fours. Meckler uses only his nines (because he didn't do a multiple action) and raises his Leads to 7 and 3. Oamp and Bee both bump those down to 5 and 1 again.

Next round, Oamp picks up a rock and chucks it at Meckler. Since this is a combat action, it is neither Rock, nor Paper, nor Scissors (though it does use his Athletics pool). Meckler has a Scissors move: He uses his Lie pool to imitate Oamp shouting, "He just ran across the throne room!" Bee is using Scrutinize to follow Meckler's tracks from the treasury. It's a Scissors move, so no one trumps. They roll, Meckler using his trump bonus from the previous turn. He still gets nothing, though. Oamp gets a pair of eights, which probably explains Meckler's failure to impersonate. ("He just ran across—OW!") Bee's MD gives her a pair of eights as well.

In resolution, Meckler takes damage from that rock to the shoulder, but Oamp doesn't get any closer. Bee, however, cuts her personal Lead down to 3.



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One more round. Meckler falls back on what he's good at—Stealth. But this time it's a Rock move, diving behind cover and then quickly sneaking to a new location so that Oamp can't aim. Oamp is throwing another rock. Bee is closing on the scene, her keen Sight peeled in a Scissors move. Meckler's Rock trumps Bee's Scissors, but since he's more concerned with Oamp right now, he chooses a bonus to his next round.

Meckler only gets a pair of tens, and that with 6+MD. Ouch. Oamp gets a pair of threes, which is sure to salve Meckler's pain. But Bee gets a 3x4. Bee closes to touch distance, then Meckler raises his Lead with her to 2 and with Oamp to 3. Oamp draws back his arm, then furrows his brow and halts his throw when his target disappears, only to be replaced by his puzzled mentor.

Next round, Meckler is using the Scissors of Stealth to do a multiple action, with his MD intact thanks to the trump bonus. Bee? Scissors to Scrutinize. Oamp? He's dropping the rock in his hand to Rock the wall with Climb. That trump lets Oamp decrease the Lead to 2 before anyone rolls.

With a grin, Meckler uses his Master Die to get 3x9 and 2x1. Bee has a pair of tens. Oamp has a pair of threes. Going first, Meckler cranks both Leads to 5, where it stays after both chasers use their gains and Meckler uses his. Five rounds into it, the pursuers are falling behind, but it's still anybody's game as they dance around the duke's rooftops.

Esoteric Disciplines

Naturally, something that absorbs as much human attention as getting away from danger (or getting close enough to provide it) merits attentive study, and studied techniques have emerged on both sides of the Lead. They're on pages 79, 82 and 83.

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED DISCIPLINES

The techniques and disciplines described in "First Year of Our REIGN" and the main rule book can be adapted to the "After Them!" pursuit system with the following changes. Often the simplest way to handle these is by working them as equipment bonuses. Fulfill the conditions for use and add +1 or +2 to the Width of your set.

Autumn Warfare

Quickstep Grace gives a +1 Width bonus for Scissors sets. The other disciplines just work as described (and if you can't use Stalker Foot in a chase, you're not trying).

Dancing Unseen

Dance of the Burglar, Shadows Haze and Undergrowth and Assassin's Dance all work as written. When Dancing Without an Audience the character can pick a number of individuals equal to the Width of a Scissors maneuver and gain an extra +2 Width against them for the purposes of changing Lead. However, that set does not give any Lead against anyone else. (Normally, a set gives Lead





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against all pursuers.) Those shadowing others can also use this. This lets **Instinct for Distraction** work normally as well.

Eyes of the Crown of Salck

Only Painter of the Mind and Reliving Sight impact chases. Painter of the Mind gives a -1d penalty to anyone who tries to escape through disguise after the Salckite has sealed the fugitive's image in his brain. Reliving Sight gives a +2 bonus to Lead gains when using a Scrutinize roll to chase someone.

One With the Land

Cloak of the Land lets the character, when chased, use Direction for a Paper or a Scissors whenever he wishes. When pursuing, Cloak of the Land gives no particular benefit. As for the rest of the techniques, they have no especial impact on chase scenes.

Relentless Pursuit

Pursuer's Eye, Tireless Tracking, Follow Even the Breeze and Omniscient Pursuit all work as written. When tracking with The Second Set of Clues, the chaser gets a +2 Width bonus to his Scrutinize sets, but only when the quarry chooses a Scissors Stealth move.

The School of Perpetual Readiness

Master Mobility gives a +1 Width bonus to Tactics sets organizing Paper chases.

Svrana Run

Instant Start gives a +2 Width bonus on the first round of a pursuit only. With the Wind gives a +1 Width bonus to Run rolls for Rock tactics. Tireless Step and Inexorable Tread both work fine as is. Unsurpassed Fleetness gives a +2 Width bonus to Run rolls.



CHAPTER 2: ESOTERIC DISCIPLINES



CLIMB

Pickpocket's Failsafe

This set of techniques is exclusively urban in origin, and has spread to port towns on both sides of the sea, leading to speculation that the Ob-lobs developed it. Those who've seen the Ob-lob Roloneepo fighters can describe many similarities. The great Ob-lob families, of course, throw up their hands and suggest there's no way they can keep track of every sailor in every port, and that if the townsfolk are getting their purses snatched, that's their problem.

Wherever it came from, Pickpocket's Failsafe tactics involve great agility and athleticism, enabling those wise in its ways to climb nearly as quickly as they can walk. Pickpocket's Failsafe is used with Coordination+Climb.

Squirrel Scramble (1 Point): The crafty thief works in an area where he knows the way out. If the pickpocket has had a chance to circulate through the area and case it out, he can declare Climb actions as Paper, with no especial justification.

Straight Plunge (2 Points): When deliberately dropping from a high place, the character reduces the Area attack from the fall by 5d instead of 2d.

Up is Down (3 Points): One characteristic of these trained cutpurses is that they change direction instantly, effortlessly—often with a taunting jibe. The character can now use Climb actions with Scissors, similar to Squirrel Scramble.

Quickstop (4 Points): If the player rolls no sets when jumping, and would

therefore start falling, the character instead stops short just at the edge. He doesn't make any gain, but he doesn't plunge to his doom, either.

Roof Flight (5 Points): The character's ability to jump over, squeeze under and dive through obstructions is now so great that even a flying opponent has trouble keeping up with him. Any time the character declares a Rock action with Climb, success gives him +2 Width.

EXPERT: HERBALISM

Ussient Herbalism

Just as a normal oak may have moss on its moonward side, trees in the Ussient Forest are covered with parasitic fungi, edible mushrooms, creepers at the base and mold colonies on the undersides of the sail-sized top leaves. The tribes have Ussient fruit as a staple, but they've have spent generations finding anything else edible in their environment.

Additionally, the constant frontier-branch skirmishes led to battlefield healing lore, based on the properties of local mosses and herbs. Many Ussient herbalists have traveled far from their towering homes seeking foreign plant lore, and some have brought home shrubs and grasses with medicinal properties. Tribesfolk have traveled as far as Deerwood and the Lightless Jungle in this pursuit.

Ussient Herbalism is used with the Expert: Herbalism Skill.

Potions and Poultices (1 Point): If the herbalist has access to plants common in the Ussient forest, he can make purifying salves and medicinal concoctions. In the Ussient forest, they can be gath-



- TO STORY

CHAPTER 2: ESOTERIC DISCIPLINES

ered with a Direction roll, or purchased. These plants have Cost 1 at any Ussient tree, and Cost 2-3 in adjoining countries. Farther afield than that, the Cost could be low or high, or familiar plants might not be available at all.

With the right plants, the tribesman can make an Herbalism roll. If it succeeds, he can immediately attempt a Healing roll and, if that succeeds, raise its Height or Width by the Width of the Herbalism set.

Example: Nonik is trying to set his friend's broken arm. He knows that purifying the wound and partially numbing the flesh is going to make this easier, so he makes a Herbalism roll, getting a 2x1 success. Good enough. Making a Healing roll with a 2x4 he can either make it into a 2x6 or a 4x4.

If the Healing roll fails, the medicine is wasted. At this level, the herbalist doesn't know how to preserve the virtues of his concoctions.

Find the Forgotten Flower (2 Points):

The herbalist can make a roll to find the particular plants needed for her art. In the Ussient forest, she can roll Herbalism or Direction, whichever is greater. Outside the forest, it's a Direction roll. Far, far from home or in an unfamiliar environment, this roll might have a Difficulty.

Each failed roll indicates five hours of fruitless search. When a roll succeeds, it took five hours less the Width of the roll. With a 5x roll, the herbalist finds what she's looking for right underfoot.

Brew Vigor Wine (3 Points): The recipe for this tonic is closely guarded. In fact, there are several recipes, with no one ingredient in common other than the obvious wine. Different recipes have varied results, ranging from (but not limited to) jittery nerves, itching, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, headaches, blurred vision and unpredictable sexual arousal. But those effects typically fade within a half hour, along with pain, stiffness and swelling from bruises and cuts. As with Potions and Poultices, vigor wine doesn't keep: If not consumed within ten minutes of its brewing, it loses its effect and just becomes wine with flecks in it.

If the Herbalism roll succeeds, the rink gives the drinker's next Vigor roll a bonus equal to the Width of the Herbalism success.

Example: Nonik gets a 3x2 brewing his vigor wine and gives it to a friend who's going to handle poisonous insects as part of a judicial test in the aptly-named Unwelcoming Lands. When his pal gets bitten and makes a Vigor roll to resist the poison, he gets +3d to his Vigor pool. If his friend got beaten instead of bitten, his Vigor roll the next morning would have the bonus.

Nightlong Draught (4 Points): This potion has only one recipe, and while it's an admirable stool-hardener, that's a side-effect compared to the steady burn of alertness and energy it provides for about four hours. During that time, the first Endurance roll the character makes has a die pool bonus equal to the Herbalism set rolled to produce the Nightlong Draught. (It's just like vigor wine, only with Endurance instead of Vigor.) It's only good for one roll, but unlike vigor wine, nightlong draughts retain their potency for about a year after being brewed. Someone who has this Discipline, has access to the requisite ingredients and lives outside the Ussient lands can reliably get Cost 2-3 for the stuff.



Chapter 2: Esoteric Disciplines



A Jungle of Healing (5 Points): A

herbalist with this level of ability has hand-copied "A Jungle of Healing," a lengthy text with elaborate drawings culled from the journals and sketches of many traveling Ussient healers. Many versions of the text exist, and while it's a valuable item, the real virtue of copying it comes from the deep study of the pictures and descriptions of foreign plants, their properties and explanations. A student advanced enough to copy the Jungle also gets to see her instructor's private notes and collection of foreign herbs. So, to be clear: The book is the symbol of the knowledge, but it's not the knowledge. Having it is useful if you can read Ussient, but someone with this Discipline doesn't need the scroll to use it, and the scroll is only useful to others as a pretext to spend XP on herbalism or healing related things.

With this Discipline, the herbalist can roll to improve a Healing roll, adding dice equal to the Width of the Herbalism set, just like vigor wine does for Vigor rolls. In addition, she can squish the resulting roll by three degrees in any direction.

HEALING

The Blessings of Ciovla

The Blessings of Ciovla are used with the Healing Skill and, except where noted, require expensive and specialized tools and materials with which to cut, clean, bless and sew up wounds.

In the Presence (1 Point): Working in a temple, the holy energy of Ciovla fills the surgeon with goodwill and peace. Or maybe it's just easier to heal someone when you're in a quiet, clean and familiar place with capable assistants. In any event, a Ciovla holy man who makes a Healing roll in an Inner Temple can add a +1d bonus to his pool.

Cruel Mercy (2 Points): These techniques can be used outside the Temple. Indeed, they were perfected by Saint Mogantiu who took Ciovla's words to the battlefield, saving the lives of the wounded on both sides of the conflict. They are crude, but effective, using fire to cauterize wounds.

With a successful Healing roll, Cruel Mercy can remove up to the roll's Height in Killing damage from a hit location, replacing it with twice as much Shock damage.

Before the Goddess (3 Points): The priest's knowledge of healing extends to encompass his understanding of history, nature, and human belief. As long as he's operating in a Temple, a Width bonus equal to his Lore Skill can be added to any Healing success for treating injuries or trauma.

Mogantiu's Service of the All (4

Points): The same woman who used hot coals to save lives was noted for using whatever came to hand as a splint, cast, or (in dire circumstances) scalpel. (Mogantiu was martyred in an Opetkan prison, if you're curious.) Like Cruel Mercy, the ability to whip up makeshift surgical implements doesn't require a Temple for use. With Mogantiu's Service of the All, a successful Heal roll gives bonus dice equal to its Width to someone's Vigor roll to overcome injury. It doesn't help with illness.

Defy the Gates of Death (5 Points): The holiest, most secret techniques aren't used lightly, as deals with death always have consequences, and they most often





fall on the person saved. But for the desperate, someone who has died of an injury can get carried to the Temple and possibly walk out under his own power.

A priest who decides to Defy the Gates of Death takes a -1d penalty to his Healing roll for every hour that patient has been dead. If the roll succeeds, the patient lives again, but at cost. The resurrected loses a point of Knowledge and one Wound Box from his torso location.

RUN

Brute Racing

Foot racing is popular in Opetka, as it is everywhere, but where most runs are straight contests of speed, the Opetkan assumption is that the race is a bit more... tactical. Tripping the fellow ahead of you, or body-checking a close pursuer are common and expected behaviors. Those who compete at a higher level, in front of cheering crowds at yearly festivals, have a bigger bag of dirtier tricks. The inclusion of obstacles in many races only offers more opportunities to make trouble. Brute Racing modifies Body+Run.

Bruising Block (1 Point): When being chased, the brute runner slows, pretending to flag, and when his pursuer gets close enough, the brute stops short and throws an elbow or heel backwards into whatever part of his rival he can reach.

Bruising Block doesn't have to be declared: Instead, it kicks in any time the following criteria are met. (1) The brute is being chased. (2) He made a Run roll—doesn't matter if it failed or succeeded. (3) The pursuer closes Lead

to 0. When that happens, even if the bruiser has already used an Esoteric Discipline, he can activate Bruising Block. This does an immediate Area Shock attack to the pursuer. The Area Attack is equal to the combined Widths of the brute's sets (if any) and the pursuer's (if any).

Rear Leg Trip (2 Points): It's not just for tripping, of course. All kinds of nasty attacks to the back can be enhanced with the Rear Leg Trip. When the character is pursuing and closes the Lead to zero, he can combine Run with any attack the next turn, and take no penalty for doing so.

Neck and Neckbreak (3 Points): This cannot be used on the first round of a pursuit, and it can only be declared when the round starts with Lead at 0. In other words, the people involved must both be moving, but close enough to touch one another. The brute can make an attack without penalty, as with Rear Leg Trip. If it succeeds, its Height is promoted to 10 immediately.

Runner's Dare (4 Points): At the highest levels, this sort of competition is about guts as much as legs. Willingness to risk harm is often a feature of race winners—as are scars from times when risks were misjudged.

When being chased and declaring a Run action, the brute can voluntarily take a Difficulty as high as he wishes on his Run roll. If he beats the Difficulty, he can change Lead by the Difficulty instead of the roll's Width. If he fails the roll, he takes an Area Killing attack equal to the Difficulty.

On the next round, pursuers have the option of taking the same risk: If they run, they can face the exact same Difficulty and either take the Area Killing



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attack or gain Lead equivalent to the Difficulty. Unless, of course, the brute has hit Lead 10 with his daring maneuver.

Batter and Break (5 Points): This technique can be used any time a round starts with Lead at zero, including the first round of a chase. The character can declare a multiple action between Run and an attack, with no penalty. If the attack set is timed first, the character can add its Width to his Run set. If the Run set is timed first, the character can add its Width to his Attack set. (Thus, Batter and Break only does any good if both actions succeed.)

SIGHT

Elder Eyes

In Upunzi, it is said that the Elders see all. This is not literally true, as there are only eleven of them and they often have better things to do than spy on your particular street. Their reputation for omniscience relies at least as heavily on their network of observers, informers and spies. Many of these 'eyes' operate right out in the open, wearing tabards embroidered with the eye-in-the-mouth sigil of the city. Just their presence is often sufficient to quell trouble before it really starts. But when trouble does come, the servants of the Elders are highly trained to watch it—often watching unobserved.

These techniques are used with Sense+Sight.

The Lidded Eye (1 Point): A heavy lidded eye may look fully closed, leading people to believe they're not observed when they are. Similarly, the secret

police of Upunzi do their most comfortable watching unseen. When combining Sight and Stealth rolls, the watcher takes the normal penalty but uses the better of the two pools. If only one set is rolled, it must be assigned to the skill whose pool was rolled.

Heavy Stenching (2 Points): The name's something of a joke. The goal is to have an invisible tail that lingers for a while after the quarry moves on. Thus, the advice is "you want to follow him like a heavy stench." To 'heavy stench' a target requires at least two people, though more are desirable. They have to be following in a group, so that there's only one Lead. Each one must know Heavy Stenching. Each pursuer follows for a while, then drops out of sight, passing off the tail to another while either racing in front or falling back and keeping the new follower in view. For each person using Heavy Stench to enhance Sense+Sight, the person rolling can add +1 to the Width of his Sight rolls, up to a maximum of +3.

Know Your Zone (3 Points): If the character has been in this area at least once before, he can use Sight as a Paper maneuver without any extra justification.

Shadow Ignored (4 Points): As a Scissors maneuver in a pursuit, the character can roll Sight+Stealth instead of Sense+Sight or Coordination+Stealth.

Unnoticed, See All (5 Points): This technique can be declared any round immediately after a round when the observer got a successful Stealth set. If the character rolls a success with a Sight roll, he can change Lead by a number equal to his Stealth Skill (instead of changing it by the Width of his Sight roll).



Designing the magic system for *REIGN* was highly structured, logical and consistent. I had a big list of effects, both positive and negative, I had a lot of varying factors and they all fit together nice and tight.

All the Esoteric Discipline paths and martial technique sets I've designed have been exactly the opposite. I followed no concrete guidelines, just eyeball and headscratch and doing what felt about right.

In part, this was because there were fewer parameters involved. With spells there's Intensity, range, duration, effect and more. With a discipline, it's basically a question of "well, is it worth one point or three or five?"

Moreover, the variety of Skills that are open to being modified with disciplines makes it hard to say that one particular effect should always

be at the third

rank of a path. Take, for example, squishing results. For a Skill that's usually used for simple contests and either gives a set or it doesn't, squishing isn't a big deal. For one where Height is more important than Width, squishing can radically improve that 7d pool.

But all this is serving as an introductory 'buyer beware' warning, because I now have broken down lists of what makes for a good first level discipline and what's more appropriate for the fifth level. Please don't just skim this and start bolting together your Frankenstein paths. These lists are meant as guidelines, not hard-and-fast rules. If an effect seems underpowered at its level with a particular Skill, go ahead and add more pepper, but watch out for unintended, gamebreaking, degenerate combos. By assembling your own paths with this article, you're approaching the triple border where "player" meets "game master" meets "designer." So look at what you make as a designer, not as a player. Sure, it may be cool for you to have a cheap and powerful discipline that lets you use your best pool for just about everything and succeed all the time, but something that so grossly goes against the spirit of the game is likely to be a pain in the ass for everyone else at the table with you.

All right, enough of me warning and crabbing and acting like an old man. Here are the new toys. Go play.

Art based on "Hunter Jumper Stock 19" by SeishinUma. http://seishinuma.deviantart.com/





MARTIAL PATHS?

Combat is a more finicky and precise situation than most Skill uses, for the very good reason that it leaves more bodies littered in its wake than, say, Fascinate or Empathy. Therefore, effects that work fine for the non-bloodshed-oriented Skills may turn the game into a travesty if applied to fighting. It's your game to experiment with, but consider this your red flag. These effects are not tested or being considered in light of Martial Techniques, only Esoteric Disciplines. They may work with fights just fine. Or they may blow your game to smithereens.

art based on "Barbarian-Warrior-8" by Marcus Ranum. http://mjranum-stock.deviantart.com/



One Point Effects

Ignore One Die of Multiple-Action Penalty

Always a favorite. Usually, when you try to do two things at once, you roll the lowest pool and knock a die off for each additional action. With this effect, you still roll lowest, but you can add an action with the discipline's Skill without the penalty. Depending on the Skill, you may want to limit it to doing two of the same action with the discipline Skill, or you may be fine with permitting additions to other Skills.

Add a +2d Bonus in Narrow Circumstances

For the cost of this Discipline at character generation, the player could have gotten an extra die in the core Skill, so two dice seems reasonable. But since nothing's free in life, it

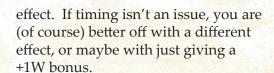
should only come in a particular instance. So, for a Stealth example, it could kick in to stay silent or unseen, but not both.

Squish a Set By One

Squishing is described on page 23 of *REIGN*. As a general rule, squishing up or down by X points is a level X discipline. If the discipline lets you squish either direction by three points, it should be the third rank of the path. At five, though, you might as well squish as many points as you want.

Time an Effect As If It Had +1W

For Skills where timing matters a lot, this is a good level one



Add a +1d Bonus to Another Skill
Pretty simple: If you roll a set with
the Discipline Skill, it gives you a
+1d bonus on a related Skill. Try and
have a reason for the bonus: "Because
I made a Jest roll, I get +1d to my
Weapon: Bow shot!" is random and,
let's face it, kind of silly.

Substitute a Close Stat

Instead of rolling its usual Stat with the Skill, you can use a different Stat. For instance, Climb is usually a Coordination Skill, but it's reasonable to train to use Body for it, or even Sense. Again, using Charm to climb a hill is random and silly.

Reduce Difficulty by 2-3 Points in Narrow Circumstances

As with timing, this is only a good one to use for Skills where Difficulties are common. Variations would be "reduce Difficulty by a Stat" or "reduce Difficulty by the Width of a set."

Reduce Penalties From Failure

A broad effect that works for a lot of Skills, this lets you reduce the impact of attempting a risky act and botching it. It's not great for proactive Skills where a failure simply means you didn't get the bargain on that cape, or you didn't make the princess' eyes twinkle with your merry joke. It's better for reactive Skills where you're rolling to avoid something bad, and the discipline can let you reduce the hassle of failure. For instance, if an Endurance failure would usually mean collapse, this could permit the character to continue (though im-

paired, so it's not as good as succeeding at the roll).

Add a +1H Bonus, to a Maximum of x10

If Height doesn't matter for the Skill, this is unlikely to make an exciting discipline, but there are lots of Skills where Height matters a lot.

Reduce the Difficulty of a Related Roll

Very similar to reducing Difficulty in narrow circumstances, and the same cautions apply. The difference is, instead of the restriction on when it can be used, it's instead a general aid, but to a specific other Skill.

Two Point Effects

Ignore More Than One Die of Multiple Action Penalty

In non-combat situations, it may be fine to just allow as many actions as the player wants. Even in combat, it's probably not unbalancing to allow extra defenses. Other than that, it's just the same considerations as offsetting a single multiple action penalty.

Improve a Baseline Trait by 20-50% The clearest example of this in canon disciplines is increasing the base unrolled movement from 15 to 20 feet. Another movement example would be that, when rolling to run (as explained on page 189), each die in a set improves the rate by 6 feet instead of 5. Alternately, you could do it with rolling Vigor to recover from Shock, and have the wounded person recover W+1S instead of WS. Mechanically, that works just like "+1 Width," below.

Keep in mind that while the 30% swing between 20% and 50% looks





big, the ORE is grainy. It's not necessarily as big as the swing between a 2d pool and a 3d pool.

Get a +2d Bonus in Broad Circumstances

Much like getting the bonus in narrow circumstances, but less restrictive. There should still be some condition to make it interesting—otherwise, it may just be a cheap way to avoid escalating Skill costs. But it should be something that a character is going to use often. So, to give a Haggle example, a narrow circumstance would be "when haggling with Ob-lobs" while a broad circumstance would be "when haggling from the seller's position."

Get a +1 Width Bonus

Not just for timing, but for anything governed by Width. Of course, if Width doesn't matter much, the Discipline won't matter much.

Decrease Difficulty by 2-3 in Broad Circumstances

A "broad circumstance" should be about half the time. You can have it be a flat -2 Difficulty (for Skills that almost always face Difficulty, like Sorcery) or a -3 Difficulty for those where it's less critical. Alternates would be "Decrease Difficulty by a Stat" or by a Skill, but for those you might want to narrow the situations in which the Discipline applies, because it's not hard to get a Stat or Skill above 3.

Reduce Damage in Narrow Circumstances

The narrower the circumstances, the greater the reduction can be without it causing envy and resentment among other players. A Discipline that reduces damage from any kind

of fall should have a small reduction. One that reduces falling damage as long as you land in water, or only when you fall off a horse? There it's fine to eliminate lots of damage, maybe even all of it, because those sorts of falls are unlikely to come up as often. Taking less damage from a punch when you're dodging is more reasonable than taking less damage from any kind of attack at all.

Ignore a Minor Penalty

When a situation gives you a -1d Penalty or a Difficulty of 3 or less, it's nice to have a Discipline to ignore that—not only because it provides a fairly balanced increase in success, but it does so by making the rules simpler.

Make an Opponent's Roll Time-Sensitive

Usually, argument and debate aren't that pressing, so someone with a Height advantage can go to town. This is particularly distressing when they're therefore able to gobble out your 3x sets with pimply little pairs. If you can make the debate a pressure-cooker, now he needs to meet triples with triples.

Evaluate a Rival Company's Quality It can break the feel of the fiction to just blurt out numbers—"They got Might 3!"—so a better way to handle these sorts of evaluations is through comparison. "Looking over their troops, your own start to look distinctly scrawny and clumsy." "You think their finances are roughly equivalent to your own." "Their peasants are poxy and ignorant, compared to the bright-eyed and well-groomed employees of your enterprise." Keep the numbers and Quality names out of it.





Perceive Relevant Hidden Knowledge About a Character

As with finding information about Company Qualities, it's better to compare than to rattle off dry names and numbers: Comparing Skill levels is always a fairly fun and useful ability. Alternately, there are often Passions to suss out. Just make sure it's relevant to the Skill. Being able to find someone's Craving by using carefully calculated Jests to see what he laughs at is plausible with some selling. Learning someone's Duty by making a Climb roll? Be serious.

Three Point Effects

Enable a Skill to Do Something It Couldn't Before

Normally, Haggle can't directly influence a Company Quality. Enabling it to do so in limited circumstances could be a good third tier Discipline. It's not a good idea to let a Skill trample too much on the purview of a different Skill—making a Dodge that does damage is all right, but making it work just as well as Fight makes the Fight Skill obsolete, and no one wants that, right?

Use a Different and Implausible Stat
Using Coordination instead of Body
to Parry makes sense—so much
sense that I'm sure someone, somewhere has already had a tedious
argument with his GM about why
it should be the default Parry Stat.
That's the kind of Stat substitution
that merits a first tier Discipline. Using Charm to parry would be a third
rank Discipline, and then only if some
tissue of explanation can be found to
cover up the naked ridiculousness of
it. For real mismatches, a narrowing
situation may be warranted. ("You

can only use Charm to parry an attack from someone who, in other circumstances, might have found you kind of cute.")

Ignore a Prerequisite For a Roll

A classic example would be a Healing Discipline that lets you Heal someone who's been out all night carousing and rolling shopkeepers instead of resting like a good boy. Another would be haggling unimpaired with someone when you don't share a language. Or Counterspelling a spell that doesn't target you.

Substitute One Skill For Another, For One Narrow Use

This is for the narrowest of narrow circumstances. You can use Haggle instead of Intimidate, but only when dealing with members of your same Truil tribe. You can use Tactics in the place of Run, but only in a huge and confusing battle with hundreds of warriors clashing on each side. Otherwise, you once again run the risk of making a Skill obsolete very cheaply.

Ignore All Difficulty in Narrow Circumstances

The more important that Difficulty is to the Skill, the narrower the circumstances should be. There are rarely Difficulties to Skills like "Student of Apiary History" so a Discipline related to that Skill could easily remove all Difficulties in almost any situation. Sorcery, on the other hand, faces Difficulty (in the form of Intensity) all the time. A Sorcery Discipline that ignored Difficulty should only kick in when things are dire ("only when you've taken killing damage to your head") or highly awkward ("only when you're being supported by a number of Salckian Thaumurgeon



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followers equal to the spell's Intensity").

Combine Skills in Narrow Circumstances

Be careful with this one, because the possibilities for abuse get pretty horrible if you don't watch out. But essentially, instead of rolling Charm+Fascinate to get on the priest's good side, you get to roll Charm+Fascinate+Jest. You can see why the narrow circumstances are needed, I'm sure: A character who could do that all the time would be an unstoppable, mirth-spewing social juggernaut, leaving the crushed and chortling husks of GMCs in its wake. So put on a limit like "Only when speaking to someone of the same social background." Another thing: Try to keep the Skills related somehow. Combining Tactics and Intimidation when you're trying to frighten an enemy force makes sense. Combining Tactics and Vigor is more of a stretch.

Produce a Morale Attack at Stat Level

Use this, of course, only for Skills and in situations where a display of talent might conceivably scare someone into dropping their sword and bolting. Moreover, it's good to keep this as an entirely free Morale Attack that spontaneously arises from a successful attempt at something else, something unpenalized. There are plenty of ways to get low-level Morale Attacks by devoting a roll to them. This should be a freebie, since it's likely to only work on small numbers of weak opponents.

Receive an Outcome Bonus Equal to a Stat

This can be a bonus to Width, Height

or a factor unrelated to either. Before you apply this as a damage bonus to something, remember that this could be as high as +6.

Add a Point to a Quality, With Effort, Once a Month

One person can make a difference, but it's not easy, even with Disciplines. It should take time and effort, in addition to a success at a dedicated roll. Whereas the Morale Attack two effects up should be entirely free, this shouldn't. If, for instance, I have a Jest path that lets me increase Territory (by raising the spirits of the workers with brilliantly timely jokes), my character's going to have to spend some time spreading those jokes around before he gets his roll, and if the roll fails, tough luck for me this month.

Prevent a Quality From Tiring in Narrow Circumstances

Normally, every roll that involves a Quality lowers it by a point. Preventing that drop is a potent effect, so either reserve it for exacting situations ("Might does not ever drop from defending in wide-open plains when the attacker's pool isn't more than three greater than my own") or have it work only once a month for a particular application ("Might does not tire after my first attack of the month.")

Four Point Effects

Height Automatically Jumps to 10
This is easy to remember, doesn't have the baggage of squishing and it's powerful. If, of course, it's for a Skill where Height matters. Probably



a bit risky to put on a Martial Technique though.

Double a Baseline

All the advice about improving a baseline element by a lesser amount applies here. You could set it up, thus, that someone's base climbing speed is 10 feet per round for each point of Width rolled on Climb. (Using this on a fighting Skill is going to throw the combat system badly out of whack, even more so than many of the entries in this article.)

Substitute Height for Width

This is particularly potent when Wide results are highly desirable, as with the Healing or Vigor Skills. It's not universally great (since your chances of getting an x1 set are as good as your chances at x5) but probably best to reserve for Skills where routinely getting sets that have Width of x5-10 aren't going to be ridiculous. Or where massively Wide sets aren't going to suck all the challenge out of a situation.

Broad Skill Substitution

Just like substituting a Skill in narrow circumstances, the considerations here are (1) not making it ridiculous and (2) not making that other Skill utterly obsolete. It could work well for Parry and Dodge, which are similar in effect but differ in detail—letting someone use Dodge to protect another person isn't going to unbalance the game. Similarly, letting someone use Eerie instead of Direction (for whatever reason) probably won't get too weird because they're both Sense Skills and rarely used to have a drastic effect on other characters. But letting someone use Jest for Athletics would be a very peculiar substitution, and hard to justify in almost any situation.

Ignore All Difficulty in Broad Circumstances

This is a good one for Difficultyplagued Skills, and by the fourth tier the player should be getting some pretty serious bang for the buck. It's particularly nice that it simplifies things.

Impose a Difficulty on Someone

This is a mechanic to use with a little bit of caution. The concerns are (1) that it can serve to pointlessly slow down the game by forcing multiple re-rolls by GMCs (or rival characters), (2) it can potentially rob people of actions they ought to be able to at least attempt and (3) it can make characters who ought to be competent at a Skill into laughingstocks. So this is best used for Dynamic Contests (see REIGN, page 14) where there's already an element of competition and this is just tilting the odds. Though, if a Dynamic Contest already has Difficulties, it may be best not to use this effect—not because it's unbalancing, but just because adjusting Difficulties upwards and downwards on the fly can be annoying. Be careful using it with Static Contests for all the reasons listed above.

Produce a Morale Attack Equal to the Set's Height

This is much like the previous Morale Attack effect. It should be something that's added on as frosting atop another result, not as a primary outcome of the roll. It's nice because there's the chance of getting MA 10, but that's rare enough to keep the effect closer to balance.



Add a Temporary +1 Bonus to a Quality.

Unlike the Morale Attack above, this should require—at the very least—a dedicated roll that can't be re-attempted. Alternately, you can allow the Discipline to give the bonus for only some circumstances—"Only when temporarily boosting Influence" or "Only when Territory is being applied to improve something permanently" for example.

