THE
Third
Year
OF OUR REIGN
Well what have we here? It’s another free book you pay for.

If that seems a little opaque, here’s what I mean. All the content in this book is, at this moment, free. It was paid for by my fans, or by fans of the tabletop RPG *REIGN*. This was carried out through the agency of a website called Kickstarter.com, which I’ve described, over and over, as “a sort of public-source arts funding site” to my puzzled relatives and neighbors.

To break that down, as I often wind up doing, Kickstarter provides a framework where creators (like me) can present projects and ask for money to fund them. Fans (like you) or curious bystanders can pledge money to support the idea. It’s timed: If you don’t raise your $1,000 within 30 days, or 45, or 90, you’re out of luck. The project gets no money, and the site collects no pledges. Sad, but there you have it.

The projects in here were not sad, so here you have them. Each was offered up at around ten cents per word, and though some cleared easily and some required extra premiums, each eventually got enough money that I was obligated to hold up my end of the bargain: To release the stories and game rules and interstitial material for free, for anyone, online, in perpetuity. You can find them, and many others, on the downloads page of my web site, www.gregstolze.com.

But some people like the smell of book dust or want something they can consult without worrying about the batteries. So for them I compile material into books, sold through print-on-demand technology. If you’re reading this on a screen, it’s probably the .pdf that all those Kickstarter pledges bought. If it’s on a page, it was paid for, most likely through www.lulu.com. Either way, I hope you enjoy it.

This book was in no way possible without the support, trust and enthusiasm of those loyal pledgers. Here are their names, in no particular order.


Y’all are the shark-infested waters beneath my creaky pirate ship o’ dreams.

The supplements would, additionally, look awfully bland and tedious without my meager illustration skill, furiously undergirded by the generous stock footage artists of Deviantart. Especially these.

http://fc08.deviantart.net/fs71/i/2010/346/9/c/witch_21_by_yseaeddastock-d34r725.jpg
http://fc03.deviantart.net/fs50/i/2009/278/f/9/5niper_10_by_Sammykaye1sStamps.jpg
http://th04.deviantart.net/fs6/PRE/i/2005/043/e/0/Blue_tonge_lizard_1_by_sam_man.jpg
http://fc06.deviantart.net/fs71/i/2010/163/0/d/Wizard_2_by_Ligbi.jpg
http://mjranum-stock.deviantart.com/
http://ahrum-stock.deviantart.com/
http://raeyenirael-stock.deviantart.com/
http://nikxstock.deviantart.com/
http://goblin-stock.deviantart.com/
http://lynnwest-stock.deviantart.com/
http://eirian-stock.deviantart.com/
http://chaoticstocks.deviantart.com/gallery/#/d1cd4tl
http://mouthofmaggotsstock.deviantart.com/gallery/?q=gun#/d12h50c
http://redivory-stock.deviantart.com/gallery/#/d2pxwo7
http://thrak-stock.deviantart.com/gallery/?q=shotgun#/d187yf9
http://sooper-deviant.deviantart.com/gallery/?q=gecko#/d2fxv7x
http://jademacalla.deviantart.com/gallery/12458226#/d1ndj3u

The cover is a Daniel Solis original.

All contents copyright © 2011 Greg Stolze. No portion of this work may be reproduced by any means without the express written permission of the author. All rights reserved worldwide
Table of Contents

Introduction...2
The Encyclopedia...5
The Brewer's Street Arrangement...5
The Civic Brotherhood...7
The Human Earthquake...10
Liberation Faith...12
The Kingdom of Nain...15
Overview...16
Values...18
Culture...18
The Political Situation...20
Nain at War...23
The Companies of Nain...25
The Castles...25
The Seven Mage Families...35
Secret Societies...39
The Commonwealth...41
The Church of the Unmoved...42
The Magic of Nain...43
The Process of Enchantment...47
The Great Voice...56
Words of Action...56
Words of Passion...60
Target Words...62
White Magic...67
Black Magic...68
Great Voice Reference...69
Creatures of Nain...71
Known Beasts of Nain...77
The Nation of Ardwin...84
Overview...86
The Old Races...86
The Young Races...88
Values...89
Culture...92
The Political Situation...94
Ardwin at War...99
The Races of Ardwin...111
The Dwarves...111
The Elves...113
The Gnomes...116
The Goblins...118
The Orcs...122
The Sprites...125
Cults of Secret Places...128
Spirits of the Land...128
The Sect of Taka’Tah...130
The Sect of Gy’Tyah...132
The Sect of Jossode...135
The Sect of Mobrau...138
The Sect of Darohay...141
Enemies of Awful Scale...143
Out of the Violent Planet...148
Introduction...150
The Leatherbacks...152
The Cyblocs...155
The Free Worlds...158
The Earthlings...162
The Solar Hot Zone...166
PCs and ETs...168
Private Contractors...168
Further Study...173
Guns...179
Unearthlings...180
Psychic Abilities...186
The Media...193
Appendix: Alternate Alien Silhouettes...196
The Brewers’ Street Arrangement

Brewers’ Street is one of the oldest streets remaining in Center City. Even before the first Empress, there was a Brewers’ Street at the base of the hill on the sunny side, bookeened by a pair of prosperous aleyards. They’re long gone. It’s now an enclave for merchants and petty nobles who’ve done well enough to command a good location, but not a great one. For the denizens of Brewer’s Street, that’s just fine. The houses higher up are larger and more grand, but there tends to be some turnover. Even the families permanently ensconced near the palace are under a great deal of scrutiny, and that’s something else the Arrangement avoids at all cost.

No one’s sure when the Arrangement began. Certainly the original pact-members are all dead and gone. It’s not the sort of thing one speaks about directly, especially not anywhere one might be overheard, or when you’re doing something suspicious (like meeting more than one other member of the Arrangement). Most of all, it’s not anything they ever, ever write down.

But the generally agreed-upon facts are as follows. Those two bygone brewers didn’t like paying taxes and started under-reporting their production. This was, and is, typical business in The Empire. But they did it to an extraordinary degree, each supporting the other’s claims about just how much quality beer could be distilled from a given quantity of hops and barley.

Their off-the-books ale was sold to friends, and a percentage “fell off the wagon” for carters and porters who carried it away. When tax inspectors came sniffing around, they were bought off or, if that didn’t work, pressured by the sorts of noble friends one can buy with hogsheads of half-priced quality lager. The brewers were good, and they were lucky, and in time they and the beneficiaries of their fraud got a man on the inside. A tax inspector general of their choosing settled right in the middle of Brewer Street and she not only tipped them wise about the inspection schedule, she recommended to the Empress that beer-sellers who were getting so much more beer out of the same supplies be taxed at a higher rate since they were obviously engaging in duplicitous dealings by watering down their product.