Add Gobble Dice

Giving a free x10 Gobble Die that can be used at any time is a wonderful fillip for any Skill where you might normally have to choose between defending or acting aggressively. It's not overpowering in the face of a 3x+set, but even those can be blunted nicely, and it can clear out a pair.

Receive an Outcome Bonus Equal to a Stat

Typically this means adding the amount of some relevant Stat to either the Width or the Height of a set. It may be wise to limit the maximum Width to 5 and the maximum Height to 10, depending on the circumstances in which the Skill gets used

Five Point Effects

Very High Improvement to Baseline Ability

By now you've got a sense of this, right? More than doubling something that's standard, like letting someone accurately throw a light object fifty feet, is pushing the limits of what humans can reasonably accomplish. But that's what five-point effects are all about.

Drastically Reduce Damage From a Moderately Broad Source Pick something fairly specific and

halve the damage from it. This is a good one to have just as a flat, nonrolled ability, as long as the source of injury is narrow enough that it's not de-facto invulnerability. Good examples would be temperature extremes (losing a point of Body half as often), or taking two points less damage from magic. Bad examples would be taking no damage from edged weapons (too broad and too much of a reduction) or taking two points less damage from punches (too narrow and not *enough* of a reduction). Look for the middle ground, and adjust for your own game's setting and tone. Good luck.

Remove All Damage from One Source As with the reduced damage above, negated damage has some parameters you can fool with. Does the ability have to be rolled? If it has to be rolled (and therefore requires an action) it can probably work just fine with a damage source as broad as "unarmed attacks." If it doesn't have to be rolled, keep it extremely narrow—"no damage from magical fire" would be good, but no damage from any kind of fire is much too broad. It's not only implausible, it's open to abuse.

Unlimited Squishing

This is more powerful on abilities where timing or Width matters, because it allows that 2x10 to turn into an 11x1. It's not bad with abilities where Height is most important, because really wide sets aren't that common. Be particularly careful with this around abilities that allow for automatic improvements of Height, like Advantage: Beauty. Granted, there are few times when Graces or Fascinate are going to rely heavily on Width, but it could happen.

CHAPTER 3: CONSTRUCTING ESOTERIC DISCIPLINES

Provides Benefit on a Fail

The best Skills or circumstances for this effect are the on/off Static Contest Skills where the character either gets it done or doesn't. With this effect, even when the set fails to materialize, there's some sort of consolation prize, which could be something completely unrelated to the situation at hand. For instance, a path based on the Student of Mathematics Skill might offer some kind of insight every time the character fails at Athletics—maybe an XP that can only be spent on "Student of Mathematics." Alternately, if a character is trying to Dodge and still gets hit, this could permit a small reduction in damage. That sort of thing.

Change a Relevant Other Skill Die to a Master Die, One Time

What this lets a character do is apply the Discipline Skill to improve an action with a related Skill. So, for example, a Scrutinize Discipline with this effect might let someone search for a great hiding place and then get the MD to Stealth when using it. Or an Intimidate Discipline might let you scare people by proxy, building up a distant boogeyman into a menace that must be stopped—giving you the bonus to Inspire when you call for a crusade to eliminate the menace. As you can see from these examples, the other Skill to be improved, and the circumstances of improvement, should be clearly defined.

Shut Down an Opponent's Course of Action

Keep this narrow, because it can be a bit of a drag on the progress of the game when one character has broad powers to just deny, deny, deny. That said, it can accelerate the game when this just cuts to the chase. "No, you're not going to find him as long

as he refuses to move, his Stealth is too good to even permit you to roll it." It can also be nice when someone tries to knock a character off his horse and the player gets to say, "Nyah nyah, my incredible Discipline keeps me in the saddle automatically."

Give a Permanent +1 Increase to a Quality, One Time Per Company This is another one that has to be handled with caution to prevent degenerate combinations from transgressing the spirit of its limitations through a mangled interpretation of the letter of the rules. One could, for example, improve a Company's Quality with this ability, then improve another Company, then combine them and form a third Company and improve that. If all that maneuvering and combining and improving makes sense within the fiction of the game and is providing lots of interesting story for other players, then it's probably just fine. But if it's just fiddling to get an unearned advantage, that's not cool. It's a subjective judgment for the GM, though.

Use an Excess Set for Another Skill There are a couple ways to apply this one. If, for example, you want it to be part of a Fascinate path, you could set it up so that any time you roll two sets with Fascinate, you can apply the other one to Jest or Graces or Lie (or any of the above). Or you could have some sort of bedside manner Discipline that lets you apply extra Healing sets to Fascinate for free. Either way, it gives those extra sets something to do, other than soak up Gobble Dice and the penalties of getting punched.

Substitute One Quality For Another in Defined Circumstances

This is a good one to require a successful roll to activate, at least, if not time-consuming arrangement. Using



CHAPTER 3: CONSTRUCTING ESOTERIC DISCIPLINES



Might instead of Treasure can be a tremendous advantage, and if it can be done any time a character feels like it, there's little point in gaining Treasure at all. (What kind of crazy game would it be if the organized social groups didn't want wealth?) Best, then, to limit it to once a month or to only very particular uses. ("For invasions, you can roll Might+Might instead of Might+Treasure.")

Restraining Factors or "Flaws"

The discussion of individual effects already has a lot of discussion of limits that are likely to be germane for a particular effect. Some of those are repeated here so, naturally, if it's supposed to already be involved with a Fifth Tier effect, its presence ought not lower its level. Use common sense. I'll repeat that my method for making Esoteric Disciplines was extremely intuitive, so I can't put it in a tidy framework. That said, here they are.

Makes a Previous Tier in the Path Obsolete (-1)

If the third tier in a path adds +4d to your Direction pool in the same circumstances that the first tier Discipline offers +2d, then there is no incentive to use the first tier ever again. Some Discipline paths are like that: They stack up, combining to get bigger and better along their narrow focus. Other paths spread, expanding the Skill in a number of different directions. If your path stacks, it can be a little more powerful because it's not providing as much variety.

You're Helping Someone Else With a Roll (-1)

I give this a price break because it offers players incentives for making other players succeed and look cool, which is a behavior I want to encourage. It also eases the ego-bruise that can arise from using your power to make the *other guy* succeed and get the glory.

Reduces Width By 1 for Timing (-1) Slowing an effect down is a good way to flaw down an effect, but only as long as timing already matters.

Inflicts a -1 Penalty to Height (-1) Height isn't quite as narrow and volatile a quality as Width, so losing a point of it is unlikely to have a radical effect on a set. Be sure to clarify what happens with those x1 sets, though—are they ruined or does this penalty have a minimum of 1? Both work, but pick one early.

Automatic One Point Squish to Raise Height (-2)

This one cuts both ways, because it's intended to be utterly involuntary. That means if you get a 2x5, it becomes a failure, transforming into a 1x6. Apply with care to keep the overall effect from actually being a penalty and not a benefit.

Makes Exactly Two Previous Tiers Obsolete (-2)

As with the -1 flaw, this is a more extreme example of stacking. If the fifth tier in that Direction path offers a +6d bonus, there's no reason to use either of the earlier, weaker Disciplines.

Inflicts a -1 Penalty to Width (-2) In addition to the timing penalty, this runs the risk of just plain out killing a set unless you put on a minimum Width of 2, which I recommend.

Inflicts a Point of Shock Damage (-2) The biggest caution with this is to keep it plausible. A Jest Discipline that lets you get the laughs through genuinely painful pratfalls makes

sense, in a twisted sort of way, but it's a little hard to imagine a reasonable way to have the use of Sight yielding injury. It's usually simplest to have the damage go to a random location, but to fulfill the demands of reasonableness it may have to be limited to a particular location.

Makes More Than Two Previous Tiers Obsolete (-3)

The pinnacle of stacked effects. Really, the goal here is to not only make this Discipline worth the points you pay to get it, but also to make it worth discarding at least three other Disciplines.

Combative Effect Is Timed Last (-3) It's a big price break, but going later than the mook with the 2x1 set is a big flaw for Skills that are at all relevant to fighting.

Difficulty Is Increased by 3 (-3) Just be careful with this one for Skills that already face regular Difficulties. Having some Difficulties exceed 10 is all right if you want to make it impossible to do certain things with the Discipline. The bigger concern is of having a bunch of Difficulties to calculate every time the Discipline gets used.

Inflicts a Point of Killing Damage (-3)

Just as with Shock damage, handle this carefully. Something that can both kill a character *and* make him look silly is something to approach with caution.

RANDOM PATHS

You saw this coming, right? The factors for each level are numbered, below. Roll 5d10 and you've got the skeleton of an Esoteric Discipline. By my math, that makes a hundred thousand possible paths for each Skill, without using restraining flaws. That should be enough to keep powergamers occupied for a while. But the rolls only give you an outline. Filling it in requires creativity, but with all the possible permutations, all I can do is vaguely wave my hands and say "fit the effect to the Skill, and if you can't find an obvious fit, re-roll or pick something."

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Chapter 3: Constructing Esoteric Disciplines



One Point Effects

Roll	Effect
1	Ignore One Die of Multiple-Action Penalty
2	Add a +2d Bonus in Narrow Circumstances
3	Squish a Set By One
4	Time an Effect as if It Had +1W
5	Add a +1d Bonus to Another Skill
6	Substitute a Close Stat
7	Reduce Difficulty by 2-3 Points in Narrow Circumstances
8	Reduce Penalties From Failure
9	Add a +1H Bonus, Maximum of x10
10	Reduce the Difficulty of a Related Roll

Two Point Effects

Roll	Effect
1	Ignore More Than One Die of Multiple Action Penalty
2	Improve a Baseline Trait by 20-50%
3	Get a +2d Bonus in Broad Circumstances
4	Get a +1 Width Bonus
5	Decrease Difficulty by 2-3 in Broad Circumstances
6	Reduce Damage in Narrow Circumstances
7	Ignore a Minor Penalty
8	Make an Opponent's Roll Time-Sensitive
9	Evaluate a Rival Company's Quality
10	Perceive Relevant Hidden Knowledge About a Character

Three Point Effects

Roll	Effect			
1	Enable a Skill to Do Something New			
2	Use a Different and Implausible Stat			
3	Ignore a Prerequisite for a Roll			
4	Substitute One Skill for Another, for One Narrow Use			
5	Ignore All Difficulty in Narrow Circumstances			
6	Combine Skills in Narrow Circumstances			
7	Produce a Morale Attack at Stat Level			
8	Receive an Outcome Bonus Equal to a			

- 9 Add a Point to a Quality, With Effort, Once a Month
- 10 Prevent a Quality From Tiring in Narrow Circumstances

Four Point Effects

Roll	Effect				
1	Height Automatically Jumps to 10				
2	Double a Baseline				
3	Substitute Height for Width				
4	Broad Skill Substitution				
5	Ignore All Difficulty in Broad Circumstances				
6	Impose a Difficulty on Someone				
7	Produce a Morale Attack Equal to the Set's Height				
8	Add a Temporary +1 Bonus to a Quality.				
9	Add Gobble Dice				
10	Receive an Outcome Bonus Equal to a Stat				

Five Point Effects

Effect

Roll

1	Very High Improvement to Baseline Ability				
2	Drastically Reduce Damage From a Moderately Broad Source				
3	Remove All Damage From One Source				
4	Unlimited Squishing				
5	Provides Benefit on a Fail				
6	Change a Relevant Other Skill Die to a Master Die, One Time				
7	Shut Down an Opponent's Course of Action				
8	Give a Permanent +1 Increase to a Quality, One Time Per Company				
9	Use an Excess Set for Another Skill				
10	Substitute One Quality for Another in Defined Circumstances				

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CHAPTER 3: CONSTRUCTING ESOTERIC DISCIPLINES

AN EXAMPLE: DIRTY RACING

I felt like the Ride Skill didn't have enough glamor, so I tossed the dice and got 1,10,1,5,4 for an esoteric riding discipline. Let's see what that yields.

Tier 1—Ignore one die of penalty for a multiple action

Tier 2—Perceive relevant knowledge about another character

Tier 3—Add a new ability to the Skill

Tier 4—Ignore all Difficulty in broad circumstances

Tier 5—Unlimited Squish

What's a situation where a rider wants to be able to do many different things? A battle, obviously, but let's look for something less obvious. How about a race? Conflicts make for good stories. But buying five tiers' worth of Disciplines just for a short little sprint seems unlikely, so let's posit a badass race.

(This is something that happens with me a lot, as it happens: I start with some mechanics and wind up developing an aspect of the setting where those mechanics can shine to best advantage.)

Every year, the seven-city tour starts in Kiqwani. Anyone who can scrape together the entry fee (and it's not cheap) can enter, receiving an official lambskin stamped with governing seals of the seven cities. When the race begins, the race marshal at Kiqwani determines the color for that year's official stamp by random selection (to preclude cheating), stamps all the skins, and then sets the racers off from the southernmost gate.

The first stage of the race, then, is either through the city of Kiqwani or (more commonly) around it. To win, a racer must arrive at Punga on the same horse, with the marks of the other six cities, and be the first (and only) to take the Punga mark. Any route the rider wants to take is permitted, as long as she starts in Kiqwani and ends in Punga.

Some choose to charge along the seashore or even through the swamp to get from Kiqwani to Upunzi, while others loop up through Sudevu—adding about a third again the distance as the straight route, but traveling that distance on the road. A similar choice comes at distant Kininguvu: Take the indirect (but safely paved) path, possibly right into the teeth of the riders coming after you? Or set off directly across the desert? Winners have chosen many different courses (though in the entire history of the race, only one rider has won taking the swamp).

Betting is heavy in all cities. Many of the riders are nobles, or priestesses, who use the race to call out and snub rivals. Winners are idolized, the lambskin with the Punga mark can be sold for huge profits, and the winning horse for even more. Even the losers' lambskins have value, and the more marks the rider got, the more she can get for the evidence of her race.



For make no mistake, not every rider completes the course. Fights between riders and steeds, while officially discouraged, are common. Professional gamblers in all cities find it a good investment to enter spoilers—racers who aren't expected to win, but who are expected to take a cheap shot at another racer's hamstring. Racers die from falls, from the weapons of 'desert raiders,' from exhaustion and thirst. But every year, eager horsewomen from every city put up their carefully saved money, hoping to enter and win—or just to have bragging rights for the rest of their lives. To win this, what Disciplines are desirable?

Fending Off The Jackals (1 point): The rider can combine Ride and Parry without penalty.

Smelling the Loser's Sweat (2 points): With a successful Sense+Ride roll, the character can evaluate another rider, as long as she sees her handle a horse or sit on one. If the roll succeeds, she knows whether the other rider's ability is lesser than, greater than, or equivalent to her own.

It's Only the Ground (3 points): Any time the character takes damage from a horizontal impact (that is, something like being thrown off a fast-moving vehicle) the character can make a Ride roll. If she gets a set, she can reduce the number of Area damage dice done by either the Width or Height of the set. It won't help if she falls out of a tree, but there aren't that many trees in the desert anyhow.

Relentless Ride (4 points): The character can ignore any Difficulty to a Ride roll. (I figure the Ride Skill gets

limited play compared to some others, so it's fine to just banish all Difficulty with a four-point Discipline).

Mark of a Champion (5 points): The player can squish any Ride roll to any degree desired.





In *REIGN* there are two levels of combat: Face to face personal stabbing, and vast, abstract collisions of nations and cultures. The second are strongly influenced by the first, sometimes. But there has been demand for a middle grade in all this, a way to resolve the tactical level where maneuver and morale matter more than a single warrior's skill, but where it's still not an entire country at risk. *Die, Men!* is meant to fill that gap.

Die, Men! was described by one playtester as "a minis game for gamers who hate minis." It does have a lot in common with traditional wargames (you can even use a hex grid, if you like) but I've tried to make it as simple and quick as I could without sacrificing the essential nitty gritty of making the right decisions. That's what command is all about, right? That and looking good in armor.

STARTING

The more of the finicky calculating you can do before the clash starts, the less of it you have to do on the fly, so I've tried to front-load as much of the organization as possible.

You Will Need...

Dice. Lots and lots of dice, actually. At least 15d10 just for rolling, plus more dice if you want to use them for groups of units. If you don't have tons of dice, you can use counters on the map, but I'd rather fumble around resetting a d6 from six to four than trying to pick two counters out of a hex, especially if your hexes are small.

Map Tools. You need a map on which to plan out the battle. You can buy hex paper, you can make your own easily enough, online resources are available with little searching. Me, I like to repurpose the sturdy cardboard hexes from my *Settlers of Catan* game, with a sheet of plexiglass on top to keep them from shifting around.

Alternately, you can do it on a square grid. That works just fine as well. It's a little clunky going diagonal, but some people prefer it, and it's easier. If you're using *Die, Men!* as a companion to a roleplaying game, the map probably comes from your GM's fervid brain. If you just want to wargame a little and bash your neighbor, there are instructions for collectively generating a map by laying tiles under "The Map," on page 100.

Chapter 4: Die, Men! (Squad Level Combat)



Die, Men! was conceived with REIGN in mind, so there are references to people using Strategy and Tactics. If you're adapting this to other ORE games, other command abilities can be substituted.

DEFINING THE SCALE

Just how big a battle is this? The rules scale, so that you can represent a brawl of twenty on twenty with the same map, supplies and rolls as an engagement of thousands. That twenty on twenty fight could be *part* of a larger engagement, with the terrain that's meaningful on the small scale (this patch of trees, that narrow stream through the field) being subsumed into one huge 'open' hex at the army level. It doesn't change the rules. Just decide how many soldiers a 'unit' represents and the rest of the scale builds from there.

This means that if I want to run a battle of 120 men against 150 enemies, I can choose to have 6 units of 20 men each, or 60 units of 2 men each, or any combination on the scale. I just have to make sure that my opponent is on the same step! If my units are 20 and his are 5, the system is going to collapse dramatically.

As a general rule, larger scales take less time to resolve. With fewer dice, you have a lot less handling time sorting your sets. However, if you get too grainy, your pool doesn't yield many sets and you wind up needing lots more rounds. Then again, since each round is shorter, it may all come out in the wash. Most important of all, the smaller the pools, the bigger the influence of luck. If I go with 60



The basic element of these rules is the 'unit,' representing a soldier or group of soldiers. You need to track units, you lose units to enemy action, the number of units you have in a given place indicates how effective you can be there. A unit could represent ten soldiers or a hundred, but units are always the same for all players in a battle. If your units are fifty troops, his units are fifty troops too. You can track units on the map with counters, or track multiple units on a single die by adjusting the top face to show how many units are there.

units of 2, I'm going to have the 15d maximum pool for a long time. If it's 6 units of 20, then I roll a pool of 6d and things are much more random.

Given how much of a difference scale makes, in a roleplaying framework it might make sense to let the winner of a Strategy roll off pick the scale, then let the other general adjust it up or down one step. In my 120 vs. 150 example, I might want to set it at ten men to a unit, so I start with a 12d pool vs. his 15d. Thats not so random as a 6d pool, but still doesn't give him as crushing of an advantage. He might then adjust it down so that I have a 6d pool and he has 7d. Or he might switch it upwards, giving both of us 15d pools, but with mine less durable.





Chapter 4: Die, Men! (Squad Level Combat)

Soldiers per Unit	Hex Size	Command Interference	Command Lag	Each Round Lasts
1	15 feet	Tactics, Difficulty o	0	5 minutes
2	15 feet	Tactics, Difficulty 3	0	5 minutes
5	30 feet	Tactics, Difficulty 5	1.	10 minutes
10	6o feet	Tactics, Difficulty 5 / Strategy, Difficulty o	1	10 minutes
20	6o feet	Strategy, Difficulty 3	1	15 minutes
50	150 feet	Strategy, Difficulty 5	2	30 minutes
100	200 feet	Strategy, Difficulty 7	3	1 hour

THE MAP

For the simplest form of the game, there are only three types of terrain: Open, Rough, and Impassible. If you want to spice things up, finer graduations (with rules) are available under the heading "Terrain" on page 105.

Open terrain doesn't change the rules at all. It's open, flat, easy to march and fight and die on. Impassible terrain is just what it says: No one can move units into it. This is for cliffs, volcanoes, deep water and the like. (If you want to represent fortresses with the simple rules, Impassible hexes where some units start does nicely in a pinch.)

That leaves Rough terrain. You can't enter Rough during the Free Movement phase at the end of combat (except for Cavalry units, if you're using them). This means you have to spend a set to move into or out of it.

If your players are just throwing a battle together, I recommend having individual hexes made up (or, like I said, borrowed from another game). Divide them up between players and take turns putting them down. You can have one player put down all the mountains and another put down all the fields, or you can just grab random handfuls. This can set up a game-before-the-game where you build terrain with plans in mind. That's cool.

SETTING UP

If this is an RPG scenario, the GM sets up the enemy units, and possibly yours as well. Or, if your characters knew this fight was coming, you may get to decide where your units are, within reason. If it's a pickup war, just take turns picking a hex and putting as many units as you want in it.





IN BATTLE

As with the standard ORE, you declare, roll and resolve. However, since you're dealing with great mobs of personnel, Declaring is necessarily vague.

Each leader declares a general strategy for their whole army. These are written down and shown simultaneously. Then each player rolls, producing sets. During the resolve phase, they spend sets to have certain hexes take certain actions — but the actions they can choose are limited by the strategy picked during Declare. If you declared a Retreat, you can't have a hex Attack, even if your opponent reveals a weakness. At the very end of resolve phase, there's a Free Movement phase, where each group of units can move into one open, unthreatened hex.

Declare

There are four options: Deploy, Seize, Hold and Retreat. You pick one of these four for your whole army, and it restricts the choices you have when assigning sets to actual actions. Usually, the strategy you pick constrains where your units can move. During the Free Movement phase, those restrictions no longer apply.

Deploy

When you declare a Deploy strategy, your units aren't actively seeking conflict with the enemy—they're trying to get into desired positions. When you Deploy, choose a general direction ("north," "to high ground," "towards the enemy troops"). When you spend sets for troop actions, you

can pick Defend or Move. The Move order cannot go directly away from the goal. (If you're Deploying north, your troops won't go south.) You can't Attack while Deploying.

Seize

With Seize, you're the aggressor. You're trying to engage an enemy force or occupy a particular location. As with Deploy, you choose a general goal ("the main force of their cavalry," "the city gate" "the center of the battlefield" "south"). Your troops can Move, but as with Deploying, they can't move directly away from the goal. They can Attack any adjacent square. They cannot, however, move away from the goal in order to make an opportunistic assault. In Seize mode, you cannot Defend.

Hold

When you Declare a Hold, you're trying to keep what you have. Your troops can Defend, obviously. They can also Attack. Their Move options are severely curtailed, however: They can *only* move into a hex that already

contains some of your troops.

Retreat

You know what a
Retreat is. The army's withdrawing
from enemy troops.
When you Retreat,
your troops cannot
Attack. They can
Move, but they cannot move directly
at an enemy unit. If
they're surrounded,
they can Defend,
but only then.





Roll

When all the generals have picked strategies, they roll the dice. Rolling dice produces sets, and you spend sets to attack, defend, and move around in threatened hexes. The more dice you roll, the more sets you're likely to get, so the obvious question is, "How many dice do you roll?"

You roll 1d10 per unit, but only up to a maximum of 15d. (Trust me, you don't really want to roll and sort more than that.) You can get some pretty impressive sets this way—4x and 5x sets are much more likely to turn up in a 15d pool than in a

smaller one. If you get a very wide set like that, you can use it as-is, or you can break it into smaller sets. If I roll a 5x10, I can either keep it or turn it into a 2x10 and a 3x10. The timing of the sets is just like in all the other ORE games.

Resolve

Now we get to the meat of it. Your army has a single pool and gets a string of sets. You spend those sets on hexes full of your units, and those units then pursue your interests. You can spend your sets on three different tactics: Attack, Defend and Move.



Encirclement occurs when your opponent has to defend more than one facet of his hex from your forces. If you're in two hexes that adjoin his, he's encircled. If your forces are in three hexes, he's considerably encircled. If you get all six hexes around his unit, they're completely surrounded and in bad, bad shape. Encirclement is a powerful tactical advantage, and it functions like a weapon in hand-to-hand ORE combat: It adds points to your Width for the purposes of determining how many units snuff it. (Not for timing!) For each facet your forces occupy, you do an extra unit of damage. When you've only got one face to his hex, you do Width damage. Two faces is W+1. If you surround him on six sides, every attack set from each of those six hexes does W+5 damage. However, your forces' damage still cannot exceed the number of units in the hex.

Example: Fifteen reserve units of the Royal Army have gotten cut off while trying to back up a failing flank. The Duke's Insurgents occupy three adjacent hexes between them and the main force. One of the Duke's hexes has five units and the other two have three apiece. When the Duke spends a 2xg set ordering the five unit hex to attack, it kills four Royal units: Width (two) plus the number of extra faces from encirclement (two). However, when the hexes with three units are assigned attack sets, there's no way for their damage to do exceed three units. If they had four or more units, they'd get the full benefit, but as it is the most damage that the total of eleven units can do is... eleven. Though to put that in perspective, it's not a bad yield from six points of Width.









COMMAND INTERFERENCE

There's a column for "Command Interference" on the scale chart. That's primarily a matter for *Die, Men!* as a roleplaying adjunct. If your characters are in the battle, their characters are in a particular hex. They may want to give orders that are different from those issued by the general or commander. Command Interference indicates what a character has to roll in order to get the units in their hex to obey.

Here's the nifty bit: Successful orders from PCs ignore the Declared strategy. If your commander put your army in Hold but you see a vulnerability, make your Tactics or Strategy roll. If it succeeds, you can take one of the sets the general rolled and turn it into an Attack. You may get chewed out for it later. Then again, considering what an unexpected Attack might do during a Retreat, you could wind up with a medal. It may seem a little odd that it's a Knowledge based roll, rather than Command, to order troops about in the field. But to get people to follow, orders have to be issued in the language they expect, employing logic they understand. Furthermore, knowing who to tell to get the message out is crucial. Simply yelling for people to do things doesn't work if you don't seem to know what you're doing.

If you want to factor in the force of personality, you can allow Command+Inspire (or Command+Intimidate, if that's your method) to reduce the Difficulties of those Tactics or Strategy rolls. For each point of Width in the Command based roll, the Difficulty goes down by one. You can do this as a multiple action, or you can set it up one turn by commanding the attention of the troops before giving them their new strategy or tactic.



Attack

You tell your troops in one hex to attack an adjoining hex. (You can't Attack an empty hex, only Move into it.) If you get a set past any defense he's mounted, you knock a die out of one enemy set. (The enemy commander picks which.)

More critically, your troops also eliminate a number of enemy units equal to the Width of the set assigned. Several factors can increase the number of units removed.

Terrain can give bonuses. Hills and Mountains both give +1 damage when they're the origin of an attack.

Position can give bonuses. See the boxed text on "Encirclement" for details. Short version: each extra facing your enemy has to defend gives you +1 damage.

Some types of troops do extra damage. Archers give a +1 bonus to troops in their hex and adjoining spaces, the presence of Player Characters gives a +1 bonus, and Cavalry troops do Width+1 damage.

All these bonuses work the same way. They take out more troops than the Width, but don't actually change the Width.



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CHAPTER 4: DIE, MEN! (SQUAD LEVEL COMBAT)

Example: I'm Seizing, my opponent is Holding. I roll and get a 2x8, while he gets a 3x8. As it happens, I'm pretty buff: I'm attacking with Cavalry units on two faces, so my damage is at Width+2 with each squad (+1 for being Cavalry, +1 for encirclement). But because his 3x8 set is timed faster, he can use a Gobble Die to wreck my 2x8. I do no damage.

Next round, I'm still Seizing, he's still Holding, neither of us has moved. This time, I get a 4x10 and a 3x9 while he gets a 4x10 as well. His four tens become Gobble Dice and when I attack with my 4x10, he can cancel three of the dice in my set, wrecking it. When I assign my 3x9, he uses his last Gobble Die to reduce it to a 2x9. It still gets through, though. Doing Width+2 damage, I clear out four of his units.

Damage is limited, however! The number of units in a square or hex serves as a cap to the amount of damage it can do. If I have two units in a square, it doesn't matter if they're Cavalry attacking a completely encircled foe and I assigned a 4x10 result. They kill two enemy units, that's it.

When units are eliminated, the defender chooses which in a hex are gone. (For example, if a hex has both Cavalry and Infantry troops, he's probably going to have the Infantry take the damage.)

Once a hex is emptied of enemies, it's an open space like any other. Attackers don't automatically move into the hex. If they want to occupy it, they can do so with a Move action or possibly during Free Movement.

Defend

If you tell a group to defend, the set you assign it turns into Gobble Dice to apply against incoming attacks.

Move

With any set, you can move all the units in one hex into any adjacent hex that doesn't already have enemies in it. It's a nice use for sets with low Width and/or Height, if they don't get ruined by attacks.

If their initial hex and the hex they're entering are unthreatened—that is, there are no enemy units in an adjacent hex—they can complete the move order even without an assigned set, during Free Movement. (But only then!)

Moving some units from a hex and leaving some behind is fine.

Free Movement

This is a little addendum to the Resolve phase, after all the sets have been spent. Each squad can move into an adjacent space, as long as that space meets two qualifications. First it has to be Open terrain. Second, it



Chapter 4: Die, Men! (Squad Level Combat)



has to be unthreatened (that is, there are no enemies adjacent to it). Heck, for Cavalry troops it just has to be unthreatened. It's one space per group of units, however. If you want to split up a squad, sending some north and some south, that's fine as long as the spaces are available.

Free Movement really is free. Moves taken at this time aren't constrained by the strategy chosen during the Declare phase. So if you were in a full Retreat and could only move away from enemies, during Free Movement you could go back towards them, as long as you were going into an unthreatened, Open space.

COMPLICATIONS

As is, you've got a simple, functional midget wargame. Position yields advantage through encirclement, a dynamic balance exists between clumping units (which can carry bigger sets and last longer) and spreading them out (where they're vulnerable, but can encircle) and you've got a few kinds of terrain to spice things up. But if you keep using this, or are already an experienced wargamer, you may want things spicier still. Thus, I offer a list of complications. Use any of them, use all, use none, it's all fine. But if you decide to kick in these complications, understand that it must, inevitably, make the process more... well, complicated. It's going to take longer, it's going to demand more attention and effort. If your group likes that, grand. Just be aware that not everyone does and that it's okay to leave some tools on the shelf, and often a good idea.

Terrain

Three basic types of terrain are nice, but why stop there? There are no changes to Open, Rough and Impassible, but there are more to be had.

Hill

When you assign an Attack or Defense to a unit on a Hill, it gets an advantage against enemy units, as long as those units aren't (1) fliers, (2) also on a Hill or (3) on a Mountain. The advantages against all other terrains are as follows: Attacks do +1 damage. Gobble Dice from Defense all get an extra point of Height, up to 10. This does not change timing, since they don't get the extra Height until they're assigned to Defend, and they can't be assigned to Defend before their spot in the timing queue.

Mountain

Mountains get an advantage against enemies as long as they aren't (1) fliers or (2) on an adjoining Mountain. The advantage is the same as for a Hill, plus that hex gets a free Height 10 Gobble Die added to any Gobble Dice produced by Defense.

Example: Joe has units on a mountain and has Declared a Hold. Shannon has units in an adjacent hex and has Declared a Seize. When they roll, Shannon gets a 3x1, a 2x8 and a 2x3, while Joe gets a 2x8. Shannon goes first, and her 3x1 wipes out three units before Joe has a chance to respond. When Joe applies his 2x8 to Defense, he gets two Gobble 9 Dice (because each gets extra Height) and one Gobble 10 Die. This is easily enough to spoil her 2x8 and 2x3.



River

You can't move into or out of a River hex during Free Movement.

Castle

Sketch out the castle walls. They're Impassible. Towers are treated like Mountains.

Palisade, Drawbridge or Portcullis

These are Impassible until they (1) take a hit from a Siege Engine or (2) are opened by the castle's owner. (Palisades can't be opened, naturally.) Then they're Open. Once they've been hit by a Siege Engine, they're gone.



If you don't want to fuss with different unit types, just give a special counter to one group of units. That's your battering ram. If they can get that to the obstacle and apply an Attack set, it's down.

Forest

When a Defense is declared for a unit in a Forest, a free Height 10 Gobble

Die is added to the Gobble Dice of the Defense set. This works just like the free Gobble Die for Mountains.

Command Lag

Without Command Lag, your troops know, immediately, what you want them to do and then they do it. This is not, strictly speaking, realistic. To better mimic the confusion of the battlefield, you can implement Command Lag.

Look at the scale chart way back at the beginning. The 'Command Lag' column lists how many turns in advance you have to declare strategies. (Best to write them down.)

So, if you have Command Lag 1, on the first round of the battle, you have to declare two strategies for your army. The first is applied during the first round. Then on the second round, you choose to Seize, Hold, Deploy or Retreat for the *third* round while the second-round actions you announced in the *first* round get implemented. When you get up to Command Lag 3, you have to think three moves ahead and are likely going to wind up giving orders to dead troops and launching attacks on units that aren't there.

Unit Type

In the basic rules, a group of mounted knights in heavy armor, trained from the first blossom of manhood to kill without mercy, is treated the same as a group of naked savages using their ancestors' thigh bones as weapons. To many, that just ain't right. So there are some options for modeling troops with special training or equipment.



Chapter 4: Die, Men! (Squad Level Combat)



Cavalry

Cavalry attacks do +1 damage. If a set is spent to move Cavalry, they can go a number of hexes equal to the Width of the set. During Free Movement, they treat Rough terrain as Open.

Defensive Bloc

A Defensive Bloc is a group of soldiers with really heavy armor, tower shields, or some other protective advantage. Hexes containing a Defensive Bloc get a free Gobble 10 Die every turn, which they can use at any time.

Fliers

Flying units ignore all the negative effects of terrain.

Archers

A hex that has archers in it gives a +1 Width bonus to all attacks made by normal troops from their hex, or from any adjoining hexes. However, the total Width bonuses can't exceed the number of Archer units.

By spending an Attack set, an Archer unit can remove one enemy unit anywhere within a two hex radius. They cannot make normal Attacks (the kind that do Width damage), however. This means that 'one enemy unit' damage is an absolute. Encirclement and terrain don't increase it.

Chariots

If a set is spent to move Chariots, they can go a number of hexes equal to the Width of the set. They can't enter Forest, Hill or Mountain hexes at all during a battle.

Chariots can Attack normally (doing Width in damage).

Player Characters

If you don't want to play through the blow-by-blow, give a +1 unit damage bonus to sets for hexes that have a PC in it. Multiple PCs means multiple bonuses.

Siege Engines

Siege Engines can launch Attacks on enemies two hexes distant. They cannot launch them against enemies who are only one hex away. However, any hex adjacent to them or two hexes away is considered threatened. Furthermore, the number of units doesn't act as a cap on damage. If you assign an unblocked 2x8 to a single Siege Engine on a hill, it wipes out three units.

Moving siege equipment isn't easy. It can't move at all unless it's accompanied by units of a different type. (Essentially, the siege engine unit represents a big hulking thing and some guys who know how to aim and load it. It doesn't have an entourage of the people or animals needed to move it around.) If it has an escort unit, they have to move together. Siege engines can't move during Free Movement.

Threat Rating

If you want to use the Threat ratings from *REIGN* for the troops, it's pretty easy to implement: Sets lower than the Threat rating of the target fail.



CHAPTER 5: FLUID COMBAT





REIGN already has the trustbased basic combat system (described on page 201), and the specific options in the Advanced chapter. But where the first one emphasizes cooperative storycrafting by the players and the GM, and the second works more as a framework for creating predictable and vaguely-plausible fights, there's also a third path. Just make sure you and your gaming group all understand which system you're using and (perhaps as important) why you're using it.

The Fluid system is simpler than the specific details of Chapter Six, while giving a little more tactical traction than relying only on Chapter Five. Its major alteration is that you have more leeway to change your action after the dice hit the table. In both the core systems, you have to declare exactly what you're doing before you roll. With Fluid, you still declare who you're hitting and what you're hitting with, but once you've sorted your sets you decide between doing more damage or trading off damage for a variety of other desirable effects.

THE PHASES OF FLUID COMBAT

As with the combat systems you're used to in REIGN, there are three phases—Declare, Roll and Resolve. They change a bit, but you can still recognize a strong family resemblance.

Declare

You declare which skill you're using, if you're making multiple actions, what you're striking with—so far, just like the other two systems. However, you can be very vague with your attacks. "I'm hitting the third guard with my sword" is perfectly acceptable. You don't need to decide how you're hitting him until it comes time to resolve.

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CHAPTER 5: FLUID COMBAT



Roll

This is just the same. You roll your pool and sort your sets.

Resolve

Here's where things change the most. Timing is no different—Widest sets still go first, and High sets still go before low ones. Parrying, Dodging, Gobble Dice—all the same old thing. What's new is how damage is resolved.

When you hit, you can choose to make it just a simple, ordinary, white-bread hit. You strike, you do damage of a type and amount appropriate for your weapon and Width, located on the body part indicated by Height.

The hit does damage only. Characters no longer lose a die from a set automatically when struck.

That's really important, so I'm going to repeat it in bold for readers who are just skimming.

Characters do not automatically lose a die from a set when struck.

If you want to ruin someone's shot or blind him, trip him, aim for a vulnerable spot or something—you can achieve that effect by trading in damage. Different effects have different damage costs, as listed on the menu on the next two pages.







Chapter 5: Fluid Combat

Effect	Cost	
Shaken: Target loses a die from a set.	1S or 1K	
Rattled: Spoil a set from a group of Unworthy Opponents. You can only use this if you attacked the group, but you can use it more than once with a single strike.	1S or 1K	
Reckless Attack: Time your first strike next round as if it was 1 Wider	1S or 1K	
Wound Up: Does an extra 2S but is timed as if Width was one less. This effect cannot be applied more than once per set.	1S or 1K	
Opportunistic: Redirect your attack from one individual to a different one. (The attack's Height and Width remain unchanged.)	1S or 1K	
Severed: Limb struck comes completely off	1K or 3S (but only if the limb is already full of Killing damage)	
Pulled Punch: Change Killing damage to Shock Thus, if I hit for 4 Killing, I can spend one Killing point to turn the other three into Shock. If I hit for 2 Killing, I can spend one to turn the other into Shock.	1K for all.	
Disarm: Target drops his weapon, shield or other object	15 or 1K to the gripping limb. 3S or 3K to any other location	
Redirected: Raise or lower your hit location by 1	1S or 1K for each point of Height changed. If I'm doing 5K of damage to location 5, I can change that to 3K to location 7	
Ghastly: Produce a Morale Attack after killing someone	1S or 1K per point of Morale Attack (so for 3S you get a Morale Attack 3)	
Crushing Blow: Change a point of Shock damage to Killing	2S each. You can turn three points of Shock damage into one point of Killing	
Intimidating: Produce a Morale Attack regardless of the attack's outcome	2S or 2K per point of Morale Attack (so for 6S you get a Morale Attack 3)	
Blinded: Target is blind for Width rounds	2S or 2K at location 10 only	





CHAPTER 5: FLUID COMBAT



Effect	Cost	
Tripped: Target loses a die from all his sets. This cannot be used on an entire group of unworthy opponents, even though they share their group of sets. Trip one mook, take a die from one set.	are	
Shove: Target moves about five steps in a direction you choose	2S or 3K	
Gripped: Target can't change location and has to take 3S to the gripped limb in order to escape	3S or 4K. Reduce by 1 if attacker is empty handed or if the target is downed. Reduce by 2 if both.	
Downed: Target is Downed, of course	3S or 4K. Reduce by 1 if you're empty handed, or if he was tripped or shoved this round or last round. If it's both, reduce the cost by 2.	
Entangled: Target can't move from his current location, or attack, until he beats the person who established the entanglement in an opposed Body+Fight or Coordination+Wrestling roll.	All, with a minimum of 4S or 5K. This minimum drops by 1 if the attacker is empty-handed or if the target is downed. If both, the minimum drops by 2	
Clobbered: Target takes 1S to each limb	5S or 4K	
Armor Damage: Target permanently loses 1AR at that location	5S or 4K	
Armor Avoidance: Damage from this blow ignores all armor at location	4S or 6K	

It's important to remember with this system that Armor only soaks up damage: It doesn't reduce it, and it does not reduce the Width of the attacker's roll. If you're fighting a heavily armored opponent, you may not be able to get through his armor with 3K damage, but you still have 3K damage to buy effects. His armor won't protect him from getting shoved, and then next round it's easier to knock him down.

It's equally important to remember that each attack is just one attack. Even if you get a 5x5 with your massive battleaxe (so, 7K and 5S) you can't decide to hit the bad guy for 7K and then spend 2S to redirect 3S to a pair of unworthy opponents. You have to apply all that damage to one hit on one person. (The "Rattled" effect that lets you ruin multiple sets for a group of mooks is an important exception. Hey, they're jittery.)

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CHAPTER 5: FLUID COMBAT

EXAMPLES

Now that you've seen the price list, here's what the system looks like in action.

A Simple Example

Cygnet and Dawn are fighting over a man, and it's gone well beyond hair-pulling and name calling. Both women have Fight pools of 8d, Parry pools of 5+ED, and are armed with longswords that do Width+1K. Cygnet has a helmet that gives AR3 to her head. Dawn has on leathers that give AR1 to everywhere but her head. Cygnet has the higher Sense Stat.

The first round, they each go for a full attack. Cygnet rolls 1,1,2,3,5,6,7,9—a lousy roll for 8d, yielding only a 2x1. Dawn does rather better with 1,1,2,2,7,7,7,10. Dawn chooses only to do damage—4K to Cygnet's unarmored torso. But since the Fluid system doesn't automatically wreck sets, Dawn has left Cygnet with 3K damage to spend, either on Dawn's lightly-armored leg (location 1) or on other effects. 2K to the leg is... okay, but Cygnet decides on the spur of the moment to disarm Dawn instead.

Next round, Cygnet declares that she's making another full attack, while Dawn says she's going to pick up her sword and attack with it. This times any set she uses as if it was one level narrower.

Cygnet rolls 2,2,3,4,8,8,9,9. With a 2x8 and 2x9 to choose from, she's happy.

Dawn rolls 2,3,4,7,7,8,10,10. That 2x10 would be a lot sweeter without the timing penalty for picking her sword up.

With 3K aimed at Dawn's armored torso, Cygnet spends 1K to redirect to Dawn's vulnerable head. 2K to the melon. Ouch.

With 3K to Cygnet's head, she spends a point to redirect down—to Cygnet's unarmored and injured torso. She does 2K there.

Headachy Dawn plays it cooler next round, rolling her full Parry pool with the ED at 10. Being a hair more sensible, Cygnet realizes Dawn isn't striking and makes a full attack.

Cygnet rolls 1,3,4,7,7,9,9,9. With a 2x7 and 3x9 to play with, she grins.

Dawn sets her ED to 10, rolls 1,1,1,3,9 and swears. A 3x1 is quick, but unlikely to protect anything but her leather-clad leg.

Cygnet opts to use the 3x9, giving her another 4K aimed at location 9. Once again, she redirects to 10, doing 3K there. She contemplates leaving it as is and enjoying a tidy, efficient fatality. But while she's angry, she's not quite wiling to face murder charges and Dawn's family. Besides, she thinks killing her romantic rival might send the wrong signal to the man in question. So she spends 1K to turn the remaining 3K to Shock. Two of those Shock stack in a box to become a point of Killing, but it leaves Dawn barely alive and unconscious.



Chapter 5: Fluid Combat



A Complicated Example

"You should have killed me when you had the chance, Cygnet!"
"I won't make that mistake again, Dawn!"

Nobody loves a grudge match, and yet, they keep on coming. Cygnet has gotten over her romantic rivalry with Dawn. (Turned out the guy was lousy in bed. Who knew?) Dawn, however, can't quite forgive and forget. She's rounded up fifteen of her family's retainers, given them swords (to raise them to Threat 2) and then made a chilling and hysterical speech about the dishonor that has befallen their entire way of life at Cygnet's hands (to increase that Threat to 3). Dawn, on the other hand, has taken up with a nice Truilish mercenary named Zwiche, who has sharpened teeth, one of those spooky moaning Truil hornbows, a Bow pool of 8d, Fight 6d, and 4+MD in Dodge. Dawn got a helmet this time (AR3 for location 10) but stuck to leathers because you can't clank down the middle of town in full metal without attracting notice. At least, not yet. Cygnet, amusingly enough, took a page from Dawn's book and got some armor for the rest of her body, so the two women have exactly the same AR at the same locations. Zwiche, on the other hand, is wearing nothing but a light cape, sandals and a loincloth because it's so damn hot in the sunlit lands.

On the first round, Cygnet goes on the attack against the charging retainers, Dawn hopes to get her licks in while Cygnet's distracted, and Zwiche decides to scamper up to the top of a nearby building to get a good sniper perch. (Did I mention that Zwiche has 3+MD in Climb, too?) Cygnet rolls 2,2,4,5,9,10,10,10. Dawn rolls 2,3,4,4,4,5,8,10.

Zwiche rolls 2,2,6 and turns his MD into a 2 in order to climb fifteen feet up the wall.

The retainers roll 1,1,1,1,2,3,4,4,5,5,5,6,8,9,10.

So, the order of action is as follows. Cygnet, with 4K at location 10 to distribute.

Retainers, with a 3x5 basic hit.

Dawn, with a 4K at location 4 to fool around with.

Zwiche with his fifteen feet of climbing.

Then the retainers with a 2x4, 2x1 and 2x1.

Cygnet has 4K to apply to one mook's head, which is serious overkill. So she spends it down. She uses three of her points of Killing damage on the "Rattled" effect, removing dice from three of the retainers' sets. Dawn considers letting two ruin the 3x5, putting another to the 2x4, and letting the leg hammers cripple her enemy, but she thinks that Cygnet's going to kill one of the followers with her remaining point of damage (and she's right) so she throws out the 2x4 and the x1 sets. Sure enough, Cygnet spends her remaining point of Killing damage on a retainer, removing him and knocking a die out of that 3x5 set. She's done an admirable job of protecting herself.

Dawn, however, has 4K to Cygnet's hand. She chooses to spend a point to disarm (since it's a bargain at 1K

The sale

CHAPTER 5: FLUID COMBAT

for the location) and let the rest go through. Cygnet's AR1 reduces the remaining damage to 2, but she has dropped her sword.

Zwiche is now five feet from the roof. The slowed down retainers hit Cygnet with a 2x5, for 3K to her other arm. After the AR1 reduction, she has two points of Killing damage there, too.

Next round, a bare-handed Cygnet decides to parry with her leathered forearms, setting her ED at 10. Dawn is slicing right back. The followers follow. Zwiche has to keep climbing—he's not in a position to hit yet. He asks if he can draw once he's at the top. The GM allows it.

Cygnet rolls 1,6,7,9,10. With her ED, she has a pair of tens to Gobble with.

Dawn rolls 1,1,3,5,7,8,9,10.

Zwiche rolls 1,4,5 and turns his MD into a 5.

The followers roll 1,1,3,5,5,6,7,7,7,8,8,9,9,10

So events go like this.

Followers, with 3x7.

Cygnet with 2x10.

Followers with 2x9, 2x8 and 2x5.

Dawn with 2x1.

Followers with 2x1.

So, before anyone can stop them, the followers do 3K to Cygnet's torso, after her AR is subtracted. With her two Gobble Dice she wards off the next two attacks to her chest, but that

2x5 hits her arm. She now has only one undamaged box in that arm. Seeing that her followers are going for the leg as well, Dawn just goes for damage, and they have no other option. Cygnet has now taken 4K to that leg as well.

Next round, however, Zwiche is on the roof and makes a multiple attack one at the mooks, one at Dawn. Cygnet is ducking and covering, Dawn is hacking and slashing—she actually decides on making two attacks—and the followers are following.

The followers' 14d pool yields 2x10, 3x7, 2x6, 2x5 and 3x1. Ouch.

Cygnet's ED is at 10 and she gets a brother for it, so she has two gobble dice set at 10. Her backup pair is a 2x1.

Zwiche gets the two pair he needs, a 2x7 and a 2x5.

Angry Dawn gets a 2x7, a 2x6 and a 2x3. So in order...

The followers' 3x7 and their 3x1.

Cygnet's 2x10 defense and the followers' 2x10 hit

Then comes Dawn with a 2x7 and Zwiche with the same.

Dawn and the followers with a 2x6 apiece.

Zwiche and the followers with 2x5s.

The followers' 3x7 is plain ol' damage, three to Cygnet's chest. Then their 3x1 hits her leg, filling it with Killing damage and bleeding two more into her torso.



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On Cygnet's turn, she actually ignores the head hit, since her noggin's unhurt and she's got a helmet that soaks all the damage. She uses her 10s to ruin Dawn's attacks. If she's going to down, she's going to die frustrating Dawn.

Seeing that Dawn's stymied, Zwiche uses the 3K from his 2x7 on the followers. It's still one attack, so he kills one with 1K and automatically ruins an attack. He spends another to spoil their last attack, and his last point on Recklessness to get his next action faster. (If you're wondering how one arrow ruins two attacks, picture an angry domestic who's about to land a blow when suddenly her good friend gets shot right next to her. Think she might flinch?) That leaves no more damage to Cygnet and a 2x5 to Dawn, 3K to Dawn's hand. With one point, he disarms her, while the other does 2K to the limb with his armor-ignoring arrow.

Will Dawn retreat? She's been bloodied and is unarmed, while her rival has indisputably learned a lesson, what with the broken leg and wheezing lungs. Plus there are those two downed henchmen to explain to her parents (are they dead, maimed or merely cowering?), and an archer up top that she can't readily attack. On the other hand, she's never going to get a better chance to finish off Cygnet, and in for a penny...

FLUID MARTIAL TECHNIQUES

The Advanced Combat system has precisely defined Martial Paths. The

Fluid system lets you design your own (within parameters) just as you can design your combat move (within parameters).

Every Martial Path has to have a focus. In Advanced Combat, all these techniques are focused on a particular weapon. With Fluid, a path can focus either on a weapon or on a particular effect. If you want to build a Martial Path based on the Wound Up maneuver, you can do that and have it work for equally well for swords, sticks and chains.

Martial Paths can have any number of techniques, but characters can't learn any second level technique without learning all the first level techniques. They can't learn a fifth level technique without all the techniques at lower levels. Furthermore, characters still can't know more than fifteen Martial Techniques.

Other than that, it's just a matter of buying off yet another chart.







Chapter 5: Fluid Combat

Benefit	Level
Chosen weapon gives the benefits of open hands for getting the Downed, Entangled or Gripped effects	1
One particular effect costs 1S or 1K less	1
One particular effect (or combination) costs 2S or 2K less	2
One particular effect (or combination) costs 3S or 3K less	3
One particular effect (or combination) costs 4S or 4K less	4
One particular effect (or combination) costs 5S or 5K less	5
One particular weapon does 1K more damage*	1
One particular weapon does 2K more damage*	2
One particular weapon does 1S and 2K more damage*	3
One particular weapon does 2S and 2K more damage*	4
One particular weapon does 2S and 3K more damage*	5
One particular effect (or combination) costs 2S or 2K less with one particular weapon	1
One particular effect (or combination) costs 3S or 3K less with one particular weapon	2
One particular effect (or combination) costs 5S or 4K less with one particular weapon	3
One particular effect (or combination) costs 85 or 5K less with one particular weapon	4
One particular effect (or combination) costs 10S or 6K less with one particular weapon	5
Offset the multiple action penalty for one use of one particular Skill	1
Offset the multiple action penalty for an unlimited number of uses of one particular Skill	3
Time an attack as if its Width was one greater	1
Time an attack as if its Width was two greater	3
Time an attack as if its Width was three greater	5
Get a free Morale Attack 2 after a kill	1
Get a free Morale Attack 4 after a kill	2
Get a free Morale Attack 6 after a kill	3
Get a free Morale Attack 8 after a kill	4
Get a free Morale Attack 10 after a kill	5



^{*}determine beforehand if this bonus is applied before or after effects are paid for.

CHAPTER 5: FLUID COMBAT



A Example Path: Flying Serpent's Coil

The mountains near Kininguvu are home to a poisonous snake called (in the local tongue) the "flying serpent." The ridiculous image of lowly belly crawlers worming their way through the air leads some travelers to dismiss the stories, until they see one of the leg-length serpents strike upwards from a coiled position. They don't remain in flight, but their jumps can reach a man's shoulder or cover the distance from the front of a wagon to its back in an eyeblink.

A sect that reveres the river Nguzi as a deity studied the flying serpents and applied what they learned to defending themselves from regional rivals. Their fighting style teaches that all weapons are largely the same, and a warrior who masters timing can take control of a fight as easily with a spear as with a dagger. Therefore, they pay particular attention to fighting in an unpredictable, staccato rhythm that confuses opponents and allows the Nguzi worshipper to get past his guard.

Attacks with the Flying Serpent's Coil can only be made in conjunction with the Wound Up effect.

Tightening Coils (1 Point): Any time you announce that you're using Tightening Coils during the Declare phase you can add the Wound Up effect to one attack that round, for free.

Unpredicted Flight (2 Points): When you pay to use the Wound Up effect, your target is automatically Shaken, and you may choose to make the strike Opportunistic for free.

Explosive Lunge (3 Points): When you pay to use the Wound Up effect, you not only ignore the restriction of timing it as if it was a point slower, it instead goes off as if its Width was one greater.

Leg-Numbing Entangling Bite (4 Points): When you pay to use the Wound Up effect, you can Down and Clobber your opponent for 4S or 4K (instead of 8S or 8K).

Their Every Move Presents a Target (4 Points): When you pay to use the Wound Up effect, you can alter your hit location by up to 4 points for free. (This works like the Redirected effect.)

Nguzi's Secret (5 Points): When you use Nguzi's Secret in the Declare phase, you get the benefit of Tightening Coils. After your dice hit the table, you can choose to use any of the other levels of Flying Serpent's Coil on your result.



Chapter 6: Martial Techniques

MAEMECK WAR-PICK

The Maemeck Warrior class often trains and operates in its homeland's mountains. Moving through such rugged terrain encouraged them to carry as little as possible, and the tendency of Milondese steel to break under stress left many unwilling to carry swords that would fail in time of need. Instead, many adapted the picks used for mountain climbing (which had, themselves, been adapted from mining tools).

The war-pick has a shaft the length of a man's leg, made of steel or stout wood. It's smooth for most of the length, but roughed towards the base, where there's a flared rim to give the best grip. The working end has a straight spike, about dagger length, and a slightly curved prong opposite it. Both are sharpened and thick, usually triangular in cross-section to leave a wound that bleeds.

The techniques of the Maemeck pickmen are used with Coordination+Pick.

Dangling Death (1 point): Fighting in the mountains, you sometimes find yourself fighting from a higher vantage point than your opponent. This is good, since your head is out of the fight zone and his is in the middle of it, and because it's easier to strike down than up. Dangling Death is a technique for accelerating the pick heavily, creating a devastating impact. When striking from above, any blow to locations 1 or 2 gets +6 Height. This bonus occurs during the Roll phase, so it affects timing as well as hit location.

Mining for Flesh (2 points): The same postures used to chip through rock to get ore can be used to punch through armor and reach the fighter within. Mining for Flesh can only be used once per turn. If part of a multiple action, the usual penalties apply. The strike bypasses three points of Armor.

The Twirl (3 points): To use the Twirl, the fighter holds the pick in front of him and, when it gets close to his opponent, he gives the haft a rapid twist, so that the two heads sweep around in a fan of steel. This spin is used to knock weapons out of the way before a strike.

The Twirl can only be used with a Feint maneuver (as described on page 205 of *REIGN*). In addition to the usual benefits of a Feint, the Twirl prevents the target from using a Parry maneuver during the next combat round.

Stick and Handle (4 points): Sometimes your pick goes deep enough to get stuck. Though inconvenient if you want to hit him again, having a weapon painfully lodged in an enemy is convenient if you want to force him to move or fall over. This is doubly true if you move one hand up to the back of your pick-head, which is sticking out as a convenient handle. If you declare an attack with Stick and Handle and strike, you get a +1d bonus on your next turn if you attack the same opponent with any of the following maneuvers: Pin, Restrain, Shove, Disarm, Slam, Strangle, Trip, Redirect or Submission Hold. You can then use your Pick skill to make those maneuvers. If you declare Stick and Handle the turn after successfully striking someone with it (that is, when you're already getting the +1d bonus)



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CHAPTER 6: MARTIAL TECHNIQUES



and your maneuver succeeds, it gets a bonus point of Width for both timing and effect.

Superior From Beneath (5 points): As discussed above, it's usually disadvantageous to fight upward. Superior From Beneath makes the best of this bad situation by bringing the opponent down to your level. It only works on opponents above you. Make a normal attack. If it hits, instead of the damage to the indicated location, it does it to location 1 or 2 (you choose) and the attack also has the effects of both a Trip and a Slam.

BLADES FOR THE EMPRESS

The Crimson Guard needs to be able to fight against any and all enemies of The Empire, the envious within and the resentful without. Fortunately, the inner steel required to give up easy eating and speaking can also be directed to the refinement of sorcerous technique.

Blade for the Empress is used (despite the name) with the Sorcery Skill. It can only be applied to the Crimson Guard's blood magic, but since they're the only ones who're permitted to learn these techniques, that's no great matter.

Defensive Cast (1 point): Normally, one can't make Sorcery part of a multiple action. With Defensive Cast, the guard can combine his Sorcery with either Dodge or Parry.

Bleed the Energy (2 points): This technique lets the Jawless combine Sorcery with Counterspell.

Mingling (3 points): The Jawless talk amongst themselves (using a language of hand signals) about the philosophical revelation that arises from merging sorcery and swordplay, their own blood and that of others, attack and defense. When they refer to 'mingling,' they mean the dissolution of barriers between actions. The technique called 'mingling,' then, is when they can combine a Sorcery roll with either an attack or a defense, at no dice pool penalty. (That is, rolling only the lower pool and looking for two sets.)

Unsurpassed Guardian (4 points): The Jawless can now combine Sorcery with attacks, defenses and Counterspelling. No dice are removed from the pool when this is done, though the Jawless still need to roll the smallest pool and get a set for each action.

Sanguine Apotheosis (5 points): The highest integration of weapon and witchcraft gives all the benefits of Unsurpassed Guardian, but the Jawless can now use his largest pool, with some restrictions. First off, he can't assign a set to a Skill if its Width is greater than the Skill's pool. Secondly, either the Widest or Highest single set rolled must be assigned to the Skill of the rolled pool.

Example: Eria has Sorcery at 9+MD, Dodge at 6d and Counterspell at only 2d. She declares that she's using all three Skills, then rolls 2,4,5,6,7,9,9,9. Setting her MD to 9 she now has either a whopping 4x9 Sorcery set, or a 2x9 Sorcery set and a 2x9 set for something else. If she'd gotten a pair of sevens and used her MD to get 3x7 and 3x9, she couldn't use the 3x7 to Counterspell, because it exceeds her pool. However she slices it though, she has to give the Highest or Widest set to Sorcery.



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CHAPTER 7: WORK FOR YOUR LIVES! (STORMS AT SEA)



an against nature is a classic dramatic conflict, and few forces in nature inspire as much awe as a storm... especially when you're on a boat in the middle of it. Deafening thunder, bludgeoning rain and the terror of lightning are enough to put a quiver into the stiffest upper lips. Fortunately, sailors on a ship in a storm typically have so much to do that there's little time to contemplate their own mortality.

OVERVIEW

Work For Your Lives! is meant to put all the strategy and danger of a combat encounter into the dangerous work of navigation. Instead of being man on man, though, it's captain (and crew) versus an uncaring force of nature that's all the more deadly for its mindlessness.

The storm wreaks damage on the ship in various places. PCs aboard can attempt to either prevent this damage, or lessen its impact. The sailors aboard are another resource. One captain callously spends their lives to preserve the hull and mast, while a more soft-hearted skipper gambles with the whole ship to conserve crew in the short term.

YOUR SHIP

The ship is where the action takes place. It's represented by a group of hit locations, just like people in *REIGN*. Instead of wound boxes, boats have structure boxes. When a location runs out of structure, it becomes worthless. Any further damage to that location goes to the next location up. Thus, if your stern has been torn off (location 7) the damage goes into location 8 (the aft hull).

Locations

The different locations on a ship fulfill different functions. Losing them creates different problems. Some of them are more resilient than others so, without further ado, let's examine the ten places your ship can break.

Location 1, the Mast

The mast, or masts, hold up the sails that allow a ship to move under wind power. Masts start with 3 Structure boxes. Once your mast goes out, your ship moves at a greatly reduced speed until a replacement can be found or made.

Location 2, the Sails and Rigging

The sails themselves, along with all the wooden stays and sheets and lines that keep them in place, are a flexible mass, but one without the resilience of solid wood. Under the stresses of a storm, they may tear loose, shred or collapse. They start with 3 Structure boxes.





Location 3, the Deck Stores

Shipboard space is limited, so any lengthy voyage carries supplies and equipment lashed down on the deck. (If a ship on a short pleasure cruise gets caught in a storm, hits to this location can either go to the Forecastle or do nothing, at the GM's discretion. Just make sure you decide and explain which beforehand.) The stores start with 3 Structure boxes, and when damaged they may come loose, go overboard, or get waterlogged to the point of uselessness.

Location 4, the Forecastle

The front of the ship, for us landlubbers. Often, sails attach here, as do the lines holding up the mast. It starts with 4 Structure boxes. If it ruptures, the ship loses some ability to handle waves from the front: Instead of breaking on the solid prow, they pour into the hold or onto the deck.

Location 5, the Starboard Deck

The deck separates the underside of the ship from the open air. This is where a lot of running around and fixing may happen during a storm, so if the deck here splits, it can be hard repairing anything that attaches to the boat's right side. (That's what 'starboard' means—'right' when you're facing the front of the ship.) It starts with 4 Structure boxes.

Location 6, the Port Deck

As with the starboard deck, only on the left side.

Location 7, the Stern

Steering takes place here, and usually it's the captain's station during trouble. (Even if he doesn't handle the wheel or tiller himself, he directs the pilot and issues orders to the crew.) Damage here drastically cuts a ship's maneuverability. If a ship drifts, instead of taking

the blow of tons of water on its strong front, the force hits broadside. It's a lot easier for a boat to capsize (meaning 'turn upside down') rolling side to side than it is to tumble end to end. The stern has 4 Structure boxes.

Location 8, the Aft Hull

Belowdecks is the 'basement' of the ship. Cargo gets stored here, but more commonly it's where crew and passengers sleep, eat, and huddle for safety during storms. The floor (or hull) is all that keeps the water out. If it lets go, the ship is in serious danger. Luckily, hulls are strong, with 5 Structure boxes from the get-go.

Location 9, the Forward Hull

As with the aft hull, this is typically a work or storage space. Damage here may require repair on the fly, or just a lot of bailing. Again, it has 5 Structure boxes.

Location 10, the Hull Amidships

This is the broadest part of the ship and, therefore, the weakest part of the hull. If this loses all of its 5 Structure boxes, the ship is foundering, lost and can only be abandoned. Even if the fore and aft hulls are compromised, a ship still might limp ashore with the main hull as a sort of raft.

If you're wondering how a hull could break when it's protected by the decks and not exposed to the wind, here's the explanation. The forces of the water on the ship aren't steady or unified. It's not just being pushed in one direction, though the push to one direction may be much stronger. It's undergoing stretching, compression and torque along with impacts and sudden changes of direction. The forces at play on a hull in a storm have been likened to the forces exerted on a ball of snot when a child rubs it between his fingers.



It's a Custom Frigate

Not all ships are created equal. To represent this, you can juggle Structure boxes between locations and rename or remove locations altogether. A poled river barge, for example, might simply take all the numbers below 5 and remove them, adding the 13 Structure boxes gained thereby to the hull. For a fast, top-heavy racer, remove the forecastle and stern, putting their points into sails, mast and rigging.

Furthermore, when PCs buy a ship, a certain degree of customization is expected. This takes the form of adding Structure boxes where desired. Most boats, you can add 4. If you pay extra, or are an Ob-lob, add 5. If it's a 'real bargain' it may have fewer extra boxes, or none at all.

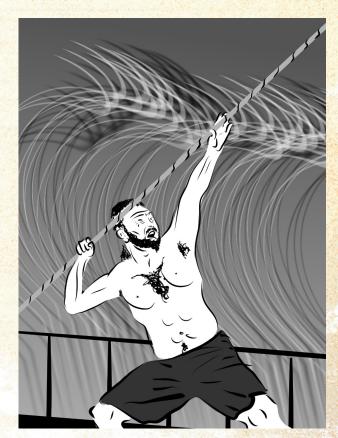
The rules scale up pretty easily: A bigger ship has a bigger crew, but just use the *Die*, *Men!* technique of designating a token as three sailors instead of one sailor. The bigger ships have more people, but more area to cover and more to do. Sure, they're heavy and strong, but they also carry a lot of momentum and can't maneuver into waves as well as a smaller boat. It all works out.

CREW

Every crew member is represented by a token. When the storm begins, the captain assigns them duty locations, where they stay unless ordered to move by an officer (or a PC). The more sailors at a location, the more they can keep it safe. They provide a layer of protection to the Structure, through their frenzied and professional activity. In the rules,

this protection is passive. A location does not take damage from the storm unless the Width of the storm's set meets or exceeds its number of sailors. However, bleed-through damage from other locations ignores the presence of sailors. Since sailors can't be assigned to locations with no Structure, this means that a lost section is a constant peril.

Sailors stationed at a location that loses all its Structure are swept overboard or crushed, but this is rare since they can be martyred. Any time a Structure box is going to fail, the captain can choose to have a sailor at that location die instead. The decision to work sailors to death has to be made, and made clear, during the Declare phase (see below).







THE STORM

The storm, for all the hell it brings, is a simple model. Before the encounter begins, the GM determines just how big this blow is, ranging from 8d (a fairly brief thunderstorm) to 15d (for a monsoon). Every turn, the GM rolls the storm's pool and sorts sets, applying them to the ship in the form of various disasters.

Storms have limited energy, however. Every turn, the storm loses a die until it can't get a set and goes from being life-threatening to merely unpleasant. This is central to how the GM is to run storms, so let me repeat that in a box.