The brewers were delighted to have an amenable ally within the tax bureaucracy, but in time the tail came to wag the dog. Their high level inspector wasn’t content to merely skim the froth off a distorted porter industry. She wanted the brewers to become her agents in a program of self-enrichment for her family and friends that was as breathtaking in its ambition as it was in its flagrant contempt for Imperial law.

AGENDA: MASSIVE TAX FRAUD

That’s what the Arrangement was a generation ago. Now, a quarter of Center City’s tax surveyors are in, as are a tenth of the wealthiest manufacturers. There’s no master member list, no formal leadership, and little informal leadership.

It operates thus. Manufacturers make a certain quantity of goods—jewelry, wine, milled silk, perfume or what have you. Part of their output gets hidden away, sold on the sly (often at a discount) or traded for favors. As tax time arrives, the merchant contacts a taxman he knows in the Arrangement. (If he doesn’t know one, he talks with a fellow entrepreneur who does.) The bent tax gatherer finds out who’s assigned to evaluate the Arrangement merchant, if anyone is. He tries to be the one assigned, or to get someone he knows is also in on the scam. Failing that, he checks out the auditors who check for irregularities, because even if an honest tax man assesses the seller for greater productivity than he admits, the seller can (for a fee) request an audit. If he knows he’s getting an Arrangement auditor, that fee starts to look like a very good deal indeed. But even assuming the merchant can’t get an Arrangement assessor or investigator, he still gets a heads up that he’s under honest scrutiny.
So maybe this year he has to suck it up and actually pay what his production was worth. At least he doesn’t have to then pay the typical percentage (paid in cash or property) to the evaluator who helped.

BELONGING

The easiest way to get into the Arrangement is to get the authority to assess and collect taxes, and live in Center. Eventually, someone within the Arrangement comes to evaluate the new tax-gatherer. It’s a tricky interview, since the Arranger won’t ever come out and say, “I say, we’re massively defrauding the Empress, is that the sort of thing that interests you?” but, instead, tries to make sure the candidate is greedy... but not too greedy. At some point, the prospective new recruit gets an opportunity to wet his beak, and if he takes it well, a few suggestions (in the form of friendly advice, often couched in moralistic aphorisms) are made about who ‘needs’ or ‘deserves’ special exemptions in the interest of greater prosperity.

Someone who responds with a crackdown is flagged as a danger, and the Arrangement tries to send him somewhere interesting... and far from Center. Someone who passes but doesn’t raise a stink is watched, but tolerated and even appreciated. After all, in addition to their crooked profits from the Arrangement, its members also have legitimate positions in The Empire’s labyrinth of taxing bodies. If they can’t find a place for a worker, honest and true but not a pain about it, they don’t deserve their positions.

Most interestingly, those who opt to steal big or over-reach their opportunity are mercilessly exposed as corrupt. After all, if you want to insulate yourself from the appearance of impropriety, a few hypocritical clean-sweeps are often just the thing.

Getting in if you’re a merchant, instead of a tax gatherer, is a narrower and more chancy thing. Being well known and respected in Center society is essential. Brash foreigners need not apply.

THE FUTURE

The issue with the Brewers’ Street Arrangement is that it’s walking a tightrope between honesty and greed. They have to stay honest enough to remain concealed, but the very nature of their opportunism and selfishness makes the deceit harder to maintain. Some want the Arrangement to grow, figuring that the more people it has on the inside, the more influence overall the cabal can exert. But others want it to stay small, seeing every new conspirator as an added risk. Those who want growth feel stifled and are tempted to steal more in consolation. Those who want secrecy feel threatened and are tempted to reveal everything themselves in order to be the one shaping the revelation story.

At some point, someone semi-decent might just succumb to her conscience and reveal the Arrangement (or large parts of it) to the Trustee of the Embroidered Placket, who could then use threat of exposure to The Empress to generate slavish obedience. Or, alternately, the Trustee (the highest fiscal authority in the land) could smash the whole rotten enterprise and earn The Empress’ deep gratitude.

On the other hand, someone overly greedy might do something too big to ignore and, in the process of arrest, try to mitigate his sentence by revealing the whole fetid mess. Whether betrayed from treachery or honesty, the Arrangement is on a collision course with exposure unless something changes soon, and drastically. If it is unveiled, the uproar over merchants cheating The Empire of needed cash (during wartime no less) is only going to be matched by the uproar over revenue collectors wallowing in luxury and neglecting their duties. The former provokes mass demonstrations and possibly riots in the major cities. The latter drives some rural hotheads to beat, threaten and possibly kill tax officials who never even had the opportunity to get ‘arranged.’
Imperial culture exalts some carefully selected aspects of the eternal female. Beauty and fertility are celebrated, often in the person of the Empress. Other traits, such as kindness and understanding, get less play, but the notion of ‘soft power’—pursuing goals through persuasion and personal connection, rather than an authority’s dictum—is alive and well and gleefully pursued.

Not everyone is comfortable with touchy-feely personal organization, however. For one thing, it’s high maintenance. If you’re not constantly maintaining alliances, the risk of losing your companionship seems less pressing when you finally ask for a favor. Plus, some people are just bad at it.

A backlash is forming. Some men in the Center City have banded together to stand against backroom dealing in The Empire’s jungle of conflicting, overlapping demesnes, provinces, regency wards, dominions and judicial districts.

AGENDA: ORGANIZED MASCUINE POWER

This clique has, however, conflated one goal (“simplify and streamline governance until it’s clear who does what and who answers to whom”) with a gender grudge. They feel that, because The Empire is not and can never be ruled by a man, there is an inherent social bias against men wielding power. Their “Civic Brotherhood” is meant as an antidote, an arrangement whereby men can support each other without getting entangled in the morass of inferred obligation and oblique duty. Many of the Brothers are retired from the military, where the hierarchy is, if not exactly clear, at least less baroque.

The system is, at bottom, very simple. Admission into the Civic Brotherhood is by invitation only. When you join, you pledge your personal allegiance to the person who recruited you and the person directly above him. These people are respectively referred to as your “Proctor” and your “Primogenitor.” They, in turn, answer to Proctors and Primogenitors of their own, all the way up to the Arch-Primogenitor, a retired Quartermaster General from the Western Marches named Rugose Readywing. The first layer he recruited are “First Brothers.” Those brought into the group by First Brothers are known as “Second Brothers” and so on all the way down.

The Arch-Primogenitor knows the names of every Brother (though not by heart—a large part of the reason he started the Brotherhood is that he’s not good at the one-on-one, and that includes a terrible memory for names. He has an elaborate, coded descent chart in his basement.) First Brothers are permitted to know the identities of as many other Brothers as they wish, but are only allowed to write down the Second Brothers they recruited (and the Third Brothers their Seconds recruited, and so on down the line).