What kind of damage does the storm do? It's limited only to the GM's imagination, but some suggestions (by location) are listed below. With them are actions that brave PCs can take to block the damage.

Location 1: Splitting Mast

The wooden support post is bending under the strain. Unless dealt with, it splinters and collapses. It can be bolstered with either an Expert: Sailor roll or a Carpentry roll.

Location 1: Breaking Stays

The lines holding the mast upright are beginning to give. If they do, the mast might crash down on the deck. They can be tightened, bolstered or bypassed

Every turn, the storm rolls one femer die in its pool. When it rolls no sets, it disperses.

with an Expert: Sailor roll or a Difficulty 5 check against any skill that includes heavy use of rope.

Location 2: Sails Rending

If the sails are up, they're in danger of tearing into tatters, badly reducing the ship's ability to move, which in turn makes it hard to steer. Trim or drop them with Expert: Sailor. Figure out which lines to cut with a Scrutinize roll and relieve the pressure.

Location 2-3: Lines Breaking

To relieve pressure on the ship's intricate nest of lines and stays as one starts to fray, bypass it with Expert: Sailor. To get up to a slipped line or lash some loose rigging so it doesn't collapse, roll Climb (tying the knot isn't as hard as getting there).

Location 3: Gear Breaks Loose

Some of the cargo, equipment or livestock kept on the deck has broken loose and is not only in danger of going overboard, but of sliding wildly around and smashing into laboring sailors. Options for dealing with this include holding it (Endurance), re-securing it (Expert: Sailor) or throwing it overboard so it can't cause more problems (Athletics).

Location 4-7: Deck and Rails Splitting

Anywhere on the topside, boards could buckle in response to the storm's torque. Loose material from the rigging could crash down and punch a hole in the deck, or the side rails could fall apart under the impact of loose debris. These can be remedied by lashing the boards down (Expert: Sailor) doing some hurried patching (with Expert: Carpenter or the like) or simply by clambering over the broken areas (Climb).

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CHAPTER 7: WORK FOR YOUR LIVES! (STORMS AT SEA)

Location 7: Tiller Trouble

In *REIGN*, most boats aren't sophisticated enough to have wheel steering—they're guided by a pair of linked rudders on either side of the hull. If the connecting bar breaks or the tiller goes out of control, it's very dangerous. This can be brought under control by wrestling them down (Athletics or Endurance) by tying them off (Expert: Sailor) by attempting an on-the-fly repair (Expert: Carpenter) or by using Expert: Sailor to try steering only by sails (if the boat has secondary sails for that).

Location 8-10: Hull Leak or Rupture Obviously, hull failure is dangerous. If the ship's equipped, one can man the pumps (Endurance) start bailing (Endurance or Athletics) try to patch it (Expert: Sailor or Carpenter) or start ejecting ballast or cargo to lighten the load (Athletics).

Location 8-10: Panicky Passengers

Not everyone onboard is capable during a crisis, so the best thing is to herd them belowdecks, safely out of the way. But people are contrary animals, especially when really scared. To keep them from doing something stupid (like running up on deck to seize the longboat, or jumping in the sea to swim for it) roll an Inspire or Intimidate set. Or just knock 'em out.

Location 8-10: Unsecured Cargo
This is much like Gear Gets Loose,
above (at Location 3) except that in this
case it doesn't bounce off the ship. It
stays confined to smash against hull
timbers and fall on people. Same remedies apply—hold, lash or jettison.



On the surface of it, Stormtongues would seem to be a panacea for weather distress, but remember that the Weather Change spell takes eight hours to cast. So if a Stormtongue starts casting Weather Change as soon as a storm is sighted, it's going to be sixteen rounds of storm conflict before the spell goes off. Since the storm is losing a die every round, by the time the spell goes off the storm has, by necessity, already run out of steam on its own.

Frustrating! But what if the mage has more time to prepare? Weather Wisdom is very popular, even on ships that don't have Stormtongues aboard.

Casting Weather Change the day before the storm comes is much, *much* more effective. If successfully cast, the spell removes Width+2 dice from the storm's initial pool. Weather Change can also be used to keep a ship moving, but without knowledge that a storm is brewing, it's just as likely to make things worse as ameliorate them.



SINK OR SAIL

Now that you understand the ship's locations and the terrible, terrible things that can happen to them, it's time to walk through the steps of confronting the storm.

Actions taken to prepare for or adapt to a storm are taken in rounds (just like a fight). Unlike fights, each round is



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roughly half an hour—but again, the time is an abstraction. Fanatical adherence to a time standard isn't necessary and is, in fact, a pain.

Beforehand

Every problem is less likely to turn completely disastrous if you prepare for it. Anticipating a storm and preparing for it can mean the difference between a little bit of sea sickness and a severe case of watery graves.

Spotting the Storm

Storms are noticed with Sense+Sight. If the roll succeeds, the signs have been detected (typically thick dark clouds massing, rising, then sinking back down). For every point of Width in the Sight set, the captain gets a round to prepare for the onslaught, either by fleeing the storm or bracing for it.

Those with the Weather Limb advantage can detect storms forming with just a Sense roll. If that succeeds, the captain gets four rounds to prepare. However, if the GM calls for a Weather Limb roll and it succeeds, it just means the weather is *changing*, not that it's specifically turning stormy. The twinge of the limb may indicate clearing, a temperature shift or fog. But if a Weather Limb goes off, for whatever reason, a Sight roll to detect a storm gets a +1d bonus.

If no set is rolled, the storm comes up with shocking speed, or comes during the night, or represents an intensifying of a mild but non-threatening rain shower.

Battening or Running

If the captain gets a chance to prepare for the storm, she has a choice. She can

run, hoping to stay ahead of the front, or she can prepare by tying down loose objects, tightening the sails, reinforcing the mast or shoring up the hull, et cetera.

For each round that she spends battening, she can add a temporary point of Structure to one location. These take damage first.

For each round that she runs, the Storm's pool drops by one.

To Your Stations

Every sailor (or group of sailors on a big boat) is represented by a token. The commander sends each sailor to



The list of problems is far from exhaustive, as are the sub-lists of responses. Lightning could hit the mast, a crewman could go mad and start flailing with a cutlass, cargo could catch fire, necessary stores could be threatened with ruin. Those aren't on the list, but they're all exciting complications. In the same vein, some smoke sculptor is going to use Sorcery to reinforce a hull or a mast, a mighty warrior is going to suggest he should be able to Fight down that broken rigging, and I find myself strangely confident that a clever player is going to suggest a way to use Charm+Fascinate to deal with a deck breech. I approve. Be creative. If someone comes up with an unorthodox way to apply a Skill to a crisis, that's good. Ingenuity should be rewarded. Unless it's a blatantly stupid ploy to use an MD in an inappropriate way.



one location on the ship. Player characters get to assign themselves a bloc of locations: Either in the rigging (locations 1-3), on the deck (4-7) or below decks (8-10). The captain is typically at location 7 but, if a PC, can roam around topside taking care of business as long as there's someone at the helm.

In the Storm

Each round is broken into four segments, very much like turns of combat. The difference is, instead of declaring actions for the storm, the GM rolls for its impact before the PCs decide what to do (since their actions are a response to what the weather coughs up). Therefore, the phases are: Crisis, Declare, Roll, Resolve.

Crisis

The GM rolls the storm pool, pulls out all sets and describes what's happening.

Declare

The PCs declare what they do in response to the storm. They can only help locations in their bloc. (That is, if you're down in the hold, you can't help with a problem in the rigging.) If there's no crisis in a PC's location, he can effectively "aim" for the next round, gaining a +1d bonus. If this happens twice in a row, you can get a +2d bonus, but it doesn't go farther than that.

Note that while sailors can't be assigned to locations with no structure boxes, PCs with those void locations in their bloc can still apply Gobble Dice when sets turn up that would damage them.

Instead of rolling an action, a PC can go to an adjacent bloc of locations—from

hull to deck or from deck to rigging. The captain can reassign sailors to adjacent locations—sailors from location 3 could go up the mast (location 1) or to location 5 on the deck. PCs can also use their action to get sailors on deck. Players who take these moves don't have to roll for them, but they aren't allowed to roll for anything else.

At this point, the captain says whether she wants to take any unblocked storm damage on structure, crew, or different ones at different locations.

Roll

Those who've declared actions roll the relevant pools.

Resolve

The sets the PCs rolled become Gobble Dice. They can apply those to one peril in their bloc. If a PC wants to try and address two different problems, it's a multiple action.

Storm sets that get gobbled away do no damage. Sets whose Width is lower than the number of sailors assigned to the location do no damage either. But sets that aren't stopped do Width in structure damage. (Sets whittled down without completely collapsing do their reduced Width in damage.) However, if the captain chooses, sailors at a location can die (or be horribly maimed) protecting structure boxes on a one-per-one basis. Kill two sailors, preserve two structure boxes.

When a location is empty of structure, that's bad. First off, any remaining sailors assigned to that location are swept overboard, crushed, or otherwise killed. (PCs are presumed to get to another location.) Additional hits on it bleed through to the next location (so if location 4 is empty, any other x4 sets do



Chapter 7: Work for Your Lives! (Storms at Sea)



damage to location 5). Even if the next location has ten sailors on it, a Width 2 set wipes out two structure boxes or kills two crew. However, PCs can still take action to knock dice out of damage to empty locations. They just have to describe what they're doing, and possibly take appropriate penalties or face Difficulty.

AN EXAMPLE

The 'Merrie Mayde' is a piece of crap freighter. It has no extra structure boxes, but it's at least holding together. It has ten crewmen and two PCs—the captain and his brother Sterling. Sterling's a big strong guy, but has no experience sailing. He does, however, have a keen pair of eyes, which could help a lot as the sky darkens with the arrival of nasty (13d) weather.

Sadly, Sterling rolls no pairs to spot it, so everyone's working in increasing rain and misery until—BAM!—a giant fork of lightning heralds a redoubled storm with thrice the rain. Caught unprepared, the captain quickly tells Sterling to get below while he barks orders to the sailors. Three go up in the rigging (location 2), three take the starboard deck (location 5) and four are assigned to the widest part of the hull (location 10). They are not ready to die preserving the ship—yet.

The GM rolls the storm's 13d. The good news is, he only gets three sets. The bad news is, they're 2x1 (mast), 2x9 (forward hull) and 4x7 (stern castle). No sailors anywhere to react. The GM describes it thus.

"The storm's upon you like a pouncing lion. A massive wave crashes broad-

side into the back of the ship, and you can see that there's something in the water—maybe a log or a piece of old shipwreck. It's going to sweep over the deck and smash the hell out of it if you don't do something. The mast is starting to splinter under the pressure of the wind on the sails. And down below, you can hear a horrible moaning sound coming from the front at the timbers strain. What'cha doin'?"

Cursing bitterly, the captain decides he's going to reorganize the sailors, moving those from location 2 to 1 and those from 10 to 8. Sterling's going to try and bolster location 9 by bracing the groaning hull with timbers—not an elegant repair, but at least it could relieve some of the pressure. He rolls Strength+Athletics to move the braceboards. The captain doesn't have to roll—his action is taken up with issuing commands.

Sterling rolls and gets 3x10—easily enough to wreck the storm's 2x9 set. If only he'd been on the deck instead, he could have saved the stern. But no such luck. The mast is now teetering with only one point of Structure left, but it's got three deck monkeys protecting it.

Next round, the storm's down to 12d. It turns up 3x9, 3x1, 2x8, 2x6, 2x4. "Just as the crewmen swing and swarm towards the mast, the lines supporting it start to snap! The reinforcements in the forward hull are holding, but just barely—the boards are warping and water's starting to spray in. In the aft hold, a pallet of casks breaks loose, while on the portside deck, a big piece of wreckage from the stern is tangled in the railings, it's starting to tip the ship. At the front, the hatch is popping open





and starting to slam up and down—looks like the hinges might pop at any second, and then you'll get water down into the hold that's already threatening to leak..."

Sterling takes stock. Location 8 has crew, so that's not an issue, it leaves location nine as his problem. He starts pumping furiously (an Endurance roll). Up on the deck, the captain looks at the sailors who have crises on either side of them and decides he's going to the port area. He chops at the debris to break it up and disconnect it from the ship. The GM says he can use Expert: Sailor or Fight, whichever is better. He picks his higher pool. Asked if the sailors are willing to die for their ship yet, he squints and says... no.

With a pair of ones, the captain's making little progress against the wreckage. With 2x9, Sterling does rather better with his bailing—exactly what he needs to gobble out the 3x set and nothing more. The sailors lash the casks back into place with the speed you'd expect from sailors saving rum. The crew on the mast find alternate support lines with the speed you'd expect from sailors protecting the mast on which they're perched.

11d for the storm. With an almost intelligent fury, it seems determined to strike at the ship's weak points. *Another* x9 hit, this one a pair. 3x5 and 3x3, along with another threat to the mast (2x1).

"The bailing gives Sterling some breathing room, but shifting all that timber around seems to have dislodged something in the wood supplies. Beams are starting to tip and come unsecured, raining down from above and threatening to knock out the supports you wedged in. The starboard deck buckles and groans, splitting under the torque of the storm. Several stays attached to it give way, sending the ship's spare steering oars rolling across the deck. As for the mast, its base has now shaken loose from its setting, leaving the whole thing teetering precariously."

Gritting his teeth, Sterling drops a die from his Athletics pool to set one of the remaining dice at 10. He's going to leap up on a stack of supplies and cram the timbers back into place by brute force. That's the plan, anyhow. The captain goes after the steering oars, trying to lash them back in position. He also suggests that the crew is willing to die for Structure at this point. "But they're more willing to live for it!"

The captain gets a pair of tens and smiles. Sterling gets a pair of threes and winces. The crew at location 5 is sufficient—barely—to hastily reinforce the deck, hammering fiercely. Similarly, the crew on the mast drop down and move like a well-oiled machine to reseat it in its socket and brace it firmly. The steering oars get re-tied, but Sterling's mighty arms tremble and fail, leaving him partially buried under lumber as the water rises around him. Location 9 loses two points of Structure.

The 10d storm roll yields only a 2x3 and a 2x6. "There's a momentary lull in the storm and you wonder if you've perhaps reached its eye. But the surges are still enormous, and lines are starting to snap all around the edge of the deck. Also, the collapse of some beams in the forward hull is undermining the port deck—it's starting to tilt precari-

Chapter 7: Work for Your Lives! (Storms at Sea)

VA DY

ously and come apart from the fore-castle."

Though he's tempted to reassign some sailors (two in a location won't stop a set, but can die a noble death to save the others) the captain instead rolls Expert: Sailor to shim the deck back into place and hammer in some reinforcement. With a pair of nines, he does it handily. But there's nothing for Sterling to do except catch his breath or move, and given how beat up the hull is at location 9, he decides to stay in place and work on his bonus die for next time. So the storm's pair of threes goes off unimpeded, taking location 3 down to a single structure box.

At 9d, it's starting to become conceivable that the storm could run out of steam, and indeed, only one set turns up. Unfortunately, that set's a 4x2. "Though the swells are still great, they seem to be settling, and the sky looks even a little lighter. You see a moment of hope on the crewmen's faces, but it quickly turns to alarm as the dissonant tones of snapping lines indicate a massive failure in the rigging."

Worried, Sterling can only raise his bonus to +2d. Turning gray, the captain takes stock and prepares for a +1d bonus. But no one can do anything but helplessly watch as the sails and rigging fall like a dying octopus, snaring the deck gear and sweeping it off to the side.

Location 2 is now gone, and one point of damage rolls over into location 3. With no sailors there, its last box gets checked and it's empty too.

The 8d storm pool hangs on, producing a 2x4 and a 2x2. Since locations 2 and 3 are both gone, there are a couple points

of unstoppable bleed-through coming towards location 4. It's doomed. The question is, can the captain keep location 5 from taking a hit too?

The GM describes the damage. "The sails and rigging tore free from everything but the forecastle, and as you watch, they serve as a giant sea-anchor, pulling the entire structure forward and sideways."

With his Fight pool, the captain leaps up, cutlass swinging, trying to slash as many lines as he can to liberate the decking. A pair of tens separates the forecastle, and as he leaps away from the sundering surface, he manages to wrench the deck staircase loose, allowing it to collapse gracefully inward instead of ripping out any more of the ship. Sterling, meanwhile, sits on his +2d bonus, gritting his teeth and waiting for that high Height hit.

It doesn't come. Instead, it's a 2x3 and a 2x4. "You must be reaching the opposite end of the eye now, because the wind's picking up and the waves are bigger and more frequent. With no tiller and no sails, there's no way to steer, so the wave is going to hit broadside. This is the sort of impact your ship is just not built to take."

Sterling wishes so badly that he could get up there, that he *had* gotten up there, so he declares that his action is moving up to the compromised 4-7 bloc. The captain is going to try to rig a sail on the fly and dig in one of the saved steering oars in a last ditch attempt to take it on the prow, not the ribs. He rolls Expert: Sailor.

He equals the storm: 2x3 and 2x4. Gobbling out the storm's 2x4 set, only two



points bleed through to the undamaged starboard deck. Since the captain made it clear that the sailors at location 5 were at death's door, the structure remains intact. One of them overbalances while pushing the tiller, slips, and impales himself on a splintered spar from the aft deck. The other is rigging the sails through a haze of exhaustion and fear when a rogue gust whips a rope around his arm and pulls him straight off the side.

The storm's down to 6d, and the players watch breathlessly as the GM rolls... 1,3,4,7,8,9! No sets! "As if appeased by sailors' blood, the storm calms, the rain drizzles, and the waves lose their frosty caps. You can see a little blue sky ahead."

The Merrie Mayde is a mangled wreck. It has a forlorn mast sticking up, wavering, but the sails are lost and the deck has been scythed clear of important equipment and supplies. Both the fore and aft structures are simply gone, while the port deck is warped and buckled and the forward hull has a slow but steady leak.

FIXING

Fixing a ship isn't as exciting as trying to keep it from getting wrecked so a lot of repair can be hand waved once the boat and crew get to land. It's just a matter of days, effort and supply.

If location 3 got through undamaged, you can assume that the crew has all the rope and sailcloth it needs to restore location 2 completely in one day.

After location 2, it's just a question of timber. If the landing spot has trees, no problem. A few twelve-hour days

of backbreaking labor and the ship can be almost good as new. With adequate lumber, each crewman can restore one Structure Box to any location that wasn't totally wrecked. The mast can be rebuilt on this schedule even if it was completely destroyed.

Other emptied locations are another matter. To replace a completely junked hull section or something like a big section of decking, the ship needs to be beached (a task that takes a day) and then each missing section takes a week to rebuild. It won't come out as good as new, either: Each completely destroyed and reconstructed section starts with one Structure box less than it had before the storm. All that assumes that at least half the crew survived. With less than half, repairs that size take a month apiece.

Once the Merrie Mayde limps to shore, the captain takes stock. The mast has a single point of Structure remaining. The rigging and sails are gone. The deck cargo (including extra sailcloth) is also gone. So is the entire forecastle and the stern deck. But the hull's in good shape—only two Structure hits on location 9. The port deck is two down as well. He's got eight remaining crewmen to enact repairs, so they can replace the mast, shore up the hull and re-chink the deck in just one day. That's the good news.

The bad news is, it's going to take two weeks to fix the stem and the stern. Though of course, without sails they're not going far anyhow. Looks like it's time for Sterling and the captain to go exploring an see if they can find any friendly natives with textiles.

This shows, of course, how all this "broken ship" business can fit into your game. Toil is tiresome, almost by



Chapter 7: Work for Your Lives! (Storms at Sea)

Valent III

definition. If cannibals don't attack or the PCs don't stumble across a demoninfested temple, the two weeks of repair can easily be dispatched with a scene of the PCs talking to one another in character and then, "After picking the stitches out of all the clothing that decency allows, you manage to make a short sail and get to port, now three weeks later than planned. Ready for some Company rolls?" If getting them to port on time is critical, then perhaps the lost sails wash up on shore, or they're retroactively stored in the hold (so, what got swept overboard was either food stores or paid-for cargo). Don't throw a storm at your characters unless you're ready for them to be stranded for a while.

SINKING

Also, don't throw a storm at your characters if you're not ready for the damn boat to sink.

Locations 1-3 can be torn clean off ithout really imminent danger of submersion. It leaves a ship at the mercy of tides, unless it can be rowed in any meaningful fashion, but though it's floating dead in the water, the operative word is *floating*.

Heavy damage to locations 4-7 is manageable, with effort and patching and substantial jettisoning. Even breaches in locations 8-10 don't necessarily spell a trip to the bottom, as long as each of them (8, 9 and 10) still has *some* Structure. If you need a rule of thumb, count up how many points of damage have been done, collectively to the hull locations. Subtract that number from fifteen: That's how many days the ship has to find shelter before it completely falls to pieces.

When a hull location is gone, completely empty of Structure boxes, then the ship is sinking. (When all the hull locations are gone, the ship is sunk.) If one hull location is gone, the people aboard have about half an hour to get things out of the lower levels, and perhaps forty-five minutes to scavenge from higher decks. They're going to want something that they can float on and something they can paddle away with. (Most ships carry longboats or life rafts or dinghies which are, of course, ideal.) Large sections of hull are decent makeshift rafts. On the other hand, if the hull was in large sections, rafts probably wouldn't be needed.

Is it dramatic to have your whole party go down to a watery grave? In some circumstances, yes, but in most, not really. So let them rush around and make a few Scrutinize rolls to find water, food, water, oars, water, and that satchel of Dindavaran gold marks that the captain kept hidden somewhere. Let them make Athletics rolls to paddle away from the suck-zone of the sinking ship if they cut it too close, at the cost of capsizing and losing everything they scavenged if they can't pull free. Expert: Sailor or Sense+Direction can provide some essential construction and guidance, too. But if the stakes of the journey weren't particularly high, the point of all this rolling and effort is to improve their situation, not to merely survive it. With good rolls, they wind up on a decent beach, a bit worse the wear but still roguishly attractive, near some fresh water and interesting natives. With bad rolls they drift, helpless, flirt with the mechanics for dying of thirst, and eventually wash up in some barren wasteland populated by flinty eyed barbarians who immediately start arguing whether to use them as food or forced labor. Thus, either way, the excitement and adventure continue.

Matters of Enchantment

CHAPTER 1: BLOOD MAGIC OF THE CRIMSON GUARD



New Advantage: Enchanted (Varies)

There are a lot of permanent spells that a non-spellcaster might want put upon himself. If you want to start your character out protected by Shuddersome Touch of the Eye or Standing Whirlpool, buy the Enchanted Advantage. It costs as much as it would cost to learn the spell. Thus, Shuddersome Touch of the Eye (which is Intensity 4) is a 3 point Advantage.

There are some exceptions to this: Advantages already defined. The Conjoined Advantage from the Ruhini supplement has its costs listed, which supersede this Advantage. The more obvious example, of course, is attunement. Broken and flawless attunement still cost what they always have (1 and 5 points, respectively).



Domain: Blood and violence

Method: The Crimson Guard's spells are cast by waving a bloodied sword around in arcs and circles.

Associated Skill or Stat: Coordination

Society and Beliefs: The Jawless (as they are also known) are the elite defenders of the Empress herself. They're described on page 233 of *REIGN*.

Required Knowledge: The Sword Skill at 4d, or 2+ED, or better.

EDGED TONGUE

Intensity: 1

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Height in minutes

Attunement: No

Effect: A mute person who casts this spell can place a sword or dagger to his mouth (or to the place his mouth should be) and, by tapping the blade, produce words in an unpleasant, droning monotone. Larger weapons deepen the buzzing voice.

This is the only spell in the school of the Jawless that doesn't require blood, the only one that doesn't require attunement, and the only one that has spread outside the company of the Crimson Guard.

RETURN TO THE HEART

Intensity: 1

Casting Time: Three minutes

Duration: Height in hours

Attunement: Yes

Effect: Spilled blood becomes animate and, like water running downhill, flows in a direct line towards the person from whom it was shed. (Not the person who dealt the blow that spattered it, but the person who got hit and bled.) It moves at a rate of twenty feet per round and does not stop until it is lapping at the feet of its source (or the duration expires).





If it hits a barrier, it rushes blindly around, trying to find a way around or through it.

THE BLOOD CALLS FOR RETURN

Intensity: 2

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** Yes

Effect: This spell affects one sword, which must have blood on it. The caster must either be holding that sword, or touch it with his own weapon. When the spell goes into effect, the caster picks one person whose blood is on the sword. That sword gives a +1d bonus on the next strike against that person. (It's as if the blood on the sword is pulling the edge back towards the body from which it issued, showing an uncanny prescience for how the victim moves.)

The spell fails if the sword is cleaned before the strike is made. Multiple castings have no effect.

BLOOD-SENT BLADE

Intensity: 2

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** Yes

Effect: This spell allows the Jawless guard to make one sword attack at any target he can see. He must be holding a bloodied blade in order to do this. When the spell takes effect, the shape of his weapon appears, outlined in blood, beside the target,

and the guard makes his cut. The materialization of the sword can't be counterspelled, but the strike can be blocked or parried as usual.

CARMINE RENDER

Intensity: 2

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Width in minutes or until

killed

Attunement: Yes

Effect: With a few gestures of a bloody sword, the guard summons a flapping, flying, animate, bloody... thing. It moves like an animal, though it lacks eyes or any features beyond vague wings and sharp claws. (Or are they horns? Teeth perhaps?) It's a Threat 4 Unworthy Opponent, immune to Morale Attacks, that can attack or parry. Its attacks do Width+1 Killing damage.







BLOOD BITERS

Intensity: 3

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** Yes

Effect: As the caster gestures with a blood-covered sword, fluttering red creatures detach themselves from the gore and dart over to bite at one human target within a hundred paces. This is an Area 6 Killing attack.

CRIMSON DEFENDERS

Intensity: 3

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Width in hours

Attunement: Yes

Effect: By waving a bloodied sword, the caster summons (or creates – there are different theories) ten small creatures. They usually look like an animate pool of blood, about a foot across. They can slither around on the ground at a human pace (15 feet per combat round). They can't attack, but they can leap up off the ground and impact on weapons. They're quick enough to strike arrows in midair.

The ten globules act as Threat 2 followers that can only Parry. They're immune to Morale Attacks, but easy to kill. Even a single Area Shock Die destroys a Crimson Defender.

RELUCTANT BLADE

Intensity: 3

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Until the targeted weapon

is cleaned

Effect: Instead of casting with his own blade, the enchanter makes gestures with his hand and enchants a sword in the hand of an enemy. (The weapon targeted has to be a single-blade weapon with an edge longer than the gripping surface. Thus it can target any sword and many knives, but not an axe, spear or trident.)

There must be blood on the blade. After the spell takes effect, any rolls made to strike the enchanter with that weapon are at a –1d penalty. Additional castings do not incur additional penalties. The sword's wielder can feel the sword actively pulling against him as he tries to strike the Crimson Guard, as if his weapon has become the limb of a living thing.

SANGUINE PARRY

Intensity: 3

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Width rounds, plus the

casting round.

Attunement: Yes

Effect: Like all spells of its school, Sanguine Parry is evoked with swirling gestures of a bloodied sword. Once the spell goes into effect, the caster gains a free Gobble Die equal to the Height of the casting set. This die can be used to parry with the sword. It can be used any time after the casting is complete. For a number of rounds equal to the Width of the activation set, the effect repeats during the Declare phase. This means that during those rounds, the caster gains that single Gobble Parry Die. It can be applied any time during the round. It does not affect any other actions the caster (or someone else who holds the sword) takes during that round.





THE SORCERER'S GNAWING BLOOD

Intensity: 3

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Until the next time the target rolls Sorcery or Counterspell.

Attunement: Yes

Effect: This spell is completed by a series of complicated sweeping gestures with a bloodied sword. The next time the target casts a spell or makes a Counterspell roll, all the Waste Dice from that roll do Killing damage to the target. (This won't work on a Counterspell that was trying to prevent The Sorcerer's Gnawing Blood from happening in the first place.) Multiple castings do not have additional effect. If the target makes a Sorcery or Counterspell roll in which all the dice turn up in sets, the spell goes off harmlessly. If the target fails the roll, the spell waits until a success. The damage feels like hundreds of tiny mouths chewing on the victim's veins from the inside.

GATE OF CARMINE RENDERS

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Minutes equal Height

Attunement: Yes

Effect: This spell works like Carmine Render, except that in addition to summoning one Render the round the spell goes off, it repeats a number of rounds equal to the Width of the casting roll.

Example: Stalker the Crimson Guard casts
Gate of Carmine Renders with a 3x6
roll. The round she casts the spell, a
Threat 4 flying Render appears to attack her foes. That creature lasts for
six minutes. The next round, while
Stalker can take any other action
she wishes, another Render appears.
This happens every round for four
rounds total. Each one remains for
six minutes.

THIRSTY SWORD

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Width rounds, plus casting

round

Attunement: Yes

Effect: This spell is cast both with and upon the enchanter's bloodied sword. The next time his sword does harm, it does an extra point of Killing damage to the indicated location. After it hits, the bonus damage rises by a point every round until the spell wears off.

Example: Stalker casts Thirsty Sword, getting a 2x5. The next round, she swings but misses. The round after that, she hits with a 2x7. Her sword does an extra point of Killing damage and awakens, moaning and slobbering be fed. If she hits the round after that, it does +2 damage. If it hits the round after that, the bonus is +3. Then the spell wears off. If the sword is activated with a 5x roll, it can get up to a +6 damage bonus on its last round.

Multiple castings have no additional effect.





BLOOD BITER INFESTATION

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** Yes

Effect: This is similar to the spell Blood Biters, but instead of instantly targeting one person with an Area 6 Killing attack, it can target a number of people equal to the Height of the casting roll. (This automatically produces a Morale 3 Attack, as well.)

Like most spells of this school, a bloody sword must be waved about to properly sculpt the flow of occult energy.

CALL FORTH THE BLOOD WORMS

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** Yes

Effect: The caster makes a series of particularly vicious sweeping gestures with an ensanguined blade, and ends by vehemently pointing at one person within a hundred paces. That person takes an Area 8 Killing attack, and the Waste Dice from the Sorcery roll do Shock damage. The Waste Dice are applied last.

The spell operates by transforming part of the targets' blood into small, hungry, eel-like worms. They instinctively chew their way to the surface and crawl out, turning back into shed blood immediately thereafter. It's quite gruesome. Typically there's one central locus for the infesta-

tion, where a huge blossom of them seems to burst out from the skin, but the process of enchantment is slow enough that the polluted blood has time to circulate anywhere in the body before the worms begin their feast.

BLOOD AND BONE FOR THE EMPRESS

Intensity: 9

Casting Time: Nine Hours

Duration: Permanent

Attunement: No

Effect: This is the permanent attunement spell for the Crimson Guard, and it can be cast on another person as well as upon oneself. However, to cast it on someone else, they must willingly acquiesce to the process, which culminates with the removal of the lower mandible. It hurts and it's horrible.

If the spell succeeds, not only is the proud new guardsman inducted into the ranks of the guard, but the removed bone becomes a powerful talisman. Should the bone be deliberately broken, the guard dies. These jawbones can only be broken by a deliberate attempt (though purposefully doing anything that one knows would cause the bone to break counts as 'deliberate'). Furthermore, if the Guardsman dies from some other cause (possibly even old age) the jawbone breaks itself.

This artifact is stored in the tightly protected Hall of Bones, into which only the Empress herself is permitted.



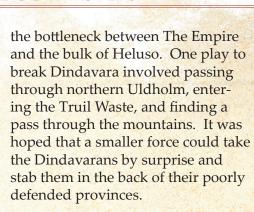
FLAWLESS JAWLESS ATTUNEMENT (5 POINT ADVANTAGE)

The mere process of going through the agonizing attunement rite leaves the wouldbe Crimson Guard with the Gruesome Flaw, along with the headaches of being effectively mute much of the time. There's also the small matter of leaving his life, literally, in the Empress' hands. But beyond the ability to cast the powerful spells of his chosen system, he gains an instinctive command over blood as well—his own as well as others'. The round after someone has taken Killing damage, the Jawless can command the shed blood to return to its proper place. This requires a successful Vigor roll for the Jawless to work the power on himself, or a Heal roll to perform it on another. If the roll succeeds, one point of Killing damage is turned into Shock. This can also be used to relieve the bruising and pooling of Shock damage, in which case the roll removes a point of Shock. This ability can only be used the round after the damage was taken. However, the Jawless can instantly use it on themselves to change damage that would normally kill or knock them out.

IMPERFECT JAWLESS ATTUNEMENT (1 POINT ADVANTAGE)

He who fails to attune perfectly is still hostage to she who holds his jawbone, but without the instinctive blood command of his more perfectly aligned brethren. Needless to say he's still Gruesome, but he can cast Jawless spells.





This Army of the West made its stand in a place the Truils had called "The Valley of Cursed Bones" or "Uilu Kethbeck Fjarn." The valley was a fertile pocket in the middle of the mountains, with two tight passes to the east and west. Breaking through from the west was harder than anticipated, and the Dindavarans were able to fortify the eastern pass before the surprise attack could be pressed. But the eastern pass was just as defensible from the valley, and it became another stalemate. The Dindavarans couldn't afford the commitment of retaking the valley, and the Army of the West wasn't big enough to threaten them outside Fjarn (as the highly defensible land came to be known).