A Proctor, of whatever level, can’t just take it onto himself to invite in one of his friends. He’s not even supposed to tell anyone about the Brotherhood until he’s gotten permission to issue that person an invitation. Before that happens, he has to present a case that the candidate is worthy of admission to his own Proctor and Primogenitor, and each of them has to get someone of their own rank (that is, a Third Brother Primogenitor needs another Third Brother to give a go-ahead, or a Fifth Brother Proctor needs another Fifth Brother). With five Brothers testifying to a man’s quality, he can be admitted.
There are guidelines for admission, of course. Invitations are, in theory, extended only to men who meet the following criteria.

Over the age of 16 years.
Of good birth. (This has recently been clarified to mean either titled nobility or untitled men with no identified criminal relatives within two generations.)
Of good character. No one who has been convicted of an Imperial crime is admissible, nor is anyone whose spouse or children have been so convicted unless that relative was repudiated (i.e. divorced or disowned). Indiscreet concubinage is also frowned upon.
Financially responsible. Impoverished gentlemen can look elsewhere. Their type are not welcome in the Civic Brotherhood.

Once admitted, a new Brother is told of his generation. (That is, how far he is from the Arch-Primogenitor. Currently, the most distant are the Sixth Brothers.) He is introduced to the four superiors who accredited his admission (his Proctor, his Primogenitor, and the two Brothers who share their generation) and to any other Brothers of his generation that the Proctor sees fit. He is permitted to know Brothers of his generation, no matter who invited them in, but he’s not supposed to know anyone above his Primogenitor’s level, and only two equal to that level (and two of his Proctor’s level).

So far this is all rather complicated and fiddly. Other than judge one another and join, what does the Brotherhood do? The answer is clear. They help one another. The privileges and prerogatives of membership boil down to two possibilities.

1) Brothers can ask for specific aid from any Brother they know. The Brother is under no obligation to help, but if he doesn’t, he must give a concise, respectful and clear explanation of why not.

2) Brothers can command any Brother to whom they are Proctor or Primogenitor. Refusing a direct command from someone in that position is grounds for immediate ejection from the Brotherhood, with no appeal.

This is the sort of thing that gives a thinking man pause. Fortunately, there are limits—clearly stated limits!—to the commands that can be issued. Are you ready for a list? Here’s the list.

1) Personal matters are off limits. You can’t ask for help meeting a woman or with your marital problems or require an underling to talk sense into your wayward son.

2) No lawbreaking. The Civic Brotherhood is strongly pro-law and insists that its members remain as upright as when they were admitted.

3) No treason against nation, Empire or family.

4) Nothing sexual.

5) Nothing that necessitates personal injury, or which is overwhelmingly likely to result in personal injury.

6) Nothing that requires the loss or risk of more than a tenth of the Brother’s current monetary value.

Other than that, anything goes.

Joining offers access to four higher-placed ‘men of quality,’ each of whom may have more Brothers at his beck and call. But it also obligates the new member to obey two of those men, regardless of personal feelings, inconvenience or reasonablness. If your Primogenitor says “Drop everything, ride deep into Uldholm, bring me a stone from the steps of the Sulderholm governor’s mansion, and bring it back here as soon as possible,” you’re expected to do it.
The remarkable thing about the Civic Brotherhood is that it works at all. The degree of trust required is pretty remarkable. But the Arch-Primogenitor was either lucky or skillful in his initial picks. He selected men who weren’t powerless or abusive. They don’t need the Brothers to get what they want: They fall back on the Brotherhood to make things easier, when they’d otherwise be difficult. They, in turn, drew in other men like themselves.

The Brotherhood is, therefore, full of men who regard it as a convenience, not a necessity. It’s new (it was founded only a year and a half ago) so nobody is relying on it yet. As long as there’s a sense that “I could be asked for so much, but they request so little, if I really needed it,” the men within feel more and more loyal to it. Plus, at the bottom, having a power that’s off limits to women is an unspoken lure.

The Civic Brotherhood started out with a heavy proportion of ex-military and Western Marchers, and while those majorities have thinned, they’re still present. More of the Brothers of later generation are still serving in one military or another, and their loyalty has been to their comrades more than to their countrymen, which means people of Deerwood and Center are more common in the Brotherhood at lower levels. So far, the effort to stay restricted to respectable men of means has worked, but with every generation the standards get imperceptibly looser as the Brothers become increasingly eager to obtain the prerogatives of Proctorhood.

The Brotherhood is currently all good times, hale fellowship, the pleasure of shared discretion and useful favors now and then. This can’t last. At some point, someone with an unethical bent is going to enter the group, or someone in the group is going to face a crisis that bends his ethics. When sketchy orders start flowing downward, the point of decision is going to either corrupt a lot of members, leaving them guilty and resentful towards the Brotherhood, or it’s going to get them ejected. (In company terms, they may have to choose between Territory and Sovereignty.)

Once people get ejected, the question of who they tell and how they tell it is crucial. One description of the Brotherhood makes it sound like a harmless old-boy network. Another makes it sound like a dangerous conspiracy. How is a group of self-righteous soldiers going to deal with a threat to their honor and their secrecy—especially a threat who was once one of their trusted members? What are the chances someone flies off the handle? What are the chances that an ambiguous order like “Take care of him” might get interpreted as “Gut him in his own cathedral”? Only the GM knows.
Sir Vow Alterward was a knight, a middle-ranked officer in the Deerwood army sent to the Maemeck front. He served in sidesaddle infantry—ground troops who rode horses to position, but fought on foot in heavy armor with tower shields. On a mission to find a pass through foothills he saw the squads on his left and right devastated by Maemeck biauchris, but his commanders refused to order a retreat, even though he’d made it clear that there was no route forward. No, the generals at the back sent two messengers (the first of whom died en route) to reiterate the order to scout in force for a way through the hills. So Alterward and his men pushed on, only to return at nightfall with a quarter of his men injured and three dead, to state as a solid fact that there was no way through—just as he’d thought that morning, when his comrades were alive.

He was disciplined for insubordination and then, when the commanders back in Center demanded to know why so many soldiers had been lost in fruitless scouting, he was blamed. Luckily for Alterward, he had a friend in the scribe corps who tipped him off, and he was able to desert, steal a horse, and flee to Pahar lands.

It was there that he got his first taste of democracy and he found it unbelievably sweet.

AGENDA: INSTALL DEMOCRATIC RULE

The family that hid Vow was very courteous and sympathetic, and he’d heard Pahar in his unit talking about how superior it was to pick leaders instead of having to follow any fool who got born right. That, combined with his resentment towards his officers, made the spectacle of Pahar screaming invective at candidates, ridiculing them and threatening them with bodily harm (all of which are traditional) look wonderful. Finally, he’d found a system where the leaders were accountable!