Then the war started to turn against the Empire. The Uldish trade guilds got themselves organized and began pressing the invaders out. The Army of the West was commanded to withdraw and help pacify Uldholm.

At that point, Army of the West's commander considered his options. He could expose himself to the Dindavarans as he withdrew in order to enter a highly uncertain conflict against the Ulds after marching through the Waste in winter... or he could tell the most powerful woman in the world "No."



Domain: Flesh and perfection.

Method: The Bodymasters achieve their effects by physically manipulating bodies, blood and bones.

Associated Skill or Stat: Knowledge

Society and Beliefs: The Bodymasters are a secret conspiracy descended from the most widely despised sect of enchanters, threatening the greatest nation either continent has ever known. Their humble beginnings are entangled with the small nation of Fjarn, which lies along the mountains to the west of Dindavara.

During the great Imperial War, Uldholm was invaded and the Bloodcutters wiped out its royal line. Dindavara, meanwhile, entrenched behind mountains and resisted—the cork in



100

Chapter 2: Bodymasters



He chose "no," judging (correctly, as it turned out) that The Empire had much bigger problems than one officer's revolt. In fact, he just stopped replying to Imperial communications and let the valley of Fjarn be forgotten in the chaos of war. He changed his title from general to king, and made a tentative peace with the Dindavarans and Uldish until the Bloodcutter rebellion. The king of Fjarn had a few Bloodcutter advisors, but he rejected them in the face of Uldish pressure. They fled to the Wastes.

In the Wastes, a group of Truils adopted them and taught them Truil systems of bodyworking. Combining that with their own blood magic practices, they turned away from destruction (well... partially) and towards a pursuit of human perfection.

No one's quite sure what the group that became the Bodymasters were doing in the Waste for a few generations.

No one's quite sure what (if any) connection the Bodymasters still retain to the Truils.

In fact, no one's quite sure whether the Bodymasters even exist. A few investigators have run across puzzling evidence, and some oracles have seen disturbing things in their visions. But the Bodymasters have done an admirable job of keeping themselves safe and secret.

The Bodymasters recruit from the bright and ambitious, promising beauty, health, magic power and physical perfection in return for loyalty to the cabal. Initially, their goal was to undermine and destroy

The Empire, but as the generations have passed, their intentions have softened.

After all, Empresses are known for assembling seraglios of the beautiful, and even those who fail to catch the Empress' eye might get recruited to entertain the Jawless. Thus, the quickest route into the palace, and possibly right up to the throne, is along the gilded path of outrageous loveliness.

Required Knowledge: Heal 3+

MINOR ENERGY Realignmnent

Intensity: 2

Casting Time: Four minutes

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** No

Effect: By handling, massaging and probing a person, the Bodymaster can reallocate a number of Shock damage points equal to the Width of the roll. That is, the Bodymaster can move them from one hit location to another location of her choice.

CONTAGIOUS GRASP

Intensity: 4

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Height in minutes

Attunement: Yes

Effect: The Bodymaster touches the target and causes him to lose a point of Body, Coordination or Sense (whichever is highest) for the duration of the spell. The Bodymaster can cast the spell and then wait to



perform the touch, so it needn't be a multiple action. The contact must be skin-on-skin, however. If the spell is cast multiple times on the same target, the effects are cumulative. It can't reduce a Stat below 1.

MAJOR ENERGY REALIGNMENT

Intensity: 4

Casting Time: Six minutes

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** Yes

Effect: As Minor Energy Realignment, except the Bodymaster can move Height in Shock or Killing damage.

MINOR ENERGY Transfer

Intensity: 4

Casting Time: Six minutes

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** Yes

Effect: This functions like Minor Energy Realignment, except that the Bodymaster can move damage around between two people (one of which can be himself). Thus he could remove two Shock from his own head and put it in someone else's leg. Anyone involved in this process must be handled and manipulated, of course, which means they either have to be willing or fully restrained.

EXALTED MOVEMENT

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Eight hours

Duration: Permanent

Attunement: Yes

Effect: The caster gains an additional point of Coordination. This spell can only be used once, though if its effect is broken somehow, it can be used again. It cannot be used again if the Bodymaster loses a point of Coordination through some agency other than the explicit removal of the Exalted Movement spell.

Learning this spell is usually reserved for those who have demonstrated great personal dedication to the Bodymaster cabal through organization, inspiration or communication.

EXALTED PERCEPTION

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Eight hours

Attunement: Yes

Effect: As Exalted Movement, only it adds a point to the Sense Stat. Exalted Perception is almost never taught, except to those who have advanced the goals of the Bodymasters through guile, stealth or trickery.





EXALTED POWER

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Eight hours

Duration: Permanent

Attunement: Yes

Effect: As Exalted Movement, only it adds a point to the Body Stat. Exalted Power is usually only taught to those who have proven themselves by defending their fellow Bodymasters or their secrets through combat.

FEARFUL IMPACT

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** No

Effect: The caster prepares this spell, and then strikes an object or person. He does not have to do this as a multiple action, but it must be a barehanded strike. In addition to any other damage from the strike roll, the spell does Width+2 Killing and Waste Killing damage, based on the roll that activated the spell.

GENTLE ENERGY ADJUSTMENT

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Seven minutes

Duration: Height in hours

Attunement: No

Effect: By giving a very soothing and pleasant seven minute body massage, the Bodymaster can give the recipient of this spell a Master Die in Vigor for the spell's duration. The caster can't use this spell on himself.

BLOW OF PERFECT VIGOR

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Width in minutes

Attunement: Yes

Effect: To cast this spell, the Bodymaster touches, shoves or strikes someone. It does not have to be skinto-skin contact – just slapping his armor will do it, as long as some tiny bit of the force of the blow communicates through to his body. While the spell is in effect, the target gains a Master Die in Vigor. The enchanter cannot do this on himself, sadly.



Matters of Enchantment



MAJOR ENERGY TRANSFER

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: Eight minutes

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** Yes

Effect: As with Major Energy Realignment, except that it permits transfer between two persons as Minor Energy Transfer.

RINSE ASIDE IMPERFECTION

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: Nine hours

Duration: Permanent **Attunement:** No

Effect: This is the permanent attunement spell for the Bodymasters. It is only taught to those who are accepted into the cabal, and often only after a Corporeal Contract has been signed. There is no temporary attunement for the Bodymasters.

Wicked Energy Transfer

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** Yes

Effect: This spell affects the caster and one other person, and requires the Bodymaster to make skin-to-skin contact, if only for a moment. The Bodymaster can cast this spell and then wait to touch someone, so it doesn't have to be a multiple action.

The caster can transfer a number of Killing points of damage equal to the Width of the spell roll between himself and the other person. This is typically used to heal the Bodymaster and harm the other, but the opposite transfer is equally possible.

CORPOREAL CONTACT

Intensity: 10

Casting Time: Fourteen minutes

Duration: Permanent

Attunement: Yes

Effect: This spell is cast by inking a document with the target's blood, which must be given willingly. The text of the document does not actually matter — typically it's a loyalty pledge to the Bodymasters agreeing to submit to the punishment of the Corporeal Contract should the target ever betray the conspiracy.

If the Bodymasters decide the target has betrayed them (or simply that they're better off with her dead) they can activate the spell with the blood contract. Wherever the target is, in all the world, he's immediately struck with violent internal harm. The spell does Width+2 Killing damage to location 10 every round for a number of rounds equal to Width. It ignores all armor and cannot be counterspelled.



FLAWLESS BODYMASTER ATTUNEMENT (5 POINT ADVANTAGE) a attuned Bodymaster can cast the system's spells with-

An attuned Bodymaster can cast the system's spells without temporary attunement, but perhaps a more meaningful element of the process is the ability to produce, at will, the Bodymaster Sigil. With a minor exertion, a ridge of flesh rises from some point on the sorcerer's body – the forehead is a popular choice, or the sternum, or the back of the hand. (The enchanter picks the spot when he attunes.) This sigil, which looks something like a pictogram made of thick scar tissue, shows membership in the conspiracy. When the enchanter has the benefits of Exalted Perception, the pictogram gains a line underneath it. With Exalted Movement, it gets an inverted semicircle over the top. When Exalted Power is in play, a dot appears to the right of the symbol.

In this fashion, the Bodymasters have a way to recognize each other that is, if not foolproof, certainly very hard to counterfeit. That's an important boon. Many, however, also find the perfection of form a nicer perk.

Perfection of form is a grand way to say that the Bodymaster becomes more pretty (or handsome, or impressive). Those who have the 'Gruesome' Flaw become normal. Those with no appearance Flaw or Advantage gain the 1-point version of the Beauty advantage. Those with 1-point Beauty jump up to the 3-point version, those with the 3-point go to five, while those who began with the 5-point Advantage gain no further mechanical bonus but become truly awe-inspiring. The other advantage to attunement is a permanent +1 increase to Body or Coordination, whichever is lower.

Perfection is fragile, however. Any time a Bodymaster takes damage to a hit location, that location takes an additional point of Shock that ignores armor. This does not apply to Area attacks. Instead, when hit by an Area attack, the Bodymaster adds another die to it, of the appropriate type.

IMPERFECT BODYMASTER ATTUNEMENT (1 POINT ADVANTAGE)

The imperfectly attuned gain neither the Stat boost nor the Beauty of their more favored colleagues. They can, however, manifest the sigil at will and they do still take the extra Shock damage when hit and suffer extra from Area attacks. They also, of course, can cast Bodymaster spells that require attunement whenever they want.



The Bodymasters are a pyramidal hierarchy, with the Sigil serving as a badge of rank. Someone with only the basic Sigil is a Bodymaster, but is expected to defer to the wisdom of any Bodymaster whose Sigil has additional decorations—that is, the dot to the side, the line beneath, or the half-circle above. (These additions to the scar emerge through the use of Exalted Movement, Power and Perception spells, which are typically taught as rewards for good work on the movement's behalf.) Those who gain a mark are considered "Exalted Bodymasters."

Someone who has two additions is superior those with fewer, and warrants the title "Supreme Bodymaster." The very rare few who receive the full compliment of decorations are "Perfected Bodymasters" and it is largely they who set policy for the cabal—as much as anyone can 'set policy' for a far-flung secret organization whose communiqués must be rare to guarantee secrecy.





CHAPTER 3: MAEMECK QUELLERS



Domain: Direct interference with magic.

Method: Quelling is directed through a series of overlapping crescent runes.

Associated Skill or Stat: Knowledge

Society and Beliefs: The Maemeck Book of Judgment takes a very narrow, dim and suspicious view of enchantment. Accordingly, all who practice enchantment are classified as "Undisciplined" in the rigorous Matriarchal structure. They are lower than the laborers who cart dung around the countryside.

This status is mitigated by their use to the military. A queller on the front lines is, if nothing else, very well paid. They are by far the wealthiest of the Undisciplined. Clean, soft hands and a warm bed can ease a lot of the sting when they must defer to a muck-covered peasant.

Only women are permitted to learn the magic of quelling. If a queller should change her caste due to marriage, she is expected to cease practicing the art. This does not always occur. Sometimes, warrior males marry quellers in loveless transactions of mutual benefit. The queller leapfrogs in status and is no longer officially permitted to cast spells. But as long as she keeps it down to protecting herself, her husband, and perhaps a few other officers who look aside and keep the couple deployed together, no one involved complains.

Required Knowledge: None

The only people who respect us are other quellers and foreign magicians.

- Queller Proverb







CARVING NO SHAPE

Intensity: 1

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** No

Effect: To cast this spell, the enchantress needs four runes arranged in a
square. These can be sketched in the
dirt, carved in a wall, or embroidered
on a glove—the form doesn't matter
as long as they're present. When the
spell is cast, everyone within fifty
yards immediately succeeds at an
Eerie roll. Carving No Shape is the
first exercise of the quellers, and is
equivalent to grabbing the strands
of occult force and yanking them
randomly.

Armor Against the Arcane

Intensity: 2

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Width in minutes

Attunement: No

Effect: By painting a simple rune of three crescents on a person's skin (herself or someone else's) the queller casts this spell and grants AR1 against magic damage.

LESSER CIRCLE OF DISTORTION

Intensity: 2

Casting Time: Five minutes

Duration: Hours equal to Height, or

until the runes are broken

Attunement: No

Effect: The queller draws or incises

the runes around the edge of a circle fifty paces across. Anyone inside the circle has AR1 against magic damage. It is possible to cast this spell over pre-carved runes in stone or wood, even if the caster did not personally cut them. The runes must be cut by someone who knows the spell, however.

FLAWLESS QUELLING ATTUNEMENT (5 POINT ADVANTAGE)

To be permanently attuned, and be able to cast the spells that require it at will, a character must be willing to take scars. These occupy one entire hit location—head, arm, somewhere on the body, down the side of a leg or the like. They're distinctive, but not decorative to everyday tastes. They preclude the use of Ironbone runes, of course (since no one could be attuned to both types of magic at once).

As with Ironbone runes, whether the attunement spell fails or not, the chosen hit location takes 2 Killing and 2 Shock damage. The rune is permanent, although the damage heals normally. The glyph can't be removed, changed or 'written over'. If the Queller fails her roll to establish the rune, there's still a big scar on that location. The mark cannot be replaced, nor can another mark be placed on top of it.

In addition to having a series of crescent runes along her shoulder blades, or arcing across her forehead and down her neck, the enchantress gains some meaningful passive protection from magical attack. Specifically, any time she's targeted by a spell, she can apply a Gobble Die to it, set at Height 4. This works just like a Gobble Die arising from Counterspelling, but it can be used at any time, does not need to be rolled for, and can't change Height. (If the queller does use a Counterspell and gets an x4 set, she can't add this Gobble Die to it. It simply represents the snarl of occult forces focused in her body.)

While that mystic knotting provides a decent passive protection (though worthless against big spells like Lupine Curse) it is also a dead giveaway to enchanters nearby. Any time someone casts a spell within a dozen paces of an attuned queller, that caster realizes that they're in the presence of something weird, even if they've never encountered a queller before. If they have run across one, the vibe is distinct enough to be recognized. Therefore, once an enchanter has felt a queller's presence, he can find or detect any queller within a dozen paces simply by making an Eerie roll.



Greater Armor Against the Arcane

Intensity: 4

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Width in minutes

Attunement: No

Effect: As Armor Against the Arcane,

except it's AR2.

LESSER BOILING ARCANE RECOIL

Intensity: 4

Casting Time: Seven minutes

Duration: Width in days

Attunement: No

Effect: Whenever this spell's target is successfully affected by a spell, he suffers an Area Killing Attack equal to the new spell's Intensity. It does not matter if the other spell is helpful or hurtful, cast by himself or others—as long as it is successfully cast and not counterspelled, it does the damage. The new spell still takes effect. The Area Attack ignores physical armor. It can target one visible creature within a hundred paces.

Example: Rino has cursed Baul with Lesser
Boiling Arcane Recoil. That's not
enough, however. Rino casts the
spell on Baul again. Baul fails to
counterspell it and Rino gets a successful set. Now Baul takes 4 dice of
Area Killing damage. If Rino manages to cast it on Baul a third time,
Baul would take 8d of damage, since
each of the two Lesser Boiling Arcane
Recoils would attack him as the third
took effect.

MAGE'S INSULT

Intensity: 4

Casting Time: Eight hours

Duration: Permanent

Attunement: Yes

Effect: By painting or drawing a lengthy set of runes upon the flesh of an enchanter, the queller can permanently remove the mystical effects of an attunement ritual. (Any physical effects or transformations remain, however.) Thus, the afflicted enchanter has to use temporary attunement to cast the spells he was accustomed to using. (He can now use spells of other schools, however.) It is possible to permanently re-attune, but attunement to a different school than the one that was "de-attuned" cannot be achieved.

QUELLING EDGE

Intensity: 4

Casting Time: Six minutes

Duration: Height in hours

Attunement: No

Effect: This spell is cast by sketching a trio of crescent runes on a weapon. (Despite the name, the weapon needn't be edged.) While enchanted, the weapon ignores up to 4AR that's provided by magic. It does not penetrate mundane armor, however.





IMPENETRABLE ARMOR AGAINST THE ARCANE

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Slow 3

Duration: Hours equal to Width

Attunement: Yes

Effect: By painting or drawing a rune of five crescents on herself, the matriarch gains AR 2 against magical damage. In addition, she reserves the set used to activate the spell as Gobble Dice, which she can apply at any time of her choosing to a spell aimed at her. She can use these Gobble Dice in addition to any other actions she takes. This spell cannot be cast on another person.

MARKED BY NULLITY

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Nine hours

Duration: Permanent **Attunement:** No

Effect: This is the permanent attunement spell for quellers. There is no temporary attunement. Those who want to cast those Boiling Arcane Recoils need to be willing to spend the better part of a day cutting scars into themselves. (This is a very loose definition of 'better' part.)

GREATER CIRCLE OF DISTORTION

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: Nine minutes

Duration: Hours equal to Height, or

until the runes are broken

Attunement: Yes

Effect: As Lesser Circle of Distortion,

except that it provides AR3.

INFINITE BOILING ARCANE RECOIL

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: ten hours

Duration: Forever **Attunement:** Yes

Effect: As the Lesser version, except it's permanent and ignores all armor.

IMPERFECT QUELLING ATTUNEMENT (1 POINT ADVANTAGE)

The good news is, an imperfect quelling attunement allows one to cast all quelling spells at will. The bad news is, in addition to the scars described above, it makes the attuned queller really unpleasant for enchanters to be around. The effect doesn't affect other quellers (luckily) but any other person with a Sorcery skill of 1 or higher, or an Eerie skill of 2 or more, finds it unpleasant to be within ten paces of the queller. (One particularly sensitive enchanter described it thus: "Imagine having an ugly man with bad breath standing too close, licking his finger and sticking it in your ear while shouting 'IS THIS ANNOYING? DOES THIS BOTHER YOU?' over and over.") This mostly has the effect of the Gruesome flaw. In addition, this queller can be detected just like a perfectly attuned one, only out to a hundred paces.



THE SPELL SNAPS

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** No

Effect: This spell can target one visible person or object within a hundred paces. The sorcerer sketches four crescent glyphs on some surface and waves it at the target. If successfully cast, all spells functioning on that person or item instantly cease.

MAGIC'S MARTYR

Intensity: 7

Casting Time: Thirteen hours

Duration: Permanent

Attunement: No

Effect: First and foremost, anyone who attempts to cast this spell dies. Even if the spell fails, the energies involved are too great for any human (or other creature, as far as is known) to survive. The spell, which involves drawing hundreds of runes, permanently snarls and entangles the arcane energies in a large regionabout a square mile. Forever after (if the spell succeeds) all spells cast in that area are at a +6 Difficulty. This combines with the spell's Intensity, so any spell of Intensity 5 or above is simply not possible within the field of distortion. Enchanters who try to ply their craft in such a space describe it in various ways—"like trying to breathe thin air" or "like struggling against plaint but infinitely heavy bonds."

The Matriarchy has set up a surprisingly large number of "negative zones" along the Imperial Border. Their central fortress at Stagshead is completely surrounded by them. It should be noted that casting a spell into such a zone from outside it is not impaired, however—and Stagshead itself has clear access to magic.

TOMB OF ENCHANTMENT

Intensity: 9

Casting Time: Twelve minutes

Duration: Width in hours

Attunement: Yes

Effect: To cast this spell, the sorcerer sketches a series of glyphs in a circle about three paces across around herself. When the spell begins, all enchantment within the circle ends and, in fact, becomes impossible. The circle doubles in diameter every round—so, the first round it's the three paces around the caster, next round it's six paces, and so forth. It expands until it's about a mile across (a dozen rounds or so).

While the spell is in effect, no one in its radius can cast a spell, and all lasting effects (except the Tomb of Enchantment, of course) go into abeyance. When the spell ends, permanent effects return. Spells can be cast from outside the Tomb into it—but they cannot target the spell creating the area. Note that each casting of Tomb of Enchantment precludes a further casting of it there, so even a skilled queller trying to maintain a Tomb indefinitely is never going to get out in front of the twelve minutes needed to cast it.

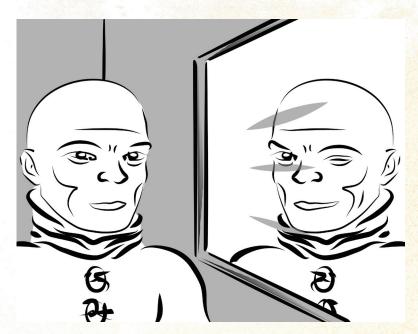




As soon as Tomb of Enchantment goes into effect, anyone in the radius with even a single point in the Eerie Skill knows things have gone perfectly metaphysically flat. No roll is required. The feeling of arcane deadness is one that has reduced unprepared enchanters to tears and whimpering.







Domain: Reflection, image and duplication.

Method: Mirror magicians cast their spells by looking at the reflections of persons or objects.

Associated Skill or Stat: Command

Society and Beliefs: The origins of mirror magic are mysterious, with multiple explanations floating around. Some say it was a gift from the Opetkan god of the Present, given to his priests to show them how things might have been other than the way they are. Others say it's just something else that the Kuklach let slip from their fingers (alongside the authority to rule and the respect of the military). There's even a story that it was practiced by the peasants of a conquered people who used it to trick and deceive their conquerors. (If that's the case, those people

seem to be gone—either killed or so firmly assimilated that they have no separate culture.)

The past doesn't matter much to the mirror magi of today. There is a School where it's taught, though even most magi themselves don't know where it's located. (Under great duress, they admit that they entered it through underground reflecting pools, but that it seemed to be in the middle of a trackless wood.) Anyone can apply to the School, if they can identify a mirror mage and ask admittance. (This is not easy.) The School admits who it chooses, teaches them what the staff think they deserve to know, and then lets them go about their business. Now and again, however, agents of the School approach alumni to make very firm requests of money, effort or advice. Usually effort, usually in the form of dangerous espionage missions.

That is, in the end, what the School is: The main trunk of the feared Opetkan spy apparatus. They use mundane agents as well, but everyone who goes to the School understands that forever after, be they priest or warrior or even Kuklach, their loyalties must be divided between their lot in life and their duties to their teachers.

Required Knowledge: None





GRIFTER'S GOLD

Intensity: 1

Casting Time: Five hours **Duration:** Width in hours

Attunement: No

Effect: This spell targets one small object—something that the caster can lift one-handed without any sort of Body roll—and duplicates it. The spell requires a reflecting surface, against which the object must be touched to complete the enchantment. While the temporary object lasts, it cannot be distinguished from the original, except that the copy is reversed from left to right as oriented when touched to the mirror. (Thus, if you duplicated a crown that was missing a gem on the left side, the duplicate would be missing that gem on the right side.) Enchanted objects perform the same enchantments. Something like a featureless gold bar cannot be distinguished from the original gold bar. The exception is that all duplicated items are perceptible as enchanted if examined with a simple Eerie success. But if you duplicate a featureless enchanted item, there may be no way to tell which is real. Until the spell wears off, of course.

In The Empire and the Heluso Confederacy, knowing this spell is punishable by public blinding.

IMAGOES

Many spells in this school create temporary creatures called "imagoes" which resemble the caster or some person that the caster has seen reflected in a mirror. Unless otherwise noted in a spell description, imagoes share some common traits. First off, they're physical reversals of the person they duplicate. If you have a scar on your left hand and a mole on your right cheek, your image has a scar on his right and a mole on his left. Secondly, imagoes tend to be fragile. If they take even a single point of Shock or Killing damage, they shatter into a small pile of glass fragments that blows away within a day. Thirdly, imagoes do not age, they cannot learn new Skills, improve their Stats, or gain Esoteric Disciplines and Martial Techniques. If they're the intelligent type of imago, they can remember events that happened to them after being created, however. Any attempt to transform an imago into another shape wears off after about 2-20 minutes. Unless otherwise noted, imagoes have one point in every Stat and one point in every Skill their original possessed. Most imagoes cannot cast spells. They do not cast shadows or reflections, either.





REFLECTIVE GUARDIAN

Intensity: 2

Casting Time: Four minutes

Duration: Ten hours

Attunement: No

Effect: To cast this spell, the enchanter needs to be able to see himself or someone else in a reflecting surface a mirror, a calm pool of water or the like. Casting the spell creates an imago that duplicates the original's Sense Stat and all its Sense Skills. It possesses a Master Die in the original's native language, but is devoid of any creativity or initiative. It can't attack, dodge, parry, or accomplish any tasks more complicated than reciting a message, washing dishes or building a fire. (If the reflected source didn't know how to build a fire, the imago couldn't even do that.) However, Reflective Guardians are created at the peak of alertness and they never get tired or bored, making them superb sentries. Typically, the caster creates one (or several) and sets them to work guarding a perimeter while he rests inside it.

MARTIAL MIRROR

Intensity: 3

Casting Time: Slow 4

Duration: Height in minutes

Attunement: No

Effect: Up to twenty people that the caster can see reflected on the last round of casting are duplicated as Unworthy Opponents. They have Threat 2, or 3 if they were equipped when they were copied. They are speechless and quite stupid, but obey

the verbal commands of the caster. They can be targeted with Morale Attacks but their Threat cannot be improved beyond 3 if they're equipped. If they show up with Threat 2 and the caster has weapons to give them, they can rise to Threat 3, but never higher.

GLASS DIPLOMAT

Intensity: 4

Casting Time: Nine hours

Duration: Until target dies

Attunement: No

Effect: This spell requires a circular pool of quicksilver at least ten feet across and a half-inch deep. (This costs at least Wealth 5 to procure, if it's available at all.) At the end of the spell, the mercury coalesces into an imago of the caster.

The imago has all the caster's Knowledge, Sense, Charm and Command Stats and Skills, but has absolutely no fear of death. It possesses one wound box, and one point each in Body and Coordination. It doesn't age and, while it can learn facts and remember new information, it can't improve Skills or Stats, nor learn Esoteric Disciplines or Martial Techniques. It can be enchanted, just as the caster can. Its personality is that of its creator. It can cast spells like its creator, but has no reflection of its own and cannot in any way create imagoes of itself.

Typically, Glass Diplomats are sent into situations where spying or negotiating are desirable, but risky. Note that there is no innate supernatural communication between caster and Diplomat. If you create one and send it off to talk tough to the Truils, you



have no way of knowing if it succeeded or failed or was destroyed en route until word reaches you through some other means.

Glass Diplomats cease to exist upon the creator's death, with one very important exception. If a Glass Diplomat succeeds in killing its creator (or arranging her death) the Diplomat becomes permanent. It still can't learn or age, it doesn't gain a reflection, but it can then continue its existence until destroyed. Whether any given Diplomat tries to exercise this option depends entirely (of course) on its caster's personality. But all Glass Diplomats instinctively know they can become "the real one" in this fashion.

NEMESIS

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** No

Effect: To cast this spell, one needs a Captivating Mirror (see below). The caster looks at an image in the mirror (either one from the past or one that is occurring right at that moment) and the mirror shatters as an imago of one reflected person emerges. This imago has all the Stats, Skills, wound boxes, knowledge, Disciplines and Techniques of the person reflected. (Any enchanted items, however, are duplicated as mundane copies.) The nemesis imago is obsessed with the drive to kill its original. Unlike most imagoes, it can cast spells if its original knows them. It needs to sleep and eat like a normal person, and it has no arcane intuition for where

its original is, but given its personal knowledge it can often figure it out. The nemesis is under no compulsion to obey or respect the magician who created it and, given the typically bad relations between the caster and any person he wishes to create an expensive assassin for, the nemesis may well attempt to kill the enchanter... but only if he's confident he can get away with it and that it won't impede his quest to kill his original.

With the death of the original, the nemesis shatters.

CAPTIVATING MIRROR

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: Eleven hours

Duration: Permanent **Attunement:** No

Effect: To cast this spell the enchanter needs to possess a flawless oval mirror, at least six feet tall and three feet wide. It must be made of glass, crystal, silver, gold or polished hematite. Such an item costs Wealth 5 in a large and cosmopolitan city, more elsewhere.

When the mirror has been enchanted, anyone who stands before it and speaks a certain phrase (set during the mirror's enchantment) can see the last ten reflections that passed before the mirror. Essentially, it's like the mirror has eyes and can show what someone could have seen if standing where the mirror is. The viewer can silently watch what was done, skipping ahead or going back as desired. (Still images are not possible, however.) It's a popular spell with spies and voyeurs.





Secrets, treachery,
manipulation by the basest
of ploys... as Illinister of
Information, these were my tools,
but none more than deception. I
have been asked how it was that
I was never meaningfully misled,
deceived or used. I don't know.
Perhaps I was and just never found
out. But unlike most who were
made into others' puppets, I know
I never believed myself more clever
than those around me.

- From "The Secret

Journals of a Man

who Wasn't"

THE STOLEN IMAGE

Intensity: 8

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Permanent, until mirror is

broken

Attunement: No

Effect: Casting this spell requires a small silver mirror framed with black pearls. (This will set someone back Wealth 4 in a well-traveled seaside city, potentially much higher in areas far from deep water—if black pearls are available at any price.)

To cast it, the enchanter has to look at the target's reflection in the mirror. If the spell is successful, the reflection remains trapped there—the target no longer casts any reflection until the spell ends with the breaking of the mirror.

The caged reflection knows everything that the target knows at the time the spell is cast, and must truthfully answer any question asked by someone touching the mirror. It can lie by omission if it wishes, but must tell only the truth and nothing but. It should be noted that a Stolen Image provides powerful protection against other mirror magics (such as Nemesis) and many mirror magi cast this on themselves for just that reason. Keeping the mirror close or well protected is always a concern, of course.



Chapter 5: Ussient Fire Mimicky





Domain: The qualities of flame, such as heat, light, destructive transformation and contagion.

Method: Fire mimics shape wood or flesh into animal patterns that channel magic into a desired configuration.

Associated Skill or Stat: Knowledge. The patterns do not only need to be shaped correctly, they must be understood correctly. Furthermore, most of the spells require an appropriately shaped object to hold the power. When made of wood, these fetishes are constructed with Expert: Carpenter. When the power is to be moved through a human body, the shapes are scars raised with Expert: Cicatrization.

Society and Beliefs: In the giant trees of the Ussient forest, fire is dangerous, particularly in au-

tumn. While the Ussient tribes use it as all civilized people do, (that is, for light, warmth, cooking and the death of enemies) they take much greater care with it. Living on vertical surfaces, the upward spread of a fire can encompass an Ussient settlement with greater speed than it could consume a more traditional, horizontal village.

Because it does not require attunement, fire mimicry's lesser spells are fairly well-known and widespread, but the spells of greater Intensity are often held as proprietary knowledge by one tree or another -- or even of Shade Lodges or Sisterhoods within a tree's population. Most of these cabals are conservative about to their culture to the point of being reactionary. Their ideology may be entirely parochial, or it may translate to a wider Ussient loyalty against outside assault. Some of these cliques traveled far to defend Briess against the Ironbones. Others closer-by watched with detached and studied unconcern.

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CHAPTER 5: USSIENT FIRE MIMICKY



LIGHT FROM SHADOW

Intensity: 1

Casting Time: Slow 2

Duration: Width Hours

Attunement: No

Effect: This common spell is cast upon a talisman made from a forked branch, carved into the shape of a diving sundarter bird. When the spell succeeds, the branch emits a fairly bright light, about equivalent to an oil lamp or a torch. Casters whose Sorcery Skill is two or higher can choose a color for the flame, as can any caster with Eerie or Counterspell at four or greater.

WINTER BRAND

Intensity: 1

Casting Time: Three minutes

Duration: Height in hours

Attunement: No

Effect: The focus for the Winter Brand is a carved cat-shaped charm roughly the size of a small dinner plate.

When enchanted, it begins to produce a penetrating warmth that, if not moved, gradually spreads out about five feet from it. The cat slowly crumbles into ash as the enchantment runs its course, but while it can create a comforting warmth, at no point does it get hot enough to boil water or even ignite a dry autumn leaf.

THIS LITTLE HEARTH

Intensity: 1

Casting Time: Five minutes

Duration: Width in hours

Attunement: No

Effect: This spell requires a talisman in the shape of a squirrel. Furthermore, to cast the spell the talisman has to be treated like an unlit fire in the process of ignition, that is, the caster must put tinder on it and strike sparks into it, and then blow on it and keep it shielded from wind and water. When successfully cast, the spell produces the warmth and glow of a small cook fire, and while it can roast meat and boil water, it will not ignite flammables.

NAKED IN WINTER

Intensity: 2

Casting Time: Five minutes

Duration: Width in days

Attunement: No

Effect: With a successful Expert: Cicatrization roll, the caster (or someone else who knows the spell) can put a mouse-shaped talisman scar on himself or someone else. As with Ironbone runes, this occupies a single hit location, can't be "written over" by other scars, and requires two points of Killing and two points of Shock damage when first applied. If the location carrying the scar is ever filled with Killing damage, the scar stops working permanently and cannot be fixed. But barring that circumstance, it's like all talismans, and once established it can be used over and over. The spell can only be cast, however,

TO COLOR

CHAPTER 5: USSIENT FIRE MIMICKY

by the person scarred, and it only affects himself.