Having developed the convert’s fervor, he grew a nice full beard, forged some travel papers (he’s “Vow Deerleg” now) and headed towards Center City to start the revolution. That was three years ago. The interim has been spent working as a bouncer and cook at a variety of taverns. He didn’t stay at any one too long, just enough time to meet the regulars, find a few who hated their bosses, feel them out about this ‘democracy’ idea (which, he discovered, often sounds better to Deerwood and Eastern Marchers coming from him than it would from an exotic Pahar) and invite them to weekly meetings. Nothing too formal (at first), just a place to discuss their grievances and try to figure out a better way.

A few things set Vow apart from other pseudonymous firebrands who want to tear down the unjust system and replace it with one that has a much peachier place for themselves. For one, he’s a veteran. He knows how to lead, how to bluster and (should it become necessary) how to take a mule kick to the chest. For another thing, he’s a real believer in a system that works and has a practical track record he can point to. He’s a shrewd judge of character and this let him spot the secret police who infiltrated his gang of malcontents. But perhaps most importantly, he’s lucky enough that he converted those selfsame undercover police spies. They’ve officially labeled him a harmless crank, systematically underreported attendance at his meetings, and advised him on how to avoid attention from their colleagues.

Vow’s days of cruising bars on behalf of representative government are over anyhow. He’s got enough members in his organization that they’re recruiting the people they trust and running meetings of their own. He’s concentrating on organizing his cells of would-be representatives and voters. And on keeping his head down.
This burgeoning political movement calls itself “The Human Earthquake.” To Vow’s way of thinking, power should come up from underneath instead of falling down like rain and lightning. He foresees a day when Imperial authority dries up and blows away, and the reliable ground of the People’s Will supports firm new structures in its place. On that day, the earthquake becomes calm. Until that day, they may need to knock some buildings down.

BELONGING

Getting in is a matter of knowing someone who’s already in, but by and large people are just dragging their friends to meetings where people talk up the “Pahar experiment” and ask why only a fifth of the Empire gets the luxury of government that’s bound to respond to them, instead of the other way around? Vow is the most persuasive speaker, but he’s gotten a few other passionate rabblerousers and articulate intellectuals in his fold, and they ply their methods as well.

To Vow’s surprise, he hasn’t gotten a lot of attention from the farmers and blacksmiths and barrel-staff-carvers. Instead, most of his followers are educated people looking for opportunity. Well-tutored but disgraced or disillusioned nobles like himself, low-power mages, merchants who get more money than respect—they all see themselves as people who could thrive if only the well-named and better-connected weren’t insulated from the consequences of bad behavior.

(There aren’t many Pahar in The Human Earthquake, either. A few, but there are already Pahar democratic insurgent conspiracies to join. Not many Pahar who get to Center City are anxious to rock the boat, and Vow’s advisors have encouraged him to make a clean break. It wasn’t too long ago that the Pahar were chanting slogans and marching in the streets, and police operatives tend to view with suspicion any meeting where too many Pahar language syllables are heard.)

Once someone shows up, the assumption is that she pays attention and asks her friends about the next event. Word of mouth gathers the disorganized and disgruntled to be ranted at or reasoned with. So far, nothing treasonous has been said in public, but there is a second tier of meetings. As people make friends and gain the trust of the speakers, these familiar faces get into one-on-one conversations. Those who can mouth the right platitudes find themselves invited to come help organize. If they want to speak, they can set their own agendas (though Vow and his bent cops carefully coach them on what can and cannot be said in public). If they have other skills… well, Vow makes a note of that and asks them to stand by.

THE FUTURE

The Empire has habitually suppressed anti-Empress movements before they have the chance to do anything too damaging, but The Human Earthquake has already grown past the point of being easily squashed. It’s too numerous, too diffuse, too passionate, too chaotic. Killing Vow would be a great first step, if it could be done deniably, or in the middle of some public disgrace. But killing him after a show trial would have the opposite of the desired effect: A man who watched his friends die for The Empire would make stirring speeches from the top of the death pillars, getting more attention as a martyr than he is as a leader. On the other hand, having him disappear wouldn’t work very well either. Against the official Empire story that he just abandoned his democratic comrades when he got bored, The Human Earthquake would present a narrative of Vow being alive, in hiding, a living symbol of The Empire’s real frailty. How fearsome can the Crimson Guard really be if they can’t find one man? If that story gains traction, The Empire is really in a bind. They can’t prove he’s dead without demonstrating their fondness for extrajudicial killings (and of a titled noble, no less!) and, rather directly, supporting his central thesis that Imperial oligarchy is unjust and vicious. On the other hand, letting his legend grow does them no favors either. So even if they
find out who he is and how large his movement has become, letting him live might be their best option.

Assuming Vow’s continued leadership, and continuing discretion on the part of his police minders, things reach a crisis point in about eight months. That’s when The Human Earthquake gets enough members that it can no longer hide, just as many of those members start getting fed up with talk and clamor for action. Depending on leadership decisions they might start a campaign of sabotage and work-stoppages until their demands of representation are met. They might seize an armory by force and attempt a bloody insurrection. Or they might strike by night, trying to assassinate the Empress herself. (Hey, it worked on the last one.)

**Liberation Faith**

“When a poor man gathers money, he spends it upon food, shelter, perhaps a warm garment and if there is more? He shares. He helps those he knows in sorrow. I tell you, humble fare satisfies a hungry peasant far more than all the Empress’ delicacies satisfy her. His rough cloak brings a gratitude more profound what a nobleman feels at the gift of a dozen fine robes. But finer than food to the hungry or shelter to the storm-driven is the chance to help another.

“A rich man who has never known want cannot see what he has, but only what he lacks in comparison to those wealthier still. Even if he is the richest man for a thousand miles, he will envy this man’s wife, that man’s skill, another man’s fortune at gambling. Once needs are met, greater stores of wealth only burden your sense of completeness, they do not enhance it.

“With authority it is the same, but worse. For a responsible man, it is a fountainhead of worry. Even a callous tyrant takes two measures of resentment and jealousy in his left hand for every measure of power he gathers in his right.

“Creating beauty is a greater joy than possessing it. Helping others is a deeper happiness than being helped. To know one’s needs and meet them is a far better thing than to endlessly feed wants and see them burgeon with unlimited growth.”

—Bell Heldfast, founder of Liberation Faith

**Agenda: Radical, Anarchic Altruism**

The Heldfasts are a landowning family of low title, little glory and modest history. They owned farms outside Center City and worked them to raise rabbits, chickens and vegetables for the polis. Over the generations their holdings grew (slowly, despite their name) until Bell’s father had a substantial farm, which he divided between Bell and her two siblings.