When in effect, the character feels warm and suffers no ill effects from cold, no matter how bitter and intense.



Talsimans and Charms

Many Ussient spells require carved wooden implements, known as "talismans," before they can be cast. Talismans must be prepared with a successful Coordination+Carpentry roll. Once created, however, it can be used over and over again without requiring another Carpentry roll. However, no matter how skilled a woodworker is, he cannot make a talisman for a spell he does not know. (All talismans have minor differences, to account for variances in wood grain and exact shape.) Casters can use one another's talismans. however. If Drien knows Light From Shadow and successfully carves a forked stick talisman for it, Huisse can cast Light From Shadow on that stick instead of carving one of her own.

Some spells, rather than using talismans, use charms. Charms require a preparatory Carpentry roll just like Talismans, the carver needs to understand the spell and other people can use the charm once it's made. The difference is that charms cannot be used more than once. Even if they are not physically destroyed by the spell, they are unsuitable for re-enchantment.

SCALDING CLUB

Intensity: 2

Casting Time: Seven hours

Duration: Forever **Attunement:** No

Effect: The scalding club is the signature weapon of the Urutu tree's brotherhood of enchantment, the Nameless Arisen. They are extremely proprietary of both the clubs and the the spell that creates them, but more so of the latter. Someone who steals a scalding club will be chased to the ends of the Ussient Forest. Someone who manages to run off with the secret of making them would be pursued to the ends of the world.

All scalding clubs are in the stylized shape of a rearing horse. Once carved and enchanted, does an extra point of Killing damage with each strike. It must be prepared as a talisman before it can be ensorcelled. While they are typically light clubs, a few of the Nameless Arisen prefer the reach and impact of larger weapons.

The damage is caused to flesh only, and takes the form of singeing, puckering and cooking. It cannot start a fire but can sting with just a touch. They're typically kept in leather sheathes to prevent accidental injury.





Chapter 5: Ussient Fire Mimicky



THE SHAPE OF LIGHT

Intensity: 2

Casting Time: Six hours

Duration: Forever **Attunement:** No

Effect: This is much like the spell Light From Shadow, except for casting time and duration. The talisman takes the form of a coiled serpent: Some casters wear them like crowns at night. Once it is created, it cannot be dimmed except by damaging the frame. Anyone who knows the spell can, however, use it to change the color of the light from the talisman.

FLAME'S APPETITE

Intensity: 3

Casting Time: Five minutes

Duration: Height in hours

Attunement: No

Effect: This spell allows the caster to selectively destroy unmoving combustible matter, in quantities up to her own body weight. She must touch the object to be altered, and it disintegrates into ash, smoke, or both at about the rate of one pound per round. Mostly useless in a fight, the spell can dissolve ropes, remove barriers (as long as they aren't metal) or cut through a branch upon which someone stands.

More inventive uses of Flame's Appetite include producing gouts of smoke on demand or destroying evidence. The most common use is shaping wood through precise dissolving with no tools required.

TO ASH AND SMOKE

Intensity: 3

Casting Time: Seven minutes

Duration: Width in days

Attunement: No

Effect: This spell makes use of a charm, usually a weapon. The carved design is an embossed triangular bird symbol, so it can be put on nearly any surface. Arrows are the most common choice, though leaden sling pellets, blocks on the end of flails and even the knuckles of mailed fists have also been enchanted to great effect. The first time the weapon strikes after enchantment, its Waste Dice do Killing damage, ignoring armor, as the carved rune releases a magic charge that courses through flesh, causing eruptions of black lesions on the target as his flesh turns to smoke and ash.

CRAWLING LIGHT

Intensity: 4

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: See Below

Attunement: No

Effect: This spell is based upon a carved charm in the shape of an insect. Smashing the charm against the ground or some other nearby surface is part of the casting attempt, so the charm is destroyed whether the spell succeeds or fails. If it succeeds, a heatless light spreads out over about ten square feet of surface. It radiates out from the broken charm, illuminating everything solid it touches. (Human beings lit up can attempt Counterspell rolls to shake the light off of themselves.)

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CHAPTER 5: USSIENT FIRE MIMICKY

The caster can douse the light whenever she chooses, or change its color with any successful Knowledge+Sorcery roll. Otherwise, it begins to randomly spread.

Every round, the spell rolls a pool, initially equal to the caster's Sorcery pool. If the glow's roll fails to produce a set, it goes out. If it gets a set of Height 3 or less, it spreads Width square feet in a random direction and its pool doesn't change. If it gets a set of Height 4 or more, it spreads Height square feet in a random direction and rolls another die in its pool on the next turn. If it gets multiple sets, it can use them all. However, its pool can never exceed ten dice, and no matter how big the glow grows, it fades out after an hour.

SCARFOOT'S KICK

Intensity: 4

Casting Time: Seven hours

Duration: Forever **Attunement:** No

Effect: The Scarfoot Lodge are known for their fierce loyalty to one another and to their home tree, and when one considers the tribulations undergone to join their number, their attitude is no surprise. To join Scarfoot Lodge, one must master this spell and at least attempt it.

To cast the spell, the enchanter wreathes one of his own feet in an elaborate pattern of scars (requiring a successful Expert: Cicatrization roll). The scar is in the form of the Ussient carnivorous monkey, the "chunk-biter." The damage is not merely cosmetic: That limb permanently loses one wound box, giving most Scarfoots their traditional limp.

Once the scars are graven, membership is complete, and some of the Lodge's most famed members had no magical powers in their mangled limbs. But those who cast the spell correctly gain a horrifying ability. If they kick someone with their limb, hard enough to do damage after any armor reduction, the location damaged loses a wound box forever and manifests a thick web of scars as well.

BEAR'S RAMPAGE

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Ten hours

Duration: Instant **Attunement:** No

Effect: This spell is cast on a bear-charm roughly the size of a fist. Once enchanted, the caster can release its deadly enchantment any time she chooses. When the opts to release the spell, it begins producing Area 5 Killing attacks. The diameter of the attack's effect is equal to five feet times the activation set's Height. It repeats its effect for a number of rounds equal to the Width of the activation roll.

Example: Master enchantress Kiennis creates a Bear's Rampage charm with a MD-powered 3x6 set. When she activates it, everyone within 30 feet of the cube takes an Area 5 Killing attack. The cube produces a total of four such attacks before disintegrating — one at the base, and another three because it was made with a 3x roll.

Those damaged by a Bear's Rampage have random pieces of their flesh erupt as smoke, leaving deep, pitted holes in their skin. If you squint and use your imagination, they look like tooth marks.



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CHAPTER 5: USSIENT FIRE MIMICKY



UNCANNY CRAWL

Intensity: 5

Casting Time: Combative Duration: Width in minutes

Attunement: No

Effect: This spell is a closely kept secret of Those Who Change the Secret Light, a mystic sect whose membership is private, mysterious, and prone to meddle in the politics of other tribes. Though they most often interfere to the benefit of their home tree, their arrogance is legendary and they often steal, blackmail, spy and betray in pursuit of what they consider the most just and ethical outcome. Unusually for most Ussient residents, even the protective lodges, Those Who Change the Secret Light are known to be active outside the boundaries of the forest.

As the name portends, Uncanny Crawl is odd to behold and difficult even to describe. The caster changes form. She ceases to be an object occupying space and becomes something like a moving shadow on a wall. Just as a fire, when lit, can crawl and move from surface to surface, so can the enchanter. She moves at a running pace over, along or underneath barriers. She can flow through cracks and small holes or travel along a length of thread that wouldn't support the weight of a bird.

Moreover, while in this altered state, the enchanter cannot be harmed by weapons or injured by any enchantment that would not quench a fire. The only real barrier to her travel is that she cannot cross liquids.

The charm for this spell is shaped like a beetle and is carved at smaller than life size.

BURNING DART

Intensity: 6

Casting Time: Combative

Duration: Instant

Attunement: No

Effect: This charm-based spell once again ensorcels a weapon (which may provide a sad commentary on the priorities of the Ussient peoples). In this case, it's a dart-tip or arrowhead in the shape of a predatory fish native to Ussient rivers, the worm-dart. The projectile can be made beforehand, but once the spell is cast on it, it must be fired immediately. Otherwise, it simply disintegrates. But if it strikes an enemy within three rounds of being enchanted, its magic burrows deep into the target, in a slow and excruciating fashion.

When it hits, the arrow or spearhead does an extra point of Killing damage. It then does one additional point of Killing damage to that location for a number of rounds equal to the Height of the casting set. This damage cannot be counterspelled, and it happens at the beginning of the round. With a successful Healing roll, the tip can be pulled out, however. This "treatment" requires the target to remove any armor over the affected limb and then do nothing on the round in which the healer tries to get it out. If the healer succeeds, the tip stops damaging the original target, but does a point of Killing damage to each of the healer's hands.

These are often used for hunting big game, especially when one is armed with a hornbow that can get through (say) a grizzly's tough flesh and matted fur.



ONE-ROLL TOOLS

CHAPTER 1: ONE-ROLL TRUILS

n Dindavara, social mobility is so rare that it's bizarre. In Uldholm, it's a key cultural tenet, but one more commonly believedin than experienced. In the Truil Wastes, there are people on top and people on bottom, leaders and followers, but the distance between them is far less than it is in more civilized lands. There are no high queens and princes living in ivory palaces at the apex. By the same token, there are no helpless beggars at the nadir. A grown Truil who can't take care of himself doesn't last long, unless some capable person (or family) is pulling his weight in addition to their own.

The lowliest Truil has the right to speak up and be heard, even if his foolishness or weakness ensure that his words won't carry much weight. The mightiest leader of the strongest clan in the most powerful tribe still has to dig his own toilet.

But while social class is narrower in the Wastes than elsewhere, there are important divisions and distinctions. Clan, family and tribe are all central identities, sources of succor and rivalry in equal measure. Too, while most Truils practice a variety of skills or trades, there is nevertheless specialization due to preference or talent. A Heartsinger behaves

very differently from a respected elder or a hunter and scout. The Truil custom of fostering children between different groups to build trust adds yet another dimension to the complexity. But among them all, fine grades of title are scorned.

BACKGROUND

2x1 Blue Face: +1 BODY, +3 Vigor, +1 Endurance, +1 Athletics

3x1 +2 Run, +2 Expert: Throw, +1 Fight

4x1 +2 Athletics, Upgrade Fight die to ED, +2 Parry

5x1 Upgrade Parry die to ED, +2 Expert: Throw, +2 Endurance

2x2 Night Hunter: +1 COORDINATION, +3+ED Stealth

3x2 +ED Dodge, +2 Fight, +1 Sight

4x2 +2 Student: Wilderness, +2 Climb, *First level of a Stealth path*

5x2 Second and third levels of Stealth path

2x3 Mountain Rider: + 3 Ride, +2 Expert: Animal Trainer, +5 Animal Companion

3x3 +2 Parry, +2 Fight, First level of a Mounted Combat path

4x3 +1 SENSE

5x3 Second and third level of Mounted Combat path

2x4 Archer: +1 BODY, +3 Bow, +2 Item

3x4 +1 COORDINATION

4x4 +ED Bow, +1 Stealth, +1 Sight, +1 Listen

5x4 Change Bow ED to MD

2x5 Front Fighter: +1 COORDINATION, +2 Axe, +2 Dodge, First level of an Axe path



CHAPTER 1: ONE-ROLL TRUILS



3x5 +ED Axe, +1 Dodge, Second level of Axe path

4x5 Upgrade Axe ED to MD

5x5 +1 Dodge, First level of a Dodge path, Third level of Axe path

2x6 Elder or Elder's Aide: +1 KNOWLEDGE, +3 Lore, +2 Languages

3x6 +2 Graces, +1 Lore, +2 Haggle

4x6 +2 Languages, +1 Lore, +1 Haggle, +1 Student:

5x6+1 Heal, +1 Language, +1 Expert: +1 Sorcery, +1 Spells

2x7 Healer: +1 KNOWLEDGE, +4 Heal, *First level of a Heal path*

3x7 Second and third levels of Heal path

4x7 +1 Heal, Fourth level of Heal path

5x7 Fifth level of Heal path

2x8 Priest or Priestess: +1 SENSE, +1+ED Sorcery, +2 *Spells*

3x8 +1 Sorcery, +1 Lore, +3 Spells

4x8 +1 Sorcery, +1 Eerie, +3 Spells

5x8 +1 Sorcery, +1 Eerie, +1 Counterspell, +2 *Spells*

2x9 Heartsinger: +1 COMMAND, +2 Inspire, +2 Perform, +1 Intimidate

3x9 +2 Graces, +1 Language, +2 Fascinate

4x9 +2 Haggle, +1 Inspire, +1 Perform, +1
Beauty

5x9 +1 Fascinate, +1 Language, +2 Jest, +1 Student:

2x10 Leader: +1 CHARM, +3 Tactics, +2 *Followers*

3x10 +ED Tactics, First level of a Tactics path, +1 Followers, +1 Wealth

4x10 +1 Graces, +1 Fascinate, +1 Intimidate, +1 *Followers*, +1 *Wealth*

5x10 *Second level of Tactics path,* +1 Item, +1 Followers, +1 Wealth

EVENTS

1 Had a Child that Did Not Survive.

Since that tragedy, every other pain seems to pale in comparison. How did it happen? Who was the other parent, and what was his (or her) fate? *Leather Hard*

2 Oathbreaker. Truil culture doesn't have a lot of respect for those who use guile and subterfuge. That means, of course, that many of them aren't accustomed to skepticism. What promise did you break? You feel bad about that? Did you get caught? +3 Lie, +2 Stealth

3 Exiled for a Year in the Darkness. What was your crime? Have you been accepted back? How did you survive on your own? +1 Stealth, +2 Student: Wilderness, +2 *Animal Companion*

4 Killed a Dindavaran Noble. Presumably everyone admires you for this feat. How did it come about? +2 Axe, +3 *Item*

5 Learned Foreign Swordplay. Who taught you fancy fencing, and why? +3+ED Sword

6 Forbidden Love. Just what was forbidden about it? Was she an outlander? Married? In an enemy clan? Was it ever resolved, or is she still out there pining? +3 in one Language, +2 Lie

7 Mother Was Ill for a Long Time. You tended to her, of course. It was your duty. You practiced some entertainment to pass the time, and you paid close attention to what the healer was doing. Did she recover? +3 Heal, +2 Perform

8 Secret Blasphemer. Which infidel faith? How were you exposed to it? What are they going to do to you if

CHAPTER 1: ONE-ROLL TRUILS

they find out? Or were you discovered already? Do you still believe or have you renounced your heresy? +2 Sorcery, +3 *Spells*

9 Firebrand. You can pull a pretty good speech out of your mouth, which is why you've been punched there a few times by people who disagreed but couldn't quite construct a logical counter-argument. What are your beliefs, and why are you so passionate about them? +4 Inspire, Hard Headed

10 Traveled to Strange Lands.

There's good stuff out there. How'd you get yours? +1 *Followers*, +2 *Wealth*, +2 *Item*

EXAMPLE

The UPC from my first published novel is 99379 10090 9, which works out to 1, 3, 7, 5x9, 3x10

5x9 Heartsinger: +1 COMMAND, +3 Inspire, +3 Perform, +1 Intimidate

+2 Graces, +2 Language, +3 Fascinate +2 Haggle, +1 *Beauty*, +2 Jest, +1 Student:

3x10 Leader: +1 CHARM, +3+ED Tactics, +3 Followers, First level of a Tactics path, +1 Wealth

1 Had a Child that Did Not Survive: Leather Hard

3 Exiled for a Year in the Darkness:+1 Stealth, +2 Student: Wilderness, +2 Animal Companion

7 Mother Was Ill for a Long Time: +3 Heal, +2 Perform

Kromtoch has always been a respectful child, a dutiful son and an obedient tribesman. His tightly-knit family was strained by his mother's illness, but he did everything he could to try to restore her health. When that failed, he did what he could to distract her from her pain.

The loveliness of his voice was hard to miss, and he was taught the arts of performing to entertain, and speaking to fire the will of warriors for combat. As a Heartsinger, he was respected and liked. He married a woman named Rull, had a son, and was happy until the Uldish settlers arrived.

Inspired by his tales of greatness, his tribe attacked the interlopers, seizing their grain and burning their homes. It was a great success and it brought his tribe much honor.

Then, by night, the Stormtongues came. Kromtoch isn't sure how many there were. They swept down from above, lightning pouring from their mouths, igniting the Truils' tents just as the Truils had burned the settlers' cabins. His son died that night.

Pausing only to sing the reversal of his child's name into its dead form, Kromtoch fled into the forest. He stayed there for a year, mad with grief, until Rull found him. The tribe needed him, she said. The settlers were back and the chief was dead. When he returned, he spoke to the people and he shocked them. He counseled negotiation with the intruders. Not acquiescence, but understanding and pursuit of some way to share the land. Otherwise, the path to the future would be paved with dead sons.



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CHAPTER 1: ONE-ROLL TRUILS



Half the tribe called him a coward and departed, obeying the previous chief's angry young daughter. The rest have followed him since. Kromtoch has walked the razor's edge with his small band, speaking to the foreigners when it's possible but still showing force when the Ulds become aggressive or arrogant. So far, it's worked. But there's a new garrison commander in the region, a sorceress. By chance, Kromtoch has learned she was one who flew over his family that fateful night.



BODY 2	COORDINATION 2	SENSE 2
	Stealth 1	
KNOWLEDGE 2	COMMAND 3	CHARM 3
Language: Uldish 1	Inspire 3	Graces 2
Language: Dind. 1	Perform 5	Fascinate 3
Student: Construction 1	Intimidate 1	Jest 2
Tactics 3+ED	Haggle 2	

Followers 3: He has fifteen Threat 2 adults who accept his guidance. There are assorted children, elders and others in the tribe who can't fight, but these fifteen are the ones who get things done.

Wealth 1

Heal 3

Student: Wilderness 2

Tactics Discipline: Basic Mobility

Beauty 1

Leather Hard

Animal Companion 2: A brown bear he rescued as a cub. It's Threat 4 and does Killing damage.



CHAPTER 2: ONE-ROLL ULDS





the unskilled, or people who are just good at jobs that have no Guild to represent them. Furthermore, social mobility cuts both ways. For every scrappy, hardworking kid saving pennies and climbing the ladder, there's a tired middle-aged Guildsman who did something unpopular with his fellows, sliding down towards poverty.

he characters from Uldholm can come from a broad variety of backgrounds. Since the ejection of the Empire and the social revolution of the Guilds, people of quality are now those who are qualified. There's a degree of social mobility that's simply not present in Dindavara or most of the Empire. True, peasants in those nations can attain great influence, especially if they're willing to make fortunes doing things the gentility consider beneath them. But breaking through to the upper crust is nearly impossible in those monarchies. In Uldholm, it's not only possible for a beggar to join the Ruling Council, just about anyone could tell you how it would be done.

That's not to say there isn't an underclass. Oh, there is, and given the governing myth of ability, there's not much pity for the poor,

BACKGROUND

2x1 Medic: +1 KNOWLEDGE, +1 Vigor, +3 Heal, +1 Lore

3x1 Apothecary: Upgrade one Heal die to ED, +1 Lore, +1 Eerie, +1 Sorcery, +1 *Spells*

4x1 Physician: +1 Inspire, +1 Fascinate, +1 Athletics, +1 Ride, +1 Counterspell

5x1 Master Healer: Upgrade Heal ED to MD

2x2 Busker: +1 CHARM, +1+ED Perform, +1 Fascinate, +1 Language

3x2 Musician: +1 Graces, +1 Lie, First two levels of a Perform path

4x2 Player: +1 Language, +1 Beauty, Third Perform path level

5x2 Bard: Upgrade Perform ED to

2x3 Guard: +1 BODY, +1 Fight, +3 Parry, +1 Intimidate

3x3 Bodyguard: +2 Heal, +1 Sight, +1 Sword, *First level of a Parry path*

4x3 Personal Protector: +1 Sword, +1

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CHAPTER 2: ONE-ROLL ULDS



Expert: Throw, +1 Athletics, Second level of Parry path

5x3 Expert Defender: Upgrade a Parry die to an ED, +1 Sword, +2 Expert: Throw, +1 Athletics

2x4 Haggler: +1 COMMAND, +3 Haggle, +1 Plead, +1 *Followers*

3x4 Bargainer: +1 Inspire, +1 Intimidate, +1 Lie, +1 Language, +1 *Wealth*

4x4 Merchant: First two levels of a Haggle path, First level of a Plead path, +1 Followers

5x4 Entrepreneur: +2 Plead, +2 *Possession*, +1 *Wealth*

2x5 Lookout: +1 SENSE, +1 Sight, +2 Listen, +1 Direction, +1 Bow

3x5 Scout: +1 Endurance, +1 Bow, +1 Run, Upgrade Sight die to ED, +1 Stealth

4x5 Trailblazer: +1 Direction, +1 Listen, +1 Eerie, +2 Counterspell

5x5 Explorer: Upgrade Sight ED to MD

2x6 Gossip: +1 CHARM, +3 Stealth, +2 Lie

3x6 Rumormonger: +2 Run, +2 Dodge, +1 Listen

4x6 Character Assassin: +ED Stealth, +2 Climb, +1 Lie

5x6 Spy: Upgrade Stealth ED to MD

2x7 Flame Dance Apprentice: +1 COORDINATION, +2 Perform, +2 Sorcery, +1 *Spells*

3x7 Expert Sorcerer: +ED Sorcery, +3 *Spells*

4x7 Moves in Fiery Glory: Flame Dance Full Attunement

5x7 Master Enchanter: Upgrade Sorcery ED to MD

2x8 Thug: +1 BODY, +2 Fight, +1

Parry, +2 Counterspell

3x8 Enforcer: +1 Fight, +1 Dodge, +2 Intimidate, +1 Athletics

4x8 Mercenary: +1 SENSE

5x8 Hardened Sell-Sword: +ED Fight, +2 Vigor, +1 Tactics

2x9 Trainee Sword-Bait: +1 COORDINATION, +2 Tactics, +1 Dodge, +1 Spear

3x9 Soldier: +ED Dodge, +2 Vigor, *First level of a Dodge path*

4x9 Veteran: +ED Spear, First two levels of a Spear path

5x9 Squad Commander: +1+ED Tactics, +1 Inspire, *First level of a Tactics path*

2x10 Cultivator Functionary: +1 COMMAND, +1 Student: Agriculture, +2 Inspire, +2 Fascinate

3x10 Agricultural Politician: +1 Ride, +1 Followers, +1 Wealth, +1 Patron, +1 Status

4x10 Among the Guild Elite: +1 *Possession,* +1 *Followers,* +1 *Wealth,* +1 *Patron,* +1 *Status*

5x10 Power Monger: +1 Lie, +1 Followers, +1 Wealth, +1 Patron, +1 Status

EVENTS

1 Lengthy Illness. You were sick a long time, having long conversations with someone who was trying to restore you. What was the illness? The treatment? What symptoms did you have? Were there books you read, which made a particular impression? Or is your lore a set of stories from a wise elder?: +2 Heal, +3 Lore

2 Ridiculously Fair. No way around it, you're a stunner. How many have been wracked by longing for you?

CHAPTER 2: ONE-ROLL ULDS

Lots. Probably a few you don't know about. Were you always radiant, or did was it some sudden transformation?: +5 *Beauty*

- 3 Studied with a Master. Were you training to be a soldier or a mercenary, is the art you learned passed down from father to son, or did you meet a sword master some other way?: +2+ED Sword, First level of a Sword path
- 4 Raided an Ancient Temple. Presumably there was an encrypted map, traps, deadly riddles, treachery on the part of your companions, and at least one attack by a mass of pestilential vermin. Whose temple was it? Are you sure their cult is wiped out?: +2 Climb, +3 *Possession*
- **5 Incident in the Woods.** Strange things happen out there, you know: +2 Counterspell, 3 points of *Animal Companion(s)*
- 6 Political Imbroglio. Someone's reputation got tarnished, or somebody's perks got stepped on, or someone's corruption was inconveniently outed. What was your role? Were you the crusader for truth, or a co-defendant who managed to get off with a slap on the wrist? Was it a guild matter, something between two guilds, a city or family or national matter? All of the above?: +2 Lie, +3 Stealth
- 7 **Stormtongue Dropout.** You had potential, and you picked up a few tricks here and there, but you just couldn't go the distance. Why did you fail?: +1 Eerie, +1 Counterspell, +1 Sorcery, +2 *Spells*
- 8 Violent Childhood. Unfortunately, a lot of your dinners started with glares and ended with shouted in-

sults and flung crockery. If you were *lucky*. When it got bad, the whole lot of you might wind up rolling out into the street, punching and biting: +3 Fight, +1 Expert: Throw, +1 Dodge

- 9 Dancer Mother, Poacher Father. Was your mother a Flame Dancer, or just a mundane performer? As for your game-grabbing pappy, was he poor, dishonest, or slumming?: +1 COORDINATION
- 10 Privileged Upbringing. You've always had servants, poor cousins and younger schoolchildren nearby to boss around. You're used to presenting your opinions forcefully: +1 COMMAND

EXAMPLE

The local blood center's number is 18007864483, so that turns into 1,3,4,4,7,7,8,8,8,10,10 and the character has the following fate.

2x4 Haggler: +1 COMMAND, +3 Haggle, +1 Plead, +1 *Followers*

2x7 Flame Dance Apprentice: +1 COORDINATION, +2 Perform, +2 Sorcery, +1 *Spells*

3x8 Enforcer: +1 BODY, +3 Fight, +1 Parry, +2 Counterspell, +1 Dodge, +2 Intimidate, +1 Athletics

2x10 Cultivator Functionary: +1 COMMAND, +1 Student: Agriculture, +2 Inspire, +2 Fascinate

1 Lengthy Illness: +2 Heal, +3 Lore

3 Studied with a Master: +2+ED Sword, First level of a Sword path

Let's start with the somewhat stodgier elements — experience as a merchant and with the powerful Cultiva-



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CHAPTER 2: ONE-ROLL ULDS



tor's Guild. I picture this character as a woman (for whatever reason), and Wilf seems a good name. Wilf's mother is in the Merchant's Guild and her father is a Cultivator. Her parents married for political convenience. They are polite and distant, but they live in different cities and only visit each other once or twice a year. Growing up, Wilf secretly wished her parents were less sophisticated and, instead, loved one another. That hidden resentment soured her on their lives of quiet power-mongering. She wanted adventure and, to their horror, tried to join a company of sell-swords. They had little use for her, especially if taking on a vulnerable and unskilled girl meant risking the wrath of her connected parents.

As a compromise, her parents let her study to be a Flame Dancer, figuring that the intense study would break her resolve. It did, though not before she picked up some tricks. When she quit, however, she didn't run home. She ran away, this time talking up her abilities to gain a place in a poorer mercenary force. Being flung in way over her head, she had to learn fast, and she did — right up to the point that a bad injury left her

unable to flee the field with the rest of her "friends." It took her hours to pull herself off the battlefield on broken legs, and by the time she did her wounds were so filthy that infection was inevitable.

Lucky for her, she was rescued by a traveler who was trying to find the very Truils who'd demolished her body. Returning from the frontier, she apprenticed herself to a master swordsman — a Dindavaran diplomat. When her parents finally tracked her down, they were appalled by her connection to the foreigner, and she made it worse by falsely intimating that her mentor was also her lover. That was a misstep: Her parents united to get him squeezed out of his position and sent home in disgrace. In the process, they found evidence that he'd only been using her as an espionage asset. She told them she didn't believe it (though she did) and said she'd rather be a traitor than surrender her love.

She was shocked when they disowned her.

BODY 2

Fight 3Sorcery 2 Parry 1 Athletics 1

KNOWLEDGE 2

Counterspell 2 Student (Agriculture) 1 Lore 3 Intimidate 2 Heal 2 Inspire 2

COORDINATION 2

Dodge 1 Sword 2+ED

COMMAND 3

Haggle 3 Perform 2

SENSE 2

CHARM 3

Plead 1 Fascinate 2

Followers 1: She decides this is a trio of Threat 3 servants – they're lightly armed but utterly loyal, having practically raised her from childhood.

Sword Path 1: Pure Commencement

Spells 1: Ignite and Fiery Nimbus





REIGN RECIPES

BUT WHAT DOES ONE DO WITH IT?



This is the question I get, now and again, about *REIGN*. "I love the world," someone says, or "I love the mechanics, but..." (More often than I like there's that 'but.') Then the question. Or, to quote Lisa Padol...

Lisa Padol Asks...

"Is there any material out on Reign covering not the world - which is gorgeous and I really love it - but covering what kinds of sessions one runs?"

Lisa, there is now.

THE RECIPE APPROACH

This article offers campaign options, broken down into digestible chunks, like items on a menu. As the chef, I think everything on there's good, but I recognize that not everyone can eat everything. There's a sense that because something came out in a supplement, it's part of the rules and as a GM you're obligated to know it, never mind that your PCs are all cerebral masterminds and the rules are for down 'n' dirty combat. Let me free you! You don't

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IMPERIAL HARLOTS



need to use everything, so you don't need to know everything. I've got a fairly long mini-game for storms at sea. Do you need that if seafaring isn't a big piece of your game? Hell no!

Each of the recipes offers a different focus and, while they're all in *REIGN*'s setting, they don't all need every rule. Look through 'em, see what appeals, and when you pick one you can focus on what you need and ignore material that might end up as dead weight.

IMPERIAL HARLOTS

(Five Ministers, Twelve Months, and One Empire in Crisis)

The premise of Imperial Harlots is pretty simple. The Empress can't do everything and doesn't want to. The real power lies with the ministers who advise her and attend to the details that make The Empire run. The PCs are those ministers.

This game is played entirely at the Company level. There's no need for individual character sheets, as nothing's going to threaten them personally (though it may not always look that way). I've run it at conventions as a single session game, though I've never gotten all the way through the events suggested. The dice don't hit the table that often, because the players have to cooperate in order to accomplish anything.

Focus

Maximum power, applied at the highest of levels. This is a good one to run for players who couldn't care less

about intricately choreographed combats, but who love to discuss, debate and persuade in-character. Its rules are undemanding and few rolls are required. What it does need is a GM who relishes thinking on her feet and reacting dramatically when the PCs run roughshod over events. No one in the setting is shod more roughly than these characters.

INGREDIENTS

Chapter Four of *REIGN* (pages 129-161), along with the sections on the Third and Final Nations (pages 163-175 and 229-247) and the big box on page 323.



In a typical *REIGN* game, the actions of the PCs give bonus dice (or penalties) to relevant company rolls. In *Imperial Harlots*, that doesn't happen. First off, without real character sheets, it's difficult to resolve many uncertain actions on the individual level. But more importantly, The Empire has such swollen Qualities already that more dice would get excessive.

No such restriction lies on the rival companies, particularly at the beginning. The Strange Bedfellows are a little bit of a deus ex machina to get events cooking. Therefore, some of their actions get significant help.

I originally created Imperial Harlots as a one-off to give players a gentle intro to the Company rules. I think it still does that pretty well.



The same

Imperial Harlots

ARC

In conventions, I assigned each of five ministers to the players. Each of the five makes final decisions for applying one Quality. They are...

Mique Nurim, Tender of the Vales. She controls The Empire's Territory.

Radiance Rosewood, Trustee of the Embroidered Placket. She's in charge of Treasure.

Will, Master of the Colors. Why no last name? He's The Empress' son. He doesn't need one. He allocates Might.

Fox, Steward of Viands. Another prince, this one is crafty and subtle. His understanding of (and therefore, power over) the nation's Sovereignty is unmatched.

Chance Smithson, Imperial Minister for Protocol and Covert Assassinations. He typically leaves the last three words off his title. As you'd guess, he handles Influence.

If your group is bigger than five, you can add politicians with input and reduce the absolute authority of each of the original characters: Instead of having final veto power on what their Quality does, they vote along with everyone else and decide in the case of ties.

If, on the other hand, you don't have five, let the players you have pick which character they want. (In conventions, I did this by letting them choose based solely on the characters' innocuous titles.) You, the GM, can run the remaining ministers but make them wishy-washy. With GMCs that

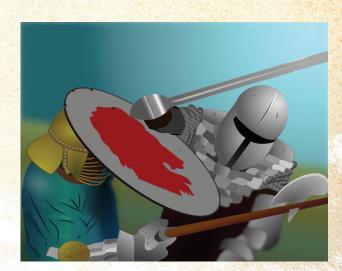
involved, the temptation to steer the game towards what you think is cool can be very strong. Resist it. You can pitch up some devil's advocate arguments if things seem boring, but in the end, the GMCs should go with the consensus. If everyone else wants to use Might for a pre-emptive strike on the western front and your GMC denies it, they're going to feel railroaded.

Act One

When the game opens (in Firstmonth), there are four major issues nagging at the ministers. Most obviously, there's the war.

Hoping to reclaim one of its former vassal states, The Empire engineered a war with the Maemeck Matriarchy on its eastern border.

The plan was to conquer them, use their mountains as a staging ground for an Opetkan invasion and, in the end, get access to sea trade—the one financial element The Empire lacks. But the plan went badly off schedule when the Maemeck handed The Empire defeat after stinging defeat. Its been a stalemate for years now.





Imperial Harlots





THE RIVAL COMPANIES

The Strange Bedfellows: Might 4, Territory 4, Influence 4, Treasure 4, Sovereignty 5

Pahar Insurgents: Might 1, Territory 1, Influence 3, Treasure 3, Sovereignty 4

Maemeck Matriarchy: Might 4, Territory 4, Influence 3, Treasure 3, Sovereignty 4

Dove's Knights: Might 2, Territory 1, Influence 3, Treasure 3, Sovereignty 2

Dindavara: Might 5, Territory 5, Influence 3, Treasure 4, Sovereignty 4

Uldholm: Might 4, Territory 5, Influence 5, Treasure 5, Sovereignty 3

Pahar: Might 3, Territory 3, Influence 3, Treasure 3, Sovereignty 2



Far away, on the other side of The Empire, Dindavara stirs. A new ruler has united its squabbling provinces and there is much fear that they are soon to strike out in conquest. These fears are well-grounded.

All these military threats and problems are a drain on the treasury, of course. Furthermore, while The Empire has always been rich with graft, it is now showing signs of actually rotting from it. The Empire has money, but the layers of bureaucracy and the depth of malignant self interest keep The Empire from using anything but a fraction of its resources.

The final issue arises from within. The Pahar nation has been in The Empire

since its inception, but has remained culturally and racially distinct. There is now grumbling that they ought to be politically distinct as well. The Pahar feel neglected, like they're suckling last teat behind the other four nations, and unlike the other four they're quite forward about saying so.

The first act (which can take a single session, or a couple sessions, or only a couple hours, depending on your group) mainly consists of establishing these problems, discussing solutions, and prioritizing resources. That's the first month.

Unbeknownst to the PCs, there's a cancer growing in the very bosom of The Empire. A conspiracy against the Empress' life is poised to strike. It has no name in the game, but for convenience, I call it the Strange Bedfellows. It's a short term company that dissolves as soon as the Empress is attacked. It is composed of Maemeck spies, Pahar zealots, and Dove's Knights.

Dove's Knights are a group of spoiled and ruthless nobles who have endeared themselves the heiress to the throne, Princess Dove. Tired of waiting for her mother to die so they can be the powers behind the throne, they decide to give nature a hand by helping assassins into the palace. Does Dove know what actions are being taken on her behalf? I've always left that ambiguous.

In any event, they bide their time in Firstmonth. So do the Maemecks. They're just gathering their strength and waiting for The Empire to convulse with a succession crisis.



THE SOL

IMPERIAL HARLOTS

Firstmonth

Strange Bedfellows hide if The Empire is conducting counter-espionage sweeps: 8d vs. Influence+Sovereignty. Successful sets become Gobble Dice. Then they prepare for their strike, rolling 8+MD (or 6+MD if they had to hide from spyhunters) vs. Influence+Territory. If they fail outright, they've revealed themselves. If they succeed, they get a +1d bonus when they try their assassination next month.

Maemecks build their army: 8d, Difficulty 4

Plantingmonth

Strange Bedfellows resist dispersal, if The Empire is aware of them and tries it. In this they roll 8d vs. Might+Sovereignty, with the Bedfellows' set gobbling. Then they try to kill the Empress, rolling anywhere between 9d (if they made their roll last month and strike from complete surprise) and 6d (if they blew it the month previous and had to run around hiding from The Empire this month). Whatever they roll, it's against The Empire's Might+Sovereignty. It's the players' choice whether The Empire tries to prevent the killing, or catch the conspirators when they're actually inside the palace. (This determines whether their Might+Sovereignty contest against the assassins is Gobble Dice or a simple dynamic contest.) Regardless of how the mission plays out, the Strange Bedfellows try to escape afterwards with two fewer dice (so, 7-4d). If they get away, they dissolve back into their individual Companies—Dove's Knights, the Maemeck Matriarchy and the Pahar Insurgency.

Act Two

If the Empress is killed (which has been set up to be very, very, very likely) the entire Empire suffers a -1 Sovereignty penalty as the shocking news spreads that the Crimson Guard failed, that the Empress is no more and (rumor has it) the new Empress had a hand in it.

The PCs have a free hand for their actions, for a little while. After that, their enemies swing back into action.

Threemonth

Dove (probably) takes the throne. The rival Companies can react to the PCs' decisions or attempt to grow their own strength, as the GM thinks apt.

Fourmonth

This is about how long it takes for confirmation of the assassination to reach the Maemeck border. They counterattack The Empire, hoping to strike while they're in disarray.

Maemeck attack: 7-8d vs. Might+Territory.

Angermonth

The last of the Dindavaran Oathbound dies. The Ulds are panicking. The Dindavaran ambassador obliquely discusses an alliance with The Empire against the Ulds. The Uldish ambassador indicates that the Dindavarans approached them with an offer of a similar alliance against The Empire.

None of the rivals have scripted actions, but behave as the GM sees fit.





STOP, THIEF! (FRAUD PAYS BETTER)



Fruitingmonth

Did the PCs find out who was really responsible for the assassination (or attempt)? If they did not, a consensus emerges from beneath. Certain security officers take it upon themselves to frame the Dindavarans, and this becomes the accepted public version of events. No scripted actions, since much depends on how the PCs reacted to the Strange Bedfellows.

Harvestmonth

If the Dindavarans were successfully framed by anyone other than the PCs, The Empire has -1 Sovereignty for the month. Otherwise, all Companies act freely.

Fallingmonth

Have the PCs destroyed the Pahar Insurgency yet? If they haven't, it succeeds and the Nation of Pahar secedes. This reduces The Empire's Sovereignty and Influence by one each, permanently. (Even if they quash the rebellion, there's going to be a large drain on the goodwill needed for good intel and stability.)

Chillingmonth

Unless persuaded that there's no need, the Dindavarans start massing troops in Danifa, on the Imperial border.

Dindavara defends: 10d

Act Three

At this stage, there's not much point in providing a script. The PCs' actions against one or all enemies has presumably thrown two continents into turmoil. (By this point in playtests, the PCs had often destroyed at least one country.) Let events take any course that seems reasonable for the next

two months (Winterlock and Dyingmonth). My notes for the last month of the year say that unless things are different, the Maemecks fortify and the Dindavarans invade. But the odds are, things are very different.

STOP, THIEF! (FRAUD PAYS BETTER)

From the height of Imperial decadence, we plunge to the depths of Uldish scumbaggery. The PCs are all unguilded criminals in a major Uldish city, trying to stay one step ahead of their victims, the soldiers, and any guilds they've defrauded. This one plays out without any Company action whatsoever. It could be a good introduction to the setting and system without worrying about the sweeping details, or it could be a break between world-beater games. Alternately, by the end, the PCs could have cobbled together a Company of their own, setting them up for a sequel campaign.

FOCUS

The center of this is trickery, mistrust and the delicate question of honor among thieves. Maybe the PCs form a tight group who only trust each other. Maybe the machinations between different PCs become the focus of the game. It works either way, but both options work best if you know which it is early. If you don't determine it before the game starts, keep an eye out to see which way it's tending.





STOP, THIEF! (FRAUD PAYS BETTER)

INGREDIENTS

Familiarize yourself with the "First Nation" chapter in REIGN, on pages 61-73. You also need the pursuit and evasion rules (starting on page 66). The simplified combat rules from page 201 in REIGN are also recommended, and I'll tell you why. If the mechanics focus on hiding and escaping, that's what the players do. Typically, a REIGN combat is almost a mini-game of its own, with various maneuvers and tactics coming into play. In this scenario, the mini-game that gets the attention is the cat and mouse element of running. This can be a pretty big shift, so make sure to get your players on board.

ARC

The city of Lumcrof is a crossroads in a fertile valley. It's on a main thoroughfare between the capital at Ulfnacht and the Heluso Confederacy. It's also the gateway to the largest settlements near the Lightless Jungle. All these factors mean that a lot of valuable goods are moving through Lumcrof-gold and foreign treasures from the Confederacy, finely wrought Uldish statuary and jewelry heading to the Confederacy, plus rare plants and animals poached from the jungle heading all over the nation.

The powers that be in Lumcrof are the Cultivators' Guild (as

always) and the Guild of Miners and Gemcutters. The Bankers and Soldiers are both poorly represented, since the pulls of the jungle frontier in one direction and the capital city in the other tend to seem more fruitful places for those guilds to ply their trades. This means that the city has a relative paucity of armed officials, coupled with a lot of loose wealth moving around. It is an ideal climate for crime.

The PCs are criminals, a gang with no Followers allowed and no starting Wealth above 2. Burglary, blackmail and smuggling are their stock in trade, and business is... fine. But they'd like it to be better. If they have Patrons or Social Status, it probably comes from connections to the Guild of Traffickers, who are reliable buyers for goods that fell off a cart (or, more likely, off someone's bedside table and into a PC's purse). If nothing else, a few cunning Traffickers recognize that acting as fences makes them less likely to be hijacked.

Act One

For the first session, you need to establish the PCs' identities, how they know and interact with one another, and their plans to steal the Sulderholm Diamond from the local governor.

Governor Bittenrecht is a fat, lazy regional boss who used to belong to the Guild of Weavers and Woodcarvers. He got his position through compromise. (No one in the Farmers or the Miners was adamantly against him, though none were enthusiastically in favor, either.) He has lined his own pockets extensively at the public's expense, but neither group is willing to take a stand against him for fear of putting a rival in his place. They'd





Stop, Thief! (Fraud Pays Better)



rather deal with 'corrupt but neutral' than cope with someone who hates them and is, probably, just as greedy and unethical.

His daughter is getting married and, as part of her dowry, Bittenrecht has purchased the Sulderholm Diamond, which is roughly the size of a sparrow's egg and horrifically valuable. Formerly kept in a fiendishly well-guarded private estate, it is now just sitting somewhere in Bittenrecht's house. Sure, he hired mercenary guards and has soldiers patrolling the streets, but the plain fact is, that diamond isn't going to be more exposed any time soon. Set up the house as you want, but keep in mind the em-

phasis on chase and pursuit. Give the Governor a skilled majordomo whose follower guards use bulk tactics, and maybe a canny and perceptive sage—a Javert for their Valjeans. Some things to consider during the heist are...

- If there's a fight, work on subduing the character instead of killing, and try to communicate that killing guards is going to invite severe reprisals.
- Be prepared for characters to get captured, which means be prepared to have other PCs go to the rescue. The Governor doesn't exactly have an oubliette in his house, so most likely any captives are getting tied up in the attic with

Would You Like Omniscience With That?

The game ought to kick off with all the PCs trying to steal the big diamond and either getting in one another's way or cooperating on the fly. The question is, how to arrange this so that it maximizes fun? The answer differs—greatly—from group to group.

Some groups prefer open gaming where they know what the other characters are doing at all times. They like the story and may cheerfully participate in their own character's humiliation if it makes a good scene. If you've got a group like that, you can pretty much present it as the starting conditions of the game that, "Each of you is, separately or as part of a team with other PCs, trying to steal a diamond from the governor. What's your plan?"

Other players prefer for surprises to their characters to also be surprising to the player. They feel that the game is cheapened when there aren't one-on-one private GM consults and secret notes passing across the table. The farthest extreme in that direction is to separately inform each player about the diamond as if the knowledge is unique to their character, so that it's really awkward when they all try to grab it simultaneously.

I'm not going to say only one method works, because both work. Like carnivores and herbivores, some gamers just digest material differently. I do suggest that a single method is more likely to work well for your group, that you figure out which one you want, and that you communicate the choice clearly to all players. That way you're giving them the diet they want and they know what's on the menu.





STOP, THIEF! (FRAUD PAYS BETTER)

a few household servants keeping watch.

- Motivate the characters to work together, if they aren't already. Be as contrived as you want. Really! Stack the events to force them into each others' arms if necessary. A first session forgives a lot more railroading than a later one. Whatever you do is likely to be less rigid than "You're all drinking in a tavern when a guy with a map comes up..."
- Maybe one of the thieves runs into the daughter and they fall in love at first sight. Hey, it could happen.

Running around the house and cutting capers can be a fine session one. Once they're all out of the house, the main question becomes: Did they get the jewel? If they got it, then the next adventure is fencing it and splitting up the take. Some possibilities with this include:

- Other thieves trying to re-steal it.
- Finding a fence who can handle action this heavy.
- Evading the governor's guards nd thief-takers.
- Dealing with a trickster who claims to have the jewel, planning to bilk the Governor out of its 'ransom.'

Alternately, they may escape without the payout. Are they going to try for it again, against increased security? Are there other criminals who are upset that the PCs angered the Governor, maybe upset enough to be out for blood? The answers to those can nicely fill out a second session.

Act Two

The diamond maguffin gets the group together with a bang. But regardless of whether they get it or not, the second act can find them. The second maguffin is a treasure map.

If they got the diamond, they find a guy who can handle some fraction of its value. His name's Jold and he's from the Sages and Enchanters Guild. Rather than gold, however, he offers tools in trade: One-use magic charms with fairly powerful spells (Intensity 4-6, cast by Experts or Masters) or perpetual magic items with Intensity

"AND LOVE... True Love..."

If you've got a PC ensnared with 'love at first sight with the intended bride' you can branch off into all kinds of cool territory. Her intended is a swine, he's exploring avenues of premarital infidelity and, as it happens, is an excellent swordsman with at least an MD in Dodge. PCs may come up with fake identities with which to woo her, but her daddy isn't going to be impressed long term without a serious outlay of cash. Where to get the money? How to go legit? Oh, if only there was some kind of hidden temple to legally ransack...



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Stop, Thief! (Fraud Pays Better)



1-2 spells on them. He's got a little bit of gold to go with it, but he sweetens the deal: He has the map to a hidden temple. The Sulderholm diamond was just one of the treasures that was looted from it decades ago, and to the best of his knowledge, no one has been back since. As part of the deal, he's willing to give them the map.

If they *didn't* get the diamond, set up some pressure. The Governor wants to know who violated his home and he's putting on pressure in every direction. Lumcrof is suddenly a very uncomfortable place for them to be. Motivate them to take a vacation, and when they're motivated, have Jold show up with his map, looking for some bold folks to accompany him on an expedition.

Of course, the temple is deep in the Lightless Jungle, so after sneaking out of town, the PCs are going to wind up in pitch black thick foliage, dealing with mutant enchanters who recognize them as the hated "lightbearers." If Jold's with them, he's mostly a load — he has a spell or two, but he's not attuned and is more geared towards helping them forward with information, rather than fricasseeing enemies. Make it clear that the PCs are outnumbered and outgunned, so it's going to be more exciting run and hide action until they reach the heavily trapped temple, where Jold attempts to betray them and either steal the loot himself or convince a PC or two to rip off the others.

On the other hand, if Jold just sold them the map and didn't go with them, he has (of course) made his own copy and is mounting a counter-expedition. Can the PCs track and chase him, dissuade his followers, get there first or lead the natives to his camp instead of theirs? ("How do you say 'why don't you two fight' in Jungle Mutant?")

Act Three

As with the transition from Acts One to Two, there's a fork in the road: Either they succeeded in looting the temple of some or all of its jewel-encrusted goodies, or they came back empty handed.

Empty-handed is clearly a bummer option. By this point, it's quite possible that events have built up sufficient momentum and there are plots enough for them to pursue. Maybe they found other valuable things in the forest (glowing birds fetch a good price on the open market, and poisons and drugs made from jungle plants command even more coin on the black). Maybe they stumbled across a secret Imperial forward camp, preparing to invade. (But who would believe the word of thieves?) Maybe they rescued a tribesman or two, and now have weird mutant sidekicks. (Or, if a PC snuffs it in the temple, those mutant sidekicks can become PCs. I bet you know exactly which of your players would really dig being the last survivor of a proud warrior tribe, don't you?)

But if *none* of those appeal, there's a tidy plot branch that can bring things nicely full circle. Turns out, while the PCs were in the bush, the bride got *kidnapped!* The Governor and the jerky fiancé are equal parts desperate and clueless, but with their underworld contacts, the PCs can find out which crime lord has imprisoned her at his stronghold in the barren hills. It

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You're On My-yi-yi Ocean

would be a tough job for the Governor to assault the place, but since he's unlikely to take the word of the PCs, the best course is probably just to rescue her themselves and rely on her father's gratitude to erase past indiscretions. (Jerky fiancé may or may not pursue them in order to steal their thunder and/or get tricked into fighting the Big Bad to the death while the PCs make off with the girl and any valuables they see lying around.)

If the PCs did loot the temple, they can return, buy themselves plush fake identities and start a Company. If the temple was a sufficient climax, you can close the arc and (if you want) start a new one where they use their newfound resources to muscle in on the Lumcrof underworld. Or you could run any of the stuff from the failed temple raid, only adding (1) the advantage that they're now filthy rich and (2) the disadvantage that a powerful tribe of jungle weirdos is so enraged by the desecration that they've followed the PCs into the light in order to get bloody revenge and reclaim their treasures.

Your on My-yi-yi Ocean

(Rum, Nostoviol and the Lash)

The PCs are an Ob-lob family with a decent sized fleet, and their basic role is "scourge of the seas." Operating from a base in the Ruhini Delta, they take ships, terrorize smaller settlements, do black-bag mercenary work for all three of the delta cities (who hate them, but hate one another more), drink rum and engage in the copious sexual hijinks for which Ob-lob sailors are justly famed.

FOCUS

There's no abstract, profound philosophy behind this one, unless it's, "Yo ho ho, I'm awesome!" This is a straightforward game of thrilling naval encounters, crafty battles, robbery on the high seas, and smugly looking down on those who work for a living. Essentially, it's the Beastie Boys song "Rhymin' an' Stealin" in fantasy RPG format.

INGREDIENTS

For this, you need *Die, Men!* from page 98, *Work For Your Lives!* from page 120, the Company rules from Chapter 4 in *REIGN*, most of Supplement 4 and a good chunk of Supplement 5. That's a lot of cultural material to digest, so if your players are new to *REIGN* you may want to find a way to break it to them gradually. Leaving out all the other supplements, keeping their access to foreign magic minimal and considering the simplified combat from page 201 in the main rule book are all ideas to consider as well.

ARC

The Nguzi delta is hot, moist, full of insects, thick with crocodiles and snakes and plants that look almost like carrots except they make you violently ill if you eat them. Nonetheless, compared to the barren dirt of the desert, it offers some serious advantages. Especially if you're a well-armed and insular group of Ob-lob pirates. First off, it's fertile enough that you can garden with minimal effort.





Secondly, it's contested ground, with three powerful cities constantly vying for more of that prime growing land. Okay, that's something of a backhanded advantage, since armed troops of all three cities periodically try to find the Ob-lob base and wipe it out. But the Ob-lobs are definitely lower on the hit list than the armed troops of other cities, so it's not impossible to play them against each other.

Thirdly, it offers access to the sea, specifically to the well-trafficked Upunzi sea lanes (and the less-active ones to Kiqwani). A fast Ob-lob ship can overtake a laden merchantman and, with no need to carry the food and water stores for a month-long journey, disgorge more fighters than any ocean merchant can carry.

So the Ob-lob pirate life is pretty good. Sneak into one of the big cities every now and then to find out about expected arrivals or departures, buy any supplies you need, take them back to the settlement, seize a freighter, use the money to buy more ships and supplies... simple.

Simple until it all goes to hell.

Act One

Once the characters have developed their Company and characters, start them with the ocean wind in their faces, and a fat Upunzi merchant ship on the horizon, steadily growing fatter. Their quarry is on the way to Muhulc, and the gossip is that the captain's greedy. That means the ship's over-laden and slow, stacked with mid-grade incense and Ruhini spices. Probably lightly guarded too, since every defender would not only

occupy storage space, but so would his food. It looks like a cakewalk and the PCs are just about to dive into it. Except, when they get close, the ship spins and comes in to ram, and there's a man at the front, spreading his wings and shouting lightning. (He's a stormtongue, as described in *REIGN*.)

The whole thing was a setup. The ship is just a ship, though more reinforced than a normal merchant craft. It has several sorcerers aboard (of whatever type tickles your fancy) and a cargo of sea-trained Upunzine soldiers. Their mission is to lure in pirates, kill as many as possible and hopefully sink one or more ships. The game starts with the lure sinking in firmly: With the winged wizard aboard, their captain knows almost to the second when the wind is going to die out completely. His plan is to isolate one ship, overwhelm it, and then try to chase down the others by having all of his troops drop spears and grab oars.

Are the PCs up to a fair fight? The military bait ship has as many soldiers on it as the Ob-lob fleet has pirates. If the Ob-lobs are on one big ship, it's a dead even match. If they're divided between several ships, the one that got closest is going to have a pretty tough defensive fight on its hands while the others get nearer. Obviously, this can be a big set-piece fight if the PCs want one. If they try to run, it's not easy: It's going to be pulling oars until the wind picks up again, and that winged freak can fly overhead and rain lightning on them. Then there's the likelihood that someone realizes the trap may not be fully sprung yet: If the city predicted their pursuit, it's likely they planned for the pirates to flee as



well. Reinforcements could be on the way, cutting off the route back to the swamps. It's a compromised position, for sure.

All in all, there are several ways this can play out.

Total Victory. The PCs are geniuses with hot dice and they manage to overcome the soldiers, neutralize the spellcasters and take the ship. They now have a fairly decent new boat for their troubles, not to mention some serious bragging rights. But what to do with the officers and soldiers (assuming it wasn't a total massacre)? Walking the plank is pretty harsh, especially given the threat of a haunting. Setting them adrift or marooning them might be more attractive, though will their mercy create some lingering goodwill? Or is it perceived as humiliation, spurring the liberated officers to dedicate themselves to bringing the pirates low? Up to you. Just surprise them.

Close Victory or Draw. Losses are heavy, but the PCs prevail, either driving off or escaping from their attackers. Do they head home and risk being followed? Set ashore on the barren coastline, hoping to scratch out some sustenance or find someone to rob before reinforcements can arrive? Or do they push on to a farther city outside Ruhini influence, without the supplies to get there safely or with certainty?

Loss. They lost one or more ships, many men, and have been put to flight, bloodied and broken. The same concerns apply as with a draw, only now they have the additional concern that the ship that chased them off is probably still pursuing them.

Abject Defeat. Ships sunk. Men killed. PCs captured. No pretty way to put it, the trap got 'em good. But the measure of a hero is not what he does when he wins, but how he comes back from an old-fashioned asswhuppin'. Imprisoned in the hold of one of the ships, there are still options. They're rich pirates: Surely at least one of the soldiers guarding them is susceptible to bribery. Or they could escape, or overpower a guard, or wait until the ship was caught in a storm and escape during the panic. Depending on their inclinations, they could even scuttle the ship themselves and escape as it was headed towards the bottom.

Act Two

A good way to set up the second phase of the arc is to rewind to the PCs' departure from their swamp base, as they set out to chase their treacherous prize. About a week after they sail off, an Upunzine squad attacks the settlement. This is straightup Company action, unmodified and (surprisingly) fairly even. Originally, the Upunzis planned to send a huge force to disperse the Ob-lobs, but then there were rumblings of interest from the north. They also worried that an overwhelming force would lose the element of surprise, while a smaller group of elite fighters might resolve the attack before the defenders realize what's happening. That plan might have worked just fine too, if it wasn't for the vagaries of swamp fever and constrictor attack. So the settlement gets no bonus dice from PC actions, but they don't suffer any penalties or have to confront a superior foe, either.

The conflict in the swamp determines what happens when the PCs return—



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either in triumph with the captured Upunzine ship, or in despair, having lost everything and escaped, or something in between. The progress of the arc depends on the combined outcomes.

Victory on Land and at Sea: Hah! Oblobs triumphant! They won't bring Upunzi to its knees, but they certainly get some breathing room and raised credibility. Bonuses are certainly in order if they choose to (1) launch reprisals against Upunzi shipping directly, (2) change things up by making raids on the city's swamp settlements or (3) negotiate with Kiqwani or Sudevu for a joint assault.

Settlement Wins, Sailors Lose: The PCs have seen ships lost or damaged, but their land holdings are intact. How are they going to rebuild the fleet? Or are they going to strike off in an entirely different direction, claiming more settlement space from the swamp or raiding the road traffic along the delta's landward edges? Are they going to fortify the settlement, or abandon it now that the Upunzines know exactly where it is? It's quite likely, by the by, that any land-based victory leaves the PCs holding a number of Upunzi soldiers hostage. What do they intend to do with them? Release them into the swamp to die or live on their own? Try to turn them against their civic masters? Fill them with false information and 'permit them to escape'? Risk ghostly wrath and possibly their reputation by burying them in a mass grave?

Triumph on the Waves, Tragedy in the Swamp: How about that, the Oblobs won on the boats and lost on the ground. Who could have foreseen it?

Possibly the PCs, if they've got an oracle on board who can tell them of the simultaneous attacks. Forewarned, they might not even head back, taking to the water indefinitely, offering their service to Kiqwani against Upunzi, or even becoming legitimate merchants until they can find a way to get back at the city that cost them their families.

Doubled Defeat: Well hell. At this point, your game is in serious danger of a trip to bummer-town. The solution is to offer hope. Emphasize the assets that remain: Not everyone could get killed or captured in the swamp raid, just like it's unlikely that every ship and every sailor was destroyed in the ambush. After wrecking the settlement, it's plausible that some Ob-lobs died, but more either ran off into the wilderness, surrendered, or got injured and captured. Same thing with the boats and sailors: Capture is more likely than massacre, especially with the hope of prizing the secrets out of an Ob-lob vessel. So in the case of a doubled defeat, remind the players of these facts, suggest that they've been in tighter spots before and started their pirating careers with less than they have now, and then ask them what they're going to do.

No matter whether they administered a resounding beat-down or received one, it's clear that Upunzi has thrown down the gauntlet. The PCs have the opportunity to slink away and look for riper opportunities in Heluso if they want. Is that what they want? If it is, you're on your own to set that up but you may want to keep needling them about the defeat in Upunzi, especially if they give the city months to expand their command of the seas. Just as deer overpopulate their environ-



ment without wolves to trim back the herds, so go the fleets of Upunzi (both mercantile and military) without the PCs to keep them humble. Some steps they may want to take against the city include...

Free the Prisoners: If they lost the settlement battle, the captives from that raid are toiling at a forced-labor farm, clearing jungle swamp back, shoring up farmland, digging irrigation ditches and just generally being unpiratical. Simply staging a jailbreak is pretty hard, and getting somewhere safe without careful planning beforehand is very hard. But if the prisoners are waiting for a sign, and the PCs soften up or suborn the guards, and if there are vehicles waiting to whisk the escaped Ob-lobs to safety (I'm thinking friendly ships laying off the coast, waiting to be rowed to after a pursuit through the deadly swamp, or wind schooners ready for a hard run to Sudevu... really, anything that justifies a cool pursuit, that's what I'm thinking) then it's a lot more manageable. GM's choice whether this is run as a Company action or just handled on the personal scale. Incidentally, if you want to put some pressure on, spread the rumor that the guards measured many of the prisoners for eyepatches.

Liberate the Sailors: This is both more urgent and more difficult. Any captured sailors are likely to get the choice between a judicial blinding and work in the shipyards, with attendant pressure to reveal Ob-lob secrets of ship design. The shipyards are on the water (of course) but the prisoners are kept in a fortified jail outside the city. Each day, they're marched in as the sun swells, and marched back as it

shrinks. The prison is heavily fortified, but it's isolated and has relatively few guards: Once a rescue force was inside, they wouldn't need to worry much about a timely chariot deployment, even if the alert was given right away. The march to work is when the prisoners are freshest, and there aren't nearly as many guards (a few chariots come out as escorts though), but it's through a nice flat stretch of land. An ambush would be hard to stage without really fast vehicles or an agonizing night spent lying in wait in the icy desert. And, of course, it's when the guards are most alert for trouble. The shipyards are right by the water, so a daring rescuer might sail in at high speed, torch the place, and get the hell out with the rescued Ob-lobs in tow. Getting the ship there past the fast ramming rowboats of Upunzi and the city's own defenses is a real challenge, but on the plus side, the rescued prisoners all know exactly how to make a ship go real fast, and they're highly motivated to not get their eyeballs eaten. The final option is to try and get them when they're marching back to jail, but that has the same problems as getting them in the morning, except that darkness is coming (good!) but the prisoners are exhausted and unable to move fast (very bad).

Lobby the Ob-lobs for Aid: The Ob-lob families are pretty hostile towards any PCs who let the Upunzis capture an Ob-lob ship, and the more intact the ship is, the more angry they are. The despoiling of the delta village is regarded with more sympathy, but Ob-lob philosophy is pretty clear that if you take the bait, you're to blame when the trap falls on you. Are there favors to call in? People to persuade or, perhaps, trick? Maybe they could





do a few little deniable, illegal favors for the "law-abiding" Ob-lobs of Kiqwani, Southport or Upunzi itself, and in return get the use of a ship (which they would, of course, have to "steal") for a time, returning it when they get some craft of their own back.

Make a Deal with Kigwani: The pirates never preyed on the city of Kigwani for the very simple reason that there's a lot less shipping going through it. Kiqwani would like to change that. (Um, the shipping bit, not the preying bit.) They distrust the Ob-lobs, but not so much that they're unwilling to work with them against Upunzi, especially since the push against the Ob-lobs in the swamp was only part of a large campaign of aggression in the delta. Ironically, the stronger the Ob-lobs' original position, the less trusting Kiqwani is. If the pirates won both engagements, the Kiqwani consider them too dangerous to let close to the city. If, on the other hand, the PCs' Company got smacked around hard, the Kiqwanis think they can take advantage of it in its weakness. Certainly they might gamble a few unmarked ships if they were persuaded those ships would be used to make life hell for the Elders. Kiqwani wants to stop Upunzi from building a powerful navy, and it wants to steal Upunzi's dominant trade position. If the PCs burn down Upunzi's docks and prey heavily on merchants going there, while giving Kiqwani a pass, the southern city is likely to regard a few light merchant ships (easily converted to coastal raiders) a small price to pay.

Disrupt Shipping: In times of trouble, go with what you know. Hit ships. Take booty. Refit stolen boats so they're optimized to move fast, hug

land and strike hard instead of wallowing across the ocean for a month. Repeat, with the occasional break for liquor and nostoviol.

If the PCs had an easy time of the ambush and fought off the swamp assault, they may jump directly to increased raiding. If that's the case, they may get approached by reprepresentatives from Ob-lob families who are concerned about the Elders' anger. There may even be a few assassinations attempts or some spying. Those Elders can spy real good when something's on their mind. But whether it takes them a long time to get back to piracy, or whether they jump to it right away, that's the presumption that sets up the third act.

Act One

After some successful raids, let the PCs get wind that Upunzi wasn't the only city building up naval strength: Zhaolu, a Wu-hra seaport notoriously intolerant of Ob-lobs (to the extent of greeting any pale-skinned travelers with fire and curiously-curved swords) has been building boats that sound suspiciously like troop transports. Given their already-impressive array of fast-moving close range attack ships (the kind of thing you really need when you're a seaport that hates Ob-lobs) it suddenly looks like they could sail down the coast, unload troops near Upunzi, or Kiqwani and mount a reasonable siege during the cold (well... less hot) season. With sea power and clear lanes they could keep their troops supplied. If they landed in the delta they might even live off the land, though that's not an uncomplicated idea. As part of the Zhaolu plan, those fast-assault ships might





start ranging farther from home, further harassing Ob-lob ships. After all, nothing messes up a good naval engagement like some pervy white pirates trying to crash the party.

After this development, the PCs are approached by an agent of the Elders. (For a fun twist, it could be someone they've been working alongside for a while—but if you go that route, be prepared for them to kill him out of hand.) This particular spy works for an Elder named Kushuitl (though both spy and Elder do everything in their power to keep the PCs from ever hearing that name), and Kushuitl is decidedly not the Elder who planned and executed the ambush and swamp assault. That was Nimuti, a name the PCs also won't get, until they've given meaningful indications that they're willing to at least hear an Elder out in good faith. (Not killing the spy is only a start.)

Kushuitl hates Nimuti. If the PCs triumphed handily against Nimuti's early attacks, Kushuitl despises his fellow Elder for clumsiness, ineptness, and for still being trusted with important defense decisions after those screwups. If Nimuti clobbered the PCs, Kushuitl envies Nimuti's triumphalism and increased prestige. If it's been mostly a draw, Kushuitl both envies and despises his rival. Kushuitl is willing to let the PCs into the highly reinforced Elders' Tower, providing them with directions to Nimuti's offices and chambers. All they have to do is take their piratical vengeance and keep Kushuitl's name out of it.