Her oldest brother was ambitious, he made prominent friends, invested in cattle drives, expanded his business into leatherwork and tried with all his might to climb the long ladder that seemed to terminate at the heights of the palace. He failed. One deal after another turned sour until he was right back where he started—one-third owner of a prosperous farm. After his taste of the finer life, he could only despise what he’d always known. He fell ill, lingered for three years of complaining, then perished.
Bell’s older sister had no similar aspirations. She was happy to hang on her brother’s coat-tails, get into the good parties, and drink heavily. It was, in fact, her alcohol-fueled death that derailed the brother’s grand plans. He mourned and tried to hide his mourning, he was angry at his sister and couldn’t show it to her friends, whom he both resented (for dragging her down) and needed (because they were the same prominent citizens who were buying his goods). In the end, all his quiet seething did him no good. He tried to keep his emotions secret, but that very effort made him too tense and jittery to be around. His high class pals gradually drifted away, leaving him with no investors to help him fund risky plans. As described, he faded away.

But before either of her siblings had died, Bell started getting headaches. Initially, they were mild and intermittent—easily dismissed as tension or a head cold or the devilry of mischievous spirits. When her sister perished, they became worse and more frequent, but wouldn’t you expect that, with all the weeping and sorrow? It was only after her brother died that the really strange symptoms began. After his burial, the headache laid her out for a full day and night, and her vision was clouded by lights and colors, sounds rushed through her mind like foreign songs and every idea in her head became disordered.

She recovered, but the dazzling attacks came more frequently. The pain had… changed, though. It was not only pain, but pain that bound together exhilaration and wonder and contentment and curiosity. Her mind was coming apart and recombining in a new shape, and everything she’d always known was as new to her as if she were an infant once more.

The nosebleeds made her think that this was something which would claim her life, and the healers who weren’t puzzled agreed. As the strange sensations grew in duration, she found that the only thing that made sense in both worlds—the realm of the new pain and the everyday life of farm toil and money—was kindness. Compassion could stretch a bridge between what she’d been and what she was becoming, and though she was no beauty, her face transformed when she spoke of it, illuminated by total belief. She told her vassals and employees about the things that were true, she pulled aside the illusions of greed and envy and it was impossible to doubt her.

Towards the end, her head was visibly swelling. When she finally died, over a hundred devout followers were in attendance. Their respect was so profound that the field in which she lay was silent except for their breathing. The crack as her skull gave way from the pressure within was clear to hear.

The tumor that had swelled her head until it burst open like a flower was reverently removed, preserved in clear liquor, and is an object of veneration by the Church of Liberation Faith.

BELONGING

You want to join? Go out to Heldfast farm—a name that looks increasingly ironic to tax assessors and land surveyors. Bell left all her property in common to “The Church of Liberation Faith” which operates through a disorganized muddle of meetings and inspiration, with no one individual emerging to act as director. The problem with an anarchic philosophy that reviles authority is, anyone who tries to organize anything is, pretty much by definition, an outsider. If you prefer, a ‘corrupting influence.’

If you’re poor and have nothing, Heldfast farm and Liberation Faith are great. You go, you get a simple meal and a dry place to sleep. But if you don’t work, you get condescending lectures, and even if you do work you get preached at all the time. Maybe that’s fine.

Interestingly, a number of people with actual wealth are finding their way to the farm and joining the Faith, throwing their property into the communal pot and living moment by moment without a care for the morrow. This is easier said
than done, of course, and for everyone who goes all in, there are a dozen on the fringes, donating a little here and there and wondering when the relief of their worries is going to occur. (The orthodox Faith answer is, of course, ‘when you give up the rest of it.’)

The Future

Right now, the Faith is a bunch of optimists on some fertile ground that’s had a few good years. If they can get some kind of coherent decision process in place, they might be able to build on their momentum and become a stable philosophical monastery, able to trade for what it needs with the surrounding businesses and support a large and growing number of ascetic altruists. In decades, who knows? They could engulf the entire nation. It’s not bloody likely, but people can be trained to live without selfishness.

On the other hand, no one has introduced violence to this little enclave yet. At some point, someone’s going to either decide they haven’t been given enough or they’re going to decide that self-interest sounds pretty good, even if it’s seized at another’s detriment. Bell never addressed this in life. The victim might decide “If he’s willing to knock me down for this corn, he clearly needs it pretty bad.” On the other hand, someone watching might think, “My altruistic drive compels me to help the guy being knocked down and robbed.” A lot of the Faithful are brawny farmworkers. Beating a thief to death might not seem out of line with their principles: As long as they think of the person they’re saving as the recipient of kindness (and not the person they’re beating), it could pass muster, especially in the heat of a struggle. (These aren’t trained theologians, remember.)

That’s without anyone justifying violence. Right now, the Faith says it’s best to lead people to reject their false luxuries. It does not say that forcefully stripping people of their property (or authority) is at all wrong. There’s a power vacuum at the top, too. A lot of adequately-fed people who sought out a new life-way are casting about for direction. A cunning demagogue could turn them into his personal mob fairly quick.
This is the story the wizards of Nain tell.

Our powers are great and our sight is keen, but we cannot know the secrets of the deep past and we will not dishonor you by claiming we do. How this world came to be, and how we came to be in it, is a matter only of conjecture. But this is what our wisest believe.

Before time was time, there was no world, but this world came to be. How it was built, we know not, but the same power that made it and sustains it lies within you. As the sun was sparked in the sky, so you can spark flame. As the ocean moves upon the shore, you can make movement. As birds fly, you can fly. The land gives life to plants of the field, and you can give life as well. By nature, the chill hand of death comes to rest on every beast in time. By the power within you, you too can bring death.

What may lie beyond this life, we cannot say, but within this world, the power others ascribe to gods rests with us and our will. This is your privilege. Use it wisely.

This is the story the commonfolk of Nain tell.

This world is broken, cruel and unjust. God could not have done this. God, the unmoved mover and prime purpose of the universe, could not touch the world and be perfect, for perfection must remain unchanged to be unsullied. So it was given unto a thousand thousands of angels to make a thousand thousand worlds, each a sphere of life, and in doing so, become corrupt, and in their corruption, to die.

But the angels’ corruption withstood the stain of death. Pieces of their will, like stains of blood, fell upon us, upon mankind. And this world of suffering and matter responds to its maker, even still. Those in whom the taint is strong, the sorcerers and wizards and enchanters, can make stones dance and fire burn dark.