From here, there are hardly any inherently bad moves for the PCs to make. They can go in, assassinate Ni-

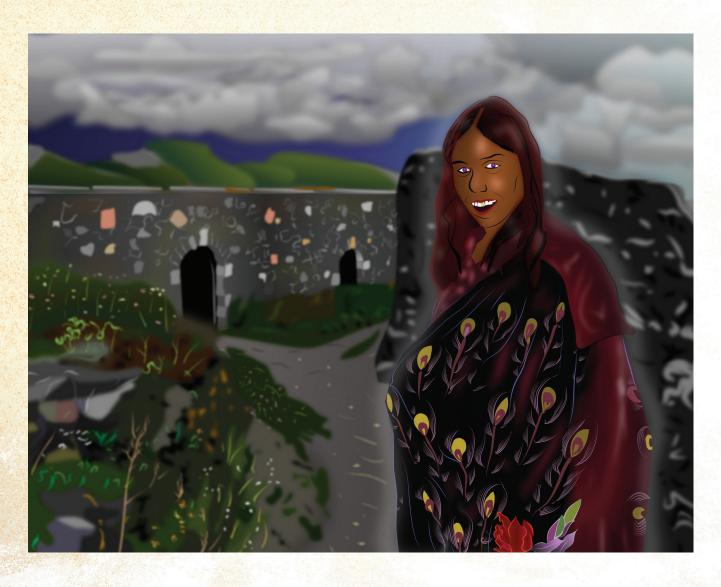
muti and escape with their vengeance (maybe). They can sell their knowledge to Kiqwani, get *substantial* sorcerous backup and (just maybe) collapse the whole damn tower, killing most or even all of the Elders. They can even get into Nimuti's presence and extort concessions out of him in return for his life and information about the Elder who sold him out. With the threat of Zhaolu shadowing the city, Nimuti may be willing to forgive, forget and even reward the despised pirates, rather than face a Wu-hra siege.

However they want to play it, they get to watch Upunzi and know they wrote its destiny. If they're watching from atop a mountain of stolen valuables, that's even better.













THE MINISTERS: FOX



THE MINISTERS

The following pages have descriptions of the ministers for "Imperial Harlots" but no pictures. You can get these descriptions with pictures at http://www.gregstolze.com/reign/ImpCouncil.zip but I didn't feel right about using those images in a book sold for profit.



Title: Steward of Viands, Domestic Overlord and Prince Imperial

Name: Fox

Domain: Sovereignty (3)

Personal History: The others call her 'Empress'. You've always just called her 'Mother.' You are her youngest son, her baby, you have never lacked for anything in your life. Other than her elite guards, who are bound to serve through repulsive enchantment, you are one of three men who are permitted to bear weapons in the Palace. Of those three, you are the only one who does not exercise that option.

Will, her oldest, broods and mutters, stewing in a fine broth of his own resentment. Chance, the spymaster, isn't fooling anyone with his stale charade of incompetence – at least, he's not fooling you but may still be wise enough to know it. Mique, the Pahar, has the duties closest to your own, but while she tends to bodies and land, you cultivate the Imperial spirit and tend to your civilization's history. As for Radiance, the banker, you have little in common. You've never needed to count costs, and she does little else.

It is your duty to make the Empire as strong as it can be. It is your dream to

make it as great as it once was, and this is the dilemma. You are a man of peace, but you live in a nation built on blood. You know as well as anyone the malaise that grips the nation: Boredom, the mask for shame, which is fed by the shrinking map of conquered countries. States that were once your minor vassals now compete on nearly equal terms, throughout the known world. Imperial citizens feel as if their nation is in its senescence, and the interminable battles with the Maemecks seem to prove this true. This shame leads to despair, which feeds corruption and decadence.

Should your nation cocoon itself, lick its wounds and try to grow once more from the richest and broadest firmament in the world? That's the Pahar people's advice. Or should you reclaim the lands of the Maemecks, and push through to the sea, and infuse your nation with a new purpose and the hope of new greatness?

Is the hope of your country built on blood? That's the question that keeps you awake at night.



100m

THE MINISTERS: FOX



WHAT YOU CAN DO

With Might, you can quell internal dissent, pursue bandits and police your citizens.

With Territory, you can increase Might.

With Treasure, you can increase your Influence

With Influence, you can uncover internal enemies.

THE OTHER COUNSELORS

Mique Nurim: She is the only other person on the council who can cook anything. Will, Radiance – even Chance, none of them could make soup. But you can, and she can. You know this about her and she doesn't know it about you. She is a practical woman and an intelligent one. Intelligent enough to understand what defeating the Maemecks could mean for the Empire. Practical enough that she won't show her opinions before her countrymen.

Prince Will: Your older brother who, despite being one of mother's closest advisors, still doesn't feel close to her. You've tried to explain to him how high he sits in her esteem, but he won't hear it, any more than he hears it about you. It's sad. But it's his own damn fault.

Chance Smithson: The "foolish fop nobleman" ruse didn't fool anyone, so he's fallen back on "grim former spy," but you suspect that underneath that is the truth – political gadfly whose debts mounted to the point that he had to start betraying his friends for money. Well, perhaps now that he's a well-funded intelligence operator, he can be trusted. Probably not, though.

Radiance Rosewood: Once you showed up unannounced at her house, and when you were shown into her chamber she was stark naked. Surprisingly, her utter lack of self-consciousness quenched any eroticism as thoroughly as a thunderstorm would put out a campfire. Since that time, you've

worked together fairly well, though you wish she'd get behind the war effort – not just to quiet Will, but because victory in this matter is essential.

THE ISSUES

Dindavara: What everyone forgets is that the Dindavarans have fought the Empire – and lost. The new Hai Riyan is no fool, unlike the squabbling warlords who kept the nation embroiled in civil war for decades. No Dindavaran army has fought an outside military for decades. Surely it's crossed the Great Leader's mind that they may have forgotten how to fight 'dishonorable barbarians'.

Pahar: The Pahar have been in the Empire since its inception, but have never been Imperial. They just don't want to admit that there's a price they have to pay for their fiercely-maintained identity. They want to have their language and customs and prayers and be treated as if they're no different from the nations that assimilated into one culture (more or less). Unfortunately, no one seems to want to tell them it's impossible. So maybe building a couple monuments to great Pahars in history will calm them down.

The Maemeck Matriarchy: If the Empire loses this war, people will believe that everything they fear about themselves is true. They will believe they are a nation in decline. They will believe the shadow of former greatness is so dark and long that they cannot emerge. They will give up, more than they have already given up.

The Fiscal Crisis: The issue is not money. You know the Empire has money because you've been in the treasure vaults and seen it piled up, tidy columns and stacks of coin, gold bars, gems neatly sorted by size and clarity. The issue is that the people think Imperial ministers are wasting their money, or stealing it, or using it for their own purposes. That's all true, of course: No one would want to be a minister without the reward of power, and money is a versatile power indeed. So what is necessary is to demonstrate Imperial effectiveness, Imperial action, so that they ignore the inevitable waste.



THE MINISTERS: CHANCE SMITHSON

Title: Imperial Minister for Protocol and Covert Assassinations

Name: Chance Smithson

Domain: Influence (5)

Personal History: When you were young and handsome you studied languages and music and traveled widely as a bard, charming all, offending few, appearing political to none. You went by the name Merry Wellmet.

You killed eleven people as Merry Wellmet. Four of them saw your face before dying. Two you killed wrongfully, due to mistaken identity. Sometimes you still have sleepless nights over those two.

In time your usefulness to the Empire merited you a promotion, and you became a diplomat. Your name then was Wane, Lord of Thunder River. You got fat and lost hair and reinvented yourself as a fuddled fool, easily misled, prone to ill-timed misunderstandings. In this fashion you crafted a major political incident between the Maemecks and the nation of Opetka, scuttling their chances of alliance and reopening antagonisms between the Maemecks and the Empire. It was assumed that the great Imperial army would crush the Maemecks, claim their lands, and be well on their way to restoring maritime trade for the Empire.

It's not your fault the army wasn't up to the task. The border wars continue to this day. Thousands have died, though you tell yourself it is not by your hand. Not even by your will: You but carried out your Empress' commands, and capably.

With the death of the old spymaster you have ascended to the highest level of control. Short of the Empress herself, no one has greater authority over the Empire's network of agents, assassins and thieves. It is a rare week when you do not sign a death warrant, and you know that those women and men still die by your hand, even if you hold a pen instead of a strangling cord.

Your whole life has been spent standing in the shadows cast by the glory of Empire. Your lot has always been to lie, murder and betray in the name of Imperial destiny and a higher law. Though you walk the sunlit gardens of the Palace and discuss your plans with open frankness, you know that in time all your works will be forgotten, conveniently, beside your name. But what of that? You have power, and riches, and a place of honor in the world's greatest nation. What need have you for glory?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

With Sovereignty, you can uncover internal enemies.

With Might you can perform covert operations in other countries.

With Territory, you can root out foreign spies.

With Treasure, you can gather information from foreign lands.

THE OTHER COUNSELORS

Mique Nurim: A capable administrator, if somewhat blind to the failings of her own Pahar people. She is an excellent organizer and operator



100m

THE MINISTERS: CHANCE SMITHSON



of predictable things, which makes her a good compliment to you (who work best with unpredictable things). She hates you.

Prince Will: All his life he has needed but to ask commandingly and his desires were made so. Now he has asked the Maemecks to surrender and they have refused him. Now, he is tired and cranky. If he wanted to kill you, he probably could, even if you were both unarmed (which he wouldn't be). But if you wanted to kill him, he'd never see you coming.

Prince Fox: This one just might see you coming, even though, of all of them, he has the least understanding of your true nature. He is a charming and pleasant and generally benevolent human being. That's dangerous. While Mique and Radiance engage the Empress' mind, her son Fox has her heart. That makes this unarmed Prince far more deadly than his martial older brother.

Radiance Rosewood: Appallingly difficult to fool, except in affairs of the heart. You've had to screen out the most odious and dangerous gold-diggers – two even needed to be dealt with permanently. She has no idea you've done this. If she knew, she might despise you. Or it might make you her confidante. You're not sure, because she can also be appallingly difficult to predict.

THE ISSUES

Dindavara: They will make war. The question is not when: They will go to war the day they can honorably do so. The question is, where? The People of the Sword would be a

mighty weapon for any nation cunning enough to turn them against its enemy. Sadly, they have no border with the Maemecks.

Pahar: This situation is far worse than anyone realizes, not even Mique. The people there are poised on the edge of insurrection. Fortunately, the troops massing for the Maemeck wars are close by if the need should arise. No one wants to turn the Empire's troops on its own citizens, though if it has to happen, the Pahar are the group that could be suppressed with the fewest repercussions.

The Maemeck Matriarchy: They're wise to all the tricks that the current Empress has the stomach to permit, and it's not worth your head to do anything crueler or more extreme. Even if it worked, the results might only steel their already-considerable resolve to fight. After a point, unconventional warfare has diminishing returns. Your spy network there is as good as it's reasonable to expect, and the news doesn't seem to change much.

The Fiscal Crisis: The people complain that money is being wasted when what they really mean is, the money is not being spent to better them personally. It's the way of things.



THE MINISTERS: MIQWE NURIM

Title: Tender of the Vales, and Terri-

torial Secretary

Name: Miqwe Nurim Domain: Territory (6)

Personal History: You're not like the others. You are Pahar.

They sit and scheme and pray to no gods beyond temporal power and naked ambition. You have a faith they ignore, a tongue they can't speak (except for Smithson, sneaky bastard – you've never found yet a language he didn't know) and a culture different from the rest of them.

It's not an alien culture. Pahar has been in the Empire since its inception, save for its brief period of insurrection. It is the only nation of the five core countries that has ever rebelled. Similarly, it is the only one that gives its people a voice, lets them contribute in those areas they know best, lets them build as best they know how.

The rest of them are Lords, or Baronesses, or holders of other titles. Pahar had a royal family too, until the rebellion. After the uprising was quelled, the Empress was merciful to the representatives. She thought the real threat was the kings. She let the quaint Pahar customs of election and participation continue.

You are the fruit of those customs.

The Royalty tell this joke: How can you tell a Pahar leader from any other nation's leader? In Pahar, the leaders are polite to the rude people they govern. Everywhere else, it's the other way around.

Of everyone on the council, you're the only woman who has ever been

named leader by the people you led. The rest of them have no idea how you – once a 'commoner' – can have such a fine instinct for governing the

WHAT YOU CAN DO

With Might, you can defend the realm against military invasion.

With Treasure, you can increase Sovereignty.

With Sovereignty, you can increase Might.

With Influence, you can root out foreign spies

THE OTHER COUNSELORS

Prince Will: A good-looking man, just coming into the fullness of maturity. For a warrior, he seems oddly dismissive of war, though given the fortunes of the eastern campaign, that may indicate some surprising 'common' sense. Still, you find it hard to trust someone who, at a relatively young age, is commanding one of the world's most formidable armies... and who still feels his ambitions are thwarted.

Prince Fox: The nice one. Despite being a man, and the son of one of the least maternal women you've ever known, he still seems to have something motherly about him.

Chance Smithson: So sneaky he could probably untie a pretzel with his tongue. You're glad he's on your side, though you're distressingly certain there are people just as bad, or worse, arrayed against the Empire. Nevertheless, Smithson's the one you have nightmares about.

100m

THE MINISTERS: MIQWE NURIM



Radiance Rosewood: Other than the Empress, she's the only other woman on the counsel, so you two have a bond, despite disagreements on the issues. Her opinions about Pahar are a barrier, certainly. Plus, you fear her loneliness may cloud her judgment. But every time you feel that way, she seems to produce some example of a vision so clear that it's harsh and unyielding. It sits oddly with her occasional wistfulness.

THE ISSUES

Dindavara: At the end of the last war, they swore to respect the current borders, "as will our children and our children's children." There's widespread debate among them whether that implies, "and so on until the end of time" or whether it ends when the final grandchild of the last noble who fought passes away. They're down to one such grandson, the last of the 'Oathbound' and many feel they'll start invading when he dies. He's pretty old, they're pretty tough, so the Empire needs to be ready.

Pahar: Your people aren't happy and none of the others understand why. You do: They're unhappy because they don't think the Empire cares about their opinions. (The Lords would say that being listened to has spoiled them.) Your appointment to the privy council has mollified them somewhat – you've no illusions about your use to the Empress as a token but you're trying to make the perception a reality by communicating their weariness with the Maemeck war and their dismay with the widespread financial corruption and mismanagement. This isn't easy because you think the majority is actually wrong

about the Maemecks.

The Maemeck Matriarchy: If Radiance would just spend what needs to be spent, instead of trying to run a bargain war, the Empire could win – or, if not win, at least make enough gains that they could walk away with pride and be ready for the Dindayaran invasion on the other side of the country. If the Dindavarans attack, the Maemecks have no incentive to make peace or keep it if they feel the fight's been fair. If they think it's a stalemate now, they might invade from the east while the Dindavarans approach from the west. Far better to settle them now, make them grateful for any peace they can get, or ruin their army... while The Empire still has the chance.

The Fiscal Crisis: The finances of the Empire are a tangled thicket, which is better than being a barren field. Radiance has her head on straight about getting them under control, but you think she could root out corruption and properly fund the war. In fact, you think people would be less likely to steal if they felt there was an emergency and were motivated by patriotism – or, if not patriotism, by the fear of punishment. After all, treason has much harsher consequences than mere corruption.



THE MINISTERS: RADIANCE ROSEWOOD

Title: Trustee of the Embroidered

Placket, Imperial Purser

Name: Radiance Rosewood

Domain: Treasure (4)

Personal History: It was a mess, a horrible mess, and you were the only one with the clarity to see it and the courage to call it what it was. Now you're in charge of the mess.

You fantasize about being a simple country girl, because your fondest memories are of life on your family's wooded estate back home in Deerwood. Your more realistic side realizes that being a peasant means hard work and uncertainty and filth and no pretty things. But that same realism shows you that governing the funds of an empire means dealing with contradictory demands and unreasonable expectations, it means late nights and blame and suspicion and never being away from pretty things. The dresses are nice, but back home you can go naked without it being a scandal. No one tries that in the Palace.

It doesn't help at all that you're unmarried, and not once in the three years you've been Imperial Purser have you met a man (or woman) who didn't have an awful lot to gain by being your friend. There's an undeniable appeal to resigning the office and letting it be someone else's problem, but your practical side whispers that you'd never get suitors of the caliber you currently enjoy, if you weren't sitting at the doorway of the world's greatest treasury.

Besides, without you, the mess would only get worse. Your innate pragmatism may show you a lot of ugly realities, but it's the only thing capable of wrangling the Empire's finances into order.

That is, if they don't get wasted on an interminable border war. Or entangled with some Prince's dreams of glory and grandeur. Or simply embezzled.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

With Influence, you can gather information from foreign lands.

With Sovereignty, you can increase your Influence.

With Might, you can attack other nations.

With Territory, you can increase Sovereignty.

THE OTHER COUNSELORS

Mique Nurim: She's nice enough, for a Pahar. But she's fallen under the Princes' spell and believes, like them, that the Maemeck war is essential. You're becoming increasingly certain that it can't even be won.

Prince Will: Handsome, intelligent and utterly exasperating. If he'd been born to a different mother, he could have been quite a man. As it is, he's quite an ass. Though every now and then, after a bottle of wine or two, you find yourself thinking that he still might grow up, if the right woman could get him to love her and stop him from resenting his Imperial mother. Fortunately, you always sober up.

Prince Fox: Sweet, gentle, surprisingly modest, unsurprisingly useless.

Chance Smithson: He needs you, so you're absolutely safe from him.

100-

THE MINISTERS: RADIANCE ROSEWOOD



Only the people he needs have that protection. You don't think he's perfectly remorseless, but he doesn't let regret prevent him from doing what he thinks is warranted. Is there any practical difference between a man with no conscience, and a man who just doesn't let his conscience stop him?

THE ISSUES

Dindavara: The Empire has built fortresses along the western border for generations. If you're not prepared now, it's hopeless to try to prepare further – at least, not by simply throwing money at the army. Building up the core strengths of the nation is the answer. Those strengths are the land, the loyalty of the people, and (let's be honest) its ability to corrupt self-interested smaller states into doing its dirty work.

Pahar: They're whiny snobs, but that doesn't mean they're wrong when they say the Empire has neglected their interests. The Empire has neglected the growth interests of all its citizens – it's just the Pahar are the only ones with politicians who can make gains by pointing out this inconvenient fact.

The Maemeck Matriarchy: Speaking of simply throwing money away at the army... You've made sure the troops have food and carts and sharpening stones for their spears. Trying to pin any failures on you is simply the usual politics of blame. Gold doesn't make troops braver or leaders smarter. All it does in the uncertain circumstances of war is find ways to mysteriously vanish.

The Fiscal Crisis: The single greatest threat to the Empire today. With regulated fiscal discipline, sweeping improvements could be made for all the Imperial nations, not just the Pahar. That would, in turn, give the strength needed to repulse any theoretical Dindavaran attack, let alone the kind of counterstrike the Maemecks could raise. But no one wants to take the harsh measures necessary to put the house in order. No one wants to curb the excesses of spoiled noblemen like Chance, Fox and Will.



THE MINISTERS: WILL

Title: Master of the Colors, Wielder of the Silver Stick, General of All Armies and Prince Imperial

Name: Will

Domain: Might (5)

Personal History: You are the oldest son of the Empress and were it not for the curse, you would be heir to the Empire.

That's how you think of your masculinity: a curse. Only a woman can wear the Imperial crown, so it's not even a question of gaining the Empress' favor or removing those on the rungs between you and the top of the ladder. You're out of the running, no real contender.

It gets worse. Not only is your potential for power limited, it's threatened. With four younger sisters you're looking at a future of diminishing prestige. They're too young to run things, but as they age they'll want opportunities to prove their fitness to rule. The oldest, Dove, has been practicing a great deal with the bow and you think she has designs on your position. You remember the first time she gave you a toothless smile when you handed her a toy, and now you're considering sending her to the front, to the east. She'd love to go, and you could easily send her into something too thick, something no fourteen-year-old palace brat could handle. Get her killed and keep your prerogatives safe, but could you do that to your own sister?

Moreover, wouldn't losing her be your failure as well?

You're sick of your sisters and the Empress but most of all you're sick of war. You inherited a stale, bogged down border war against the Maemecks and nothing you've tried has

been sufficient to break their lines. You have the troops and the sorcerers but you can't change the mountains. It sounds straightforward until you're trying to dig entrenched Maemecks out of a hilltop emplacement, with their enchanters sucking out all the magic for miles around while the biauchris scream overhead, dropping bricks and shit on troops who can't fire back...

But the Maemecks, bad as they are, are at least contained. The real threat is in the west. The Dindavarans, the People of the Sword. They claim the only thing stronger than their steel is their honor, but even steel gives way after decades. That's how long their honor has kept them cooped up, two generations training and idolizing the Hundredslayer and fuming over the shame of losing Danifa to the Empire. For a while, the spies and provocateurs kept the chiefs at each other's throats but now they have unified leadership. Now they've stopped fighting each other and it's only a matter of time until they look for someone else to battle. Only a matter of time before their promise of peace expires.

You fear the Empire is the only nation that would be an honorable challenge to them. If you've got a war going on two fronts, it might not even be that.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

With Territory, you can defend the realm against military invasion.

With Treasure, you can attack other nations.

With Sovereignty, you can quell internal dissent, pursue bandits and police your citizens.

With Influence you can perform covert operations in other countries.



THE MINISTERS: WILL



THE OTHER COUNSELORS

Mique Nurim: A staid and generally uninteresting bureaucrat, save that she's Pahar and actually seems to believe in their religious claptrap. This surprises you because it's clear that she's smart: She understands the Dindavaran threat better than your own brother. Unfortunately, her solution is to beat the Maemecks first, than the Dindavarans. But at least it's better than trying to beat them at the same time.

Prince Fox: Your younger brother is an impractical, starry-eyed, simpering sycophant. Naturally, he's the Empress' favorite son. He's not incompetent, in that the things he wants to accomplish, he can generally arrange. It's just that his goals tend to come to nothing, or at least, nothing meaningful.

Chance Smithson: A good man, a patriot who's sacrificed a lot for his country. Sometimes you think his battles, fought in the dark with dagger and blackmail, have left him more scarred and horrified than your own.

Radiance Rosewood: High-strung and stubborn, you think she may be the only woman in the world - including your mother - who could comprehend and tame the Empire's finances. For all that, she's been an anchor around the war effort, always finding a higher priority. She's constantly surrounded by a cloud of suitors, each trying to sway her financial clout their way. She drives you crazy, but the men around her make you sick. It would serve her right if you tried to seduce her in order to change her mind about war funding. Honestly, that doesn't sound like such an onerous task...

THE ISSUES

Dindavara: It's not a question of whether they'll come. It's a question of when, and how bad it will be. Even if they decide to strike the Ulds first, or the Confederacy, that just gives them one less enemy at their back when they turn on the Empire.

Pahar: The Pahar whine, as they've always whined. You're glad they're whining, because that means they have the luxury of being pains in the neck. When the situation gets bad, they'll come through, like they've always come through. You've worked with Pahar sorcerers, and the time to worry is not when they're afraid or crabby or sniveling, it's when they're quietly intent or are trying to raise your spirits.

The Maemeck Matriarchy: It's a hot stove. Keep touching the stove and you keep getting burned. Let this one go, let them keep the border they've held for years, and get the troops to the west. What's the big reward, anyway? Access to the sea? Then we have to try to build a navy in the face of Ob-lob opposition, while the Dindavarans beat down the back door.

The Fiscal Crisis: What crisis? The Empire has too much money to readily track? That's ridiculous. When things get low, you can invent or conquer or discover more. That's the way it's always been done. Money in the bank isn't helping anyone, especially when soldiers in the field need it.



MAPS

ne of the most frequent criticisms of *REIGN*'s setting has been "I just don't get the geography!" People dislike the peopleshaped continents that defy any sane grasp of physics.

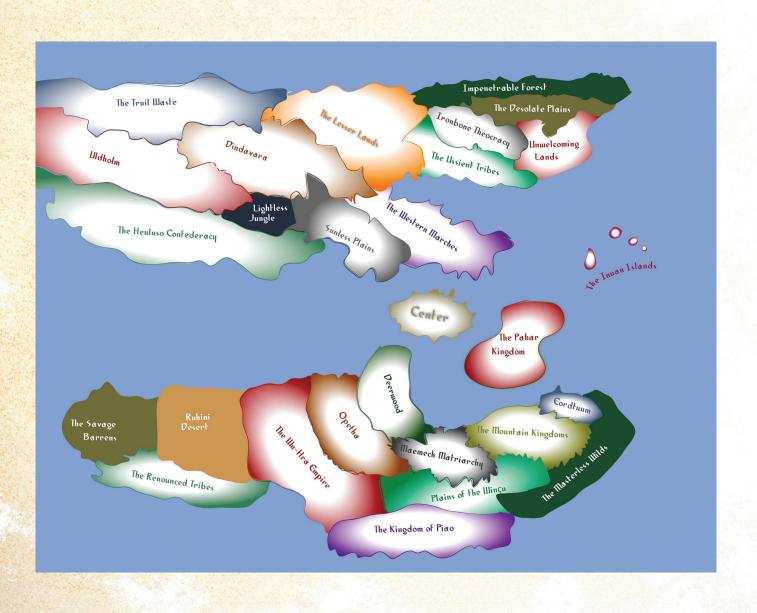
I designed the world that way because the idea fascinated me, but the actual core substance of play in REIGN can work just fine without that particular piece of fantasy. So, to help out people who like the setting and the politics but not the physics, I've designed an alternative map which illustrates the known world as more typical continents.



(If you want to print these out, go online to http://www.gregstolze.com/reign/REIGN_Supplement_8.zip and you can get large, full color files.)









Quick Reference

CHASE REFERENCES

Pursuer

Coordination+Stealth Sense+Direction Sense+Empathy Sense+Hearing/Sight Sense+Scrutinize

T

Body+Athletics
Body+Endurance
Body+Run
Coordination+Climb
Coordination+Dodge
Coordination_Ride
Coordination+Stealth



Charm+Lie
Charm+Plead
Command+Inspire
Command+Intimidate
Knowledge+Tactics



CHASE BRIEF

Declare - All reveal simultaneously, rosham-bo style. If you beat an opponent, you can change Lead by 1 or add +1d next turn.

Roll

Resolve - Change Lead by W or offset opponent sets. Runner changes all his Leads. Followers only change their own Leads.

ADVANTAGES

Add +1 or +2 to Lead change from relevant set. Command+Perform (Theater) Coordination+Expert (Sailor) Knowledge+Tactics Knowledge+Student (Local Area) Sense+Direction



Body+Athletics
Body+Endurance
Body+Run
Coordination+Climb
Coordination+Ride



Command+Intimidate Command+Inspire Coordination+Stealth Charm+Lie Charm+Plead Knowledge+Tactics



Quarry





Combat Reference

Combat Rundown

Declare - Describe what your character tries. Highest Sense declares last, GMCs declare before PCs.

Roll - Roll the appropriate pool, with any penalties for maneuver or the like.

Resolve - Widest set goes first, Height breaks ties.

Getting Hurt

Hits do Width damage, plus any bonuses from weapons. When hit, lose a die from any of your sets (your choice).

In Bad Shape

Blind - Diff 4 to close action, -2d to ranged action

Dazed - (Torso full of Shock) -1d to all actions

Down - On ground, -1d to all actions.

Unconscious - (Head full of Shock) No actions for at least a half hour unless revived with Healing roll.

Not Getting Hurt

Dodge and Parry sets turn into Gobble Dice. In a fight, Gobblers can't be used against attacks that are timed quicker.

Any single Gobble Die can counteract any single opponent's die that is its own Height or lower.

Sets reduced to one die have no effect. Gobble Dice from a single set can counteract dice from multiple other sets.

Unworthy Opponents

Declare - You don't need to declare their actions.

Roll - Roll 1d per follower, maximum 15d.

Resolve - When each set comes up, use it as a defense or attack. Sets of 4x+ must be broken down to 2x or 3x sets. No maneuvers. They're out of the fight when hit by a set with Width or Height over their Threat. When hit, they lose a set. Morale Attacks remove followers = to their rating if they exceed Threat.

Basic Moves

Attack - If you get a set past defenses, it does damage.

Dodge - Either produces Gobble Dice or gets you to cover. Only protects you.

Parry - Produces Gobble Dice. Can protect others. Need an object to block with or arms get hurt.

Move - 15 feet/round no roll, success with Run adds Width x5'.

Aim - Each round spent preparing adds +1d to a later pool or offsets a -1d penalty, max +2d or offsetting -2d.

Called Shot - Drop a die from your pool, set another die to the result you want, roll.

Multiple Actions - For each extra action, drop a die from the lowest pool involved. Each action needs a set.

Simple Maneuvers

Display - Only on the first round of combat. Gives +1d or offsets -1d penalty to next attack on a witness.

Draw - Any action taken with a weapon the round it's drawn is timed 1 Width slower.

Feint - Opponent loses a die from a set and you get +1d or offset -1d penalty next attack. Can't be dodged or parried. Max of +2d or offsetting -2d penalty.

Pin - Take -1d if trying to pin someone while standing, otherwise both go down and are motionless. To escape he has to beat your Body score as a Difficulty to his roll.

Restrain - Called shot to arm or leg. Gives Gobble Dice against restrained target.

Shove - Tripping or slamming opponents get +1d. With a set, move him 5', cost him a die, and get +1d next turn to trip or slam.

Stand - Removes 'Downed,' -1d penalty to other actions.

Tackle - Tripping or slamming opponents get +1d. Roll with -1d penalty. With a set, it does normal damage and both you and opponent are downed.

Threaten - Before combat, roll Intimidate to produce Morale Attack equal to Width.

Wait - Can choose to time any successful action later.

Advanced Maneuvers

Charge - Multi-act with Ride or Run. Run gives +1d if you're Tripped.

2x Ride set = +1S

3x set = +2S, +1K

4x set = +3S, +2K.

Disarm - Called shot to arm. Unarmored, multi act with Dodge or take 1K to an arm.

2x Weapon flies H feet away

3x As above, 1S to his hand

4x 2S to hand, you hold weapon or it's at your feet.

Disfiguring Strike - Called shot to head with killing weapon. Gives Gruesome Problem or

2x Reduce Beauty 1 step

3x Reduce Beauty 2 steps

4x Gives Gruesome Problem

Display Kill - Take -1d penalty, must land killing strike.

2x Morale Att. = W or H

3x Morale Att. = W+Command or H

4x Morale Att. = W+Command+Intimidate or H

Knockout - Called shot to head

2x Weapon does only S

3x Weapon does only S+1

4x Weapon does only S+3, can't become K.

Slam - Diff 3, similar weight

2x Down, 1S to loc.s 3 & 5

3x Down, 1S to all but loc. 10

4x Down, 1S to all, WS to indicated location

Strangle - Called shot to head, no penalty if he's pinned.

2x 2S to head, auto 2x10 next turn if strangle's unbroken by Dodge, Parry or Attack.

3x 3S to head, auto 3S next turn if not dislodged this turn.

4x W+1S to head, auto 4S next turn if not dislodged this turn.

Trip - Called shot to 1 or 2, no penalty. Won't work if he's Down. +1 bonus if he Shoves, Tackles or Charges on foot.

2x No damage, he loses a die and has a -1d penalty next turn.

3x As 2x, plus he's down

4x As 3x, plus 1S to each arm.



DIE, MEN! REFERENCE

Unit Size	Hex Size	Comm. Interfr.	Com. Lag	Round Lasts
1	15 ft.	Tactics, Diff. o	0	5 mins
2	15 ft.	Tactics, Diff. 3	0	5 mins
5	30 ft.	Tactics, Diff. 5	1	10 mins
10	60 ft.	Tactics, Diff. 5 / Strategy, Diff. o	1	10 mins
20	60 ft.	Strategy, Diff. 3	1	15 mins
50	150 ft.	Strategy, Diff. 5	2	30 mins
100	200 ft.	Strategy, Diff. 7	3	1 hour
		Unit Types		

Archers: Give +1 Width to friendly Attack sets within one space. Total bonus can't exceed number of Archers. Can't Attack normally, but can spend an Attack set to destroy 1 unit in a 2 space radius.

Cavalry: +1 dmg. Can travel Width of Move set. During Free Movement, can enter Rough terrain.

Chariots: Can travel Width of Move set. Can't enter Forest, Hill or Mountain terrain.

Defenders: Free x10 Gobble Die, usable any time.

Fliers: Ignore negative effects of terrain.

Infantry: No rule changes.

Siege Engines: Can Attack 2 spaces away, but not 1 space away. Attack damage is not limited by number of troops. Can't move during Free Movement, can't move unless another unit of a different type moves with it.

STEPS OF CONFLICT

1. Declare - pick a strategy, reveal simultaneously.

Deploy - Name a goal. Troops can Defend or Move, though not away from the goal. Can't Attack.

Seize - Name a goal. Troops can Attack any adjacent area. Can Move, though not away from goal. Can't Defend.

Hold - Troops can Defend and Attack. Can only Move into a space that already contains your troops.

Retreat - Troops can Move, but not directly at any enemy. Can't Attack. Can Defend if surrounded.

- 2. Roll d10s equal to Units, maximum 15.
- 3. Resolve Widest sets go first, Height breaks ties. Each set can be spent on one tactic. Damage from troops in a space can't exceed the number of units in that space.

Defend - Your dice become Gobble Dice, canceling dice in sets Attacking your troops. If an Attack is reduced to 1x, it does nothing.

Attack - If your set gets past Defense, you knock one die out an enemy set (defender picks). You destroy Width units (defender picks which).

- For each extra facing, +1 dmg.
- Attacks from Hills & Mtns., +1 dmg.
- Some troops do extra damage.

Move - Spend a set to move all or some of the units in one space into an empty or friendly adjoining space.

3a. Free Movement - Each squad can move into an adjoining Open and unthreatened space.





Unconventional Warfare