To say they are evil is naïve, just as to say that the unstained are good is foolish. In no family is the power too strong to skip a generation, or to cease entirely. There is no one among us ordinary folk who cannot find an ancestor or distant cousin who bears the power. Many wizards are kind and honorable. But even the wisest man can have moments of folly, and even the gentlest of us knows anger. The wizards are no better. Anything you might do in a moment of weakness—one failure of courage or burst of temper—they might do as well. But their weakness can be more terrible our strength.
Perhaps one in a hundred of the people of Nain have the gift. Perhaps as many as one in fifty. In the seven great Enchanted Bloodlines, the power is far more common than not, while other families find themselves almost entirely bereft of enchanters. But there is no family in Nain of whom it can be said that there has never been a wizard of their name.

(No family but one.)

The magic of Nain shows itself at childhood's end, as girls take the shapes of women and boys speak in cracked voices and scratch the itch of new beards. The wizards seek it out every winter during their Festival of New Vessels. The grown enchanters craft wands, the sign and tool of a sorcerer's power, and on the longest night of the year, the wands seek out those children coming into the gift, who have not yet been anointed into the world of enchantment.

Wizard children who inherit the power are often destined to take a wand from a parent or relative. Enchanted children of common stock are taken by the wizard who made the wand, and their parents rarely resist. Sad as it is to see a child taken away to a new life among strangers, the dangers of an untutored wizard developing powers without focus or guidance are terrible, well-known, and if they're forgotten once or twice every few generations, the results are usually tragic enough to ensure a years of compliance.

(And those passed over? They can always hope for next year, or the year after. Some wizards only get a wand by seventeen or even eighteen summers. But most are found by twelve years, and each birthday after makes finding less likely. As the solstices pass, the hope for magic has to die, replaced by acceptance... or envy.)

Nain itself is a fertile, triangular valley bordered on three sides by cruel mountain crags and ending in a thick and vicious forest. The mountains and the woods are both home to dangerous animals like bears and wolves and lions, but far more perilous are magical creatures like manticores and hammerwights. These monsters, though dangerous enough to challenge even mighty wizards, are often sought by brave enchanters who seek to harness their powers for themselves.

A road goes through the forest. Few wizards leave Nain by it forever, for why go to lands where their power may be respected, but their social position isn't? Few foreign travelers make it to Nain to trade for the magic devices the enchanters craft (for the nation has little else of worth to outsiders). As for commoners leaving the country, only the brave go and few of them come back.

Nain is primarily an agricultural nation, and between the fertility spells of its natives and the land's natural bounty, it supports a large population for its size. Roughly half the people there are farmers. Another quarter, or a bit more, are laborers of a different type—miners, carters, dairymaids, swineherds and shepherdesses. Most of the remainder are skilled workers such as masons, smiths, carpenters, potters and weavers. Only a tiny fraction falls outside those categories and into specialized roles of ruler, warrior or magician. But that slender shred of the population wields disproportionate influence.

Nain is almost two overlapping and interlaced countries. One is the land of commoners, who work, love, steal from one another and live their lives rarely seeing enchantment or monsters. The other is the society of magi who scheme and connive against one another, strive to control their peasants, and deal with all manner of unexpected events, threats and perils.

The contact between "drudge" Nainians and their powerful neighbors is at its most frequent when it is casual. A magician buys his bread from a baker, perhaps holds some land and collects duties from his tenants, consults with a horse groom before purchasing a steed. These professional contacts of convenience are usually smooth and involve little concern from either party.
Close emotional contact is frowned upon but inevitable. Given the limited numbers of wizards and the frequency with which they emerge from common stock, there are sorceresses falling in love with the unenchanted, farmers alarmed by the return of a magus daughter, and marital arguments where one spouse carries a wand and the other doesn’t.

Law and order are quite different between the two classes. Magicians police themselves, and the wanton slaughter or abuse of drudges isn’t just illegal—it’s rude. They accept that a bit of bluster can be needed to encourage the lazy, but killing a common laborer (or even a ruler or a warrior) is regarded as a weak and cowardly deed. To a wizard, it’s like a grown man kicking a kitten. Never mind that some warriors are fierce and skilled and some wizards are weak: It’s expected that a wizard can, barring subterfuge or treachery, overcome any among the unpowered.

(Though of course there are wizards who wish to see a firmer hand taken, who think that they should have the right to kill any drudge who has the insolence to meet their eyes. Indeed, there are many who have found that the power of human sacrifice is just as great when it’s a commonblood on the altar… though officially, of course, such abominable practices ceased long ago.)

Unlike most primitive and near-feudal societies, noble bloodlines don’t exist in the common culture of Nain. When any child could be swept out of its parents’ arms to become an enchanter midway through its life—and when any family of shepherds might produce a child whose magic could overcome any drudge king—the idea of rule by divine right seems absurd. As for letting the magicians rule them, that wasn’t really practical either. Certainly tithing to the magicians was reasonable (if for no other reason than to allow them to gather in towns and torment other magicians instead of having their bored eyes roving over the populations of rural estates), but asking them to solve mundane problems? There was clearly no correlation between magic power and wisdom, so the commonfolk left the wizards alone as much as possible and governed themselves. Primarily this takes the form of a rough democracy in which a mayor is selected every five years or so, determined often by who has the most relatives and has annoyed them the least. A shire reeve is similarly selected on the basis of size, strength and ability to bully other peasants into compliance with the laws and social mores of the town, city or village. These local leaders appoint regional governors and, periodically, administrators with narrow national duties. But Nain’s government (known as “the Commonwealth”) has no king or supreme executive. Often decisions are made in situ by whoever has the loudest voice or clearest plan.
The values of the enchanters are passion, honor and loyalty. They prize passion because emotion fuels their gifts: A wizard who doesn’t care has a harder time bringing his will to bear on the world. They prize honor because it keeps their emotions channeled in acceptable directions. A wizard’s pride in himself as a man of his word can offset momentary angers or fascinations. Finally, they prize loyalty because their competitions with one another are rarely one on one. Or perhaps, it’s clearer to say that even the personal vendettas and obsessions often play out within a context of competing groups: The three schools, seven great families and various cliques or cabals all interact and contend with one another, and that’s without factoring in the loose Commonwealth government that has both wizards and drudge bloods among their members. As for the commoners, their culture is far more likely to value patience, kindness and practical outcomes.

To a wizard, someone who dies wand blazing, fighting for what he believes, is a magnificent romantic figure. To a drudge, he’s a fool. An enchanter who dies fighting to defend a village from a chimera is honored for his courage and for showing compassion to the villagers, but he’s much more honored if his sacrifice actually drives the monster off. As the refrain of the song "The Dragon of Kraegnot" puts it, "If we’re fated to pay wizard blood for our safety, I wish we’d at least become safe."

As for patience and kindness, they’re bald necessities. Someone who loses his composure with wizards is unlikely to have a full, healthy, pox-free life. Empathy for others is needed in hard times. If the common folk argued and contended with the unforgiving intensity of the sorcerers, nothing would get done and everyone would go hungry.

When wizards can create sounds and lights with negligible effort, there’s little incentive for them to study instruments. Similarly, when an Abro ritual can change a stone into a statue in hours instead of days, craftsmanship is naturally disdained. The art forms honored among magicians are dance and poetry, because they can’t simply be enchanted into existence.

Wizard dances are formal and intricate, often in alternating stages. In the first stage, everyone is expected to move in a pre-arranged and precise pattern. (Not knowing your place is humiliating.) But periodically there’s a phase in which the dancers circle and pairs who wish to really strut their stuff can go to the center and display their grace and athleticism with dips, lifts and precision footwork. There’s a strategy and social dynamic at work during circles: Staying at the periphery is safe and neutral. The first circling is for the very best dancers, and if you go in during the first circle and aren’t excellent, (say, an x10 or 3x+ set on your Graces or Perform: Dance roll) you’ve just humiliated yourself. Later circles have progressively lower standards, and correspondingly lower chances of looking great. Even a great dancer at an end circle looks merely good. Sure, he’s fine on his feet, but he’s a coward for not dancing earlier.

As for poetry, longer is better, rhyme and rhythm are strict (to the point of mangling grammar and syntax) and it should be about epic love affairs, battles with monsters, tragic death or (ideally) all three.

Among commonbloods, craftsmanship and musicianship are prized far more. Because of the attention they have to pay to master their skills, they usually have a better grasp of subtleties than magicians who can simply will sound or matter into their desired configuration. A carved statue may be less precise than one made with Abro, but it’s likelier to have pleasing proportions, a graceful composition, and that hard-to-define emotional element some call ‘soul.’ It’s the same...
with music, especially in ensemble. One magician can create the sound of an entire orchestra, but it usually sounds somewhat sterile or artificial. A group of skilled drudges is, again, less perfect but more beautiful. (This phenomenon drives aesthetically-inclined magicians crazy. Sometimes literally.)

(One mage family, the Talmacks, are noted for their pursuit of instrumental and vocal music divorced from magic and, though they don’t know it, this earns them some respect from the commoners. Indeed, the commonfolk don’t really think about it themselves.)

Clothing

Wizards wear robes. Even the warrior-magi of Glinrow wear robes, though theirs only come to mid-thigh and are accompanied by pantaloons and tights if they want to avoid scandal. (Some from the Scath family at Glinrow embrace scandal.) Other wizard robes are voluminous and flowing, often with an even more flowing cape or cloak. (Again, Glinrow is the exception, preferring short capes clasped at the shoulders so they won’t get snagged in a fight or become a makeshift garrote.) Graduates of Bleak Monastery are more likely to wear hoods and cowls, while the traditional Murhalx hat (pointed and broad-brimmed) has spread in popularity with the other schools as well. Glinrow and Murhalx both tend to think ‘more is better’ when it comes to decoration, embroidery and jewelry. Indeed, most magicians have ropes of necklaces with amulets, pendants and other odds and ends dangling off them. Sometimes, these items are artifacts with magic powers. Some of them are probably touchstones (explained in the “Magic of Nain” article). Others are decoration, or protective coloration for items of enchantment.

Bleak Monks tend to avoid ostentation as much as practical, but even they often have interesting objects dangling from their rope belts or hidden in the pockets of their wide sleeves.

Commoners, men and women alike, wear pants most of the time. If they’re rich or influential, they might adopt tights and pantaloons, but usually it’s trousers. Women wear long dresses on important occasions like marriages or funerals or high feasts. Otherwise, both wear loose blouses with puffy sleeves gathered at the wrists. The more prosperous wear jackets or vests, and add lace to the throat and wrists.

Cuisine

Plentiful and bland. Lots of bread (coarse black stuff for most, fine milled white bread for the rich and magical), honey in the south near the forest, mutton in the east and west near the mountains, pork and beef and chicken everywhere. Root vegetables get eaten raw in summer, cooked in winter and pickled in fall. Except for apples and raspberries, fruit is less common—even grapes are rarely eaten, since they’re needed for wine. Beer and wine are everywhere, usually drunk by anyone over the age of 12 at every meal but breakfast. Hard liquor is rarer and usually favored by the wand-carriers.

The biggest meal is usually breakfast, followed by a light lunch, a more substantial mid-afternoon dinner, and a light supper an hour before bed.
As described, politics in Nain divide sharply between mage and drudge, intersecting in the Commonwealth. The concerns of the politicians in each group overlap a little, but not very much. In many cases, the idea of conflict between classes is as odd as the idea of a maple tree attacking a honeybee: Even if it could do so, what possible interests would bring them into conflict?

Magician Politics

The seven great families administrate most of the land in Nain, if by "administrate" one means "take taxes from and defend against monsters." They bicker with one another over particularly choice sections, often finding paper-thin rationales in forgotten treaties, probably-bogus legal interpretations, false accusations of black magic and (most commonly) by reinterpreting the impossibly tangled lines of familial descent that stretch back to mythological times. Sometimes these arguments lead to scandal, public insults, duels or even massed armies in the field. (Though a 'massed army' is a curious thing in Nain. See "Nain at War," on page 20.)

The other subject of conflict in sorcerer's politics is simple prestige. Who gets to enter a room first. Who bows to whom a fraction of a moment sooner, or a part of an inch lower. Whose titles permit him to go armed in the presence of this master or that Prime, who defers to whom when speaking. These matters are deadly serious to many magicians in Nain and if they feel a need to defend their honor through challenge, murder, the fabrication of social disaster or military invasion, they do it. The problem, of course, is that social prestige is constantly shifting, no matter what official medals and titles say. If you take insult and no one backs you up, it doesn’t matter what your title is or how powerful you are with your witchcraft: You’re ridiculous. If you kill someone over a slight, maybe you get less ridiculous. Or maybe you become a spoiled and dangerous brat no one wants around.

Ancient family rivalries play into these factional disputes, and even more into the arguments over etiquette and privilege. But all of that gets another entire dimension when school loyalty comes into it. While some schools have heavy favoritism from certain families (and vice versa—Domhurden at Glinrow, Chaun and Fessen at the Monastery, Talmack and of course Murhalx at Murhalx Castle) there are people from most families at most schools and the question of standing behind a cousin or a classmate comes up often. Yet no matter how often people subordinate family to friends or Prime to patriarch, it's always a matter for incredulity, breast-beating and outraged accusations of betrayal.

Mundane Politics

While the wizards fulminate and posture, the drudges get in the harvest, repair the roads, dig wells, survey land, warn one another about sheep poxes and, by and large, do every single task related to maintaining a government, as long as it isn’t anything worthy of an epic ballad. The sorcerers conduct their lives like poems. Commonbloods live prose.

The political disputes are therefore regional, financial and only rarely personal. Drudge politicians want hidden piles of money, creature comforts, and security. They know they’re never going to compete with wizards for pomp and splendor, so they don’t try. They content themselves with having a warmer, drier house than the next mayor, with better years in the wine cellar.
Commonwealth Politics

There are grandly titled positions in the Commonwealth, usually occupied by wizards and usually with duties that are primarily ceremonial. Then there are jobs with boring descriptions, large budgets, and considerable discretion in how they carry out their mandates of "improving commerce" or "upholding Nainian culture" or "securing the nation's borders."

Conflicts arise in the Commonwealth when a wizard in a lowly position just can't accept the decisions of a drudge who outranks him (and who usually finds himself having a run of "awful luck" that could easily be attributed to sandbagging by all the drudges around him, but which never is). They arise when a wizard gets grand ideas and tries to implement them without commoner support. And sometimes a drudge gets into one of those grand ceremonial positions and tries to throw his weight around with his sorcerer peers. Sometimes, if he's rich enough and has enough allies, he can even succeed.

By my guts and bones, Darrow, I'll not abide this treatment. I am no common fool to fright off with a puff of smoke and a wizardly sneer. I am Mayor of Abhar's Grove and if those damn Scath whores think they can play me against their lickbottom servants in Bright Bonnet Valley, they shall learn their error to their grave distress. I will not be insulted in my home. I will not be made mock of before my children and my wife.

You know I am a patient man. You know I have bided my time and stored my funds against time of need. Now, I have need of that man we discussed, the officer discharged from Glinrow's service.

Veissa Scath cannot die. I'll not be involved in any such plot. But above her life she values her lovely face, and it is her greatest weapon against the likes of us. Hire the man. Make clear that she is to live. Should she choose to die by her own hand after the work, I'll count myself as having good value, but she must not be murdered.

In this matter, I shall pay half before, half after and your duty will be only to arrange affairs. In return for this funding, you are to destroy this missive upon receipt of the first payment. It is a sign of my trust that I commit these words to paper. You were right. We ought have taken these steps last year. The enchanters have gotten too bold by half, the Scath wench especially.
The mundane forces of Nain are meager in number, though well trained and, in times of war, often equipped with dangerous items or powerful potions. Each castle has a small company of men at arms, usually pikemen and crossbowmen used for wall defense, occasionally mobilized to chase a bandit or break up a brawl (or even a riot). Glinrow, in addition, has a well-trained and well-armed group of cavalry soldiers, equally adept at massed lance charges or rapid-strike archery maneuvers.

Outside the castles, the per-capital numbers of armed mundanes are even lower. Towns have a dozen officers and a shire reeve who make sure tax collection goes smoothly. They also watch for bandits, rough up suspicious outsiders and sometimes chase down wolf packs. A village might have one particularly burly farmer or blacksmith that people run to when there’s trouble, and every adult male of common blood might serve a day a month in ill-fitting armor, watching a guard post with a crossbow and some harnesses to mend.

There are only three real national forces at arms: The Commonwealth Mountaineers, the Glorious Raiders and the Forest Brigade. Each is a unit of fifty to a hundred men, professional soldiers who patrol the country’s borders and interior.

The Mountaineers are expert climbers and range through the hills to the east and west (leaving the northern peaks to the Bleak Monastery to guard). Usually they’re lightly armored, on foot, and carrying bows and short swords. But they are tough. In snowy peaks they can make better time than many soldiers can on horseback, and arrive in better shape to fight. Their resistance to cold, fatigue and thin air are legendary, as is their proclivity for dealing with magic monsters themselves instead of running for a wizard.

The Glorious Raiders are an elite cavalry group much like Glinrow castle’s non-wizard horsemen, but there’s no crossover or exchange between the two. The Raiders train at the town of Spire Island, which serves as the unofficial center of the Commonwealth. The rivalries between families and schools can be steady and intense, but the rivalry between the Raiders and Glinrow’s cavalry is possibly the most violent in the nation since a Chaun buried the country’s last acknowledged Glinrow alive under Mount Torment. Neither would ask the other for help, or give it, even against a hostile foreign power.

As for the Forest Brigade, they’re like the Mountaineers only, instead of climbing tirelessly in the mountains, they move invisibly through the forests. Their armor is light even by Mountaineer standards, they typically fight with axe and longbow, but the great bulk of the casualties they inflict come by luring enemies into, snares, pit traps, deadfalls or the plentiful perils the forest supplies without encouragement. They never, ever fight fair. It’s a point of pride.

But the real strength of Nain as a military force lies in its mighty mages. For every soldier in the service of castle or Commonwealth, there are half-dozen wizards capable of killing a man from a bowshot’s distance.

Well… capable in theory.

The problem with unleashing the wizards of Nain against an invader is that every wizard is a law unto himself. They all have different strengths and weaknesses and specialties and preferences, and each thinks he knows best. Add on the deadly feuds that are almost always present between enchanters and you get troops as likely to kill one another as an enemy.

The exception to this is the students of Glinrow. They are trained to work together and, if someone tried to invade Nain, Glinrow might try teamwork outside of drills. But so far, the forest and mountains have done far more to keep the nation secure than any human being, Seeyan or Nain.
Nainian Character Concepts

...common-born mage ambivalent about her parentage and living a lie…

...Domhurden battle-mage whose brother was murdered by the Hammer-Thane…

...Warrick child working in the kitchens of the Bleak Monastery…

...Scath beauty with no magic, determined to make her way through guile or violence…

...privileged scion of Murhalx, revolted by his family’s pretensions…

Nain Companies

...children of dark magicians, determined to redeem their family names…

...clique of wealthy bankers who use mercenaries and debt-ridden magi to enhance their personal power…

...defeated squad of commonblood soldiers, at loose ends, disgraced, and resentful of the mage who killed their leader…

...rag-tag group of lost young Monastics and hard-bitten Mountaineers who have stumbled across a fourth locale of magic power equal to Nud-Umvau or the White Anvil…

...foreign explorers and dignitaries who’ve discovered that the legends of a magic land are true…

Plots of Nain

...an apprentice at Murhalx claims to be the last of the Glinrows and bears a sword that could be Kitiak Ahar…

...the mages of The Balance reveal themselves and openly call for wizards to deny positions of authority to commonbloods…

...the Chauns find a fat seam of gold in former Glinrow lands, suddenly becoming the wealthiest of the seven families…

...monster attacks drop in frequency but involve coordinated groups of creatures that never fought side-by-side in the past. Rumors abound that a mighty dragon is ordering the Detch into an army…

...the Murhalx Tree begins to sicken…
While Nain is a small nation, the social groups within it are active, meddlesome and fiercely competitive. Combined with their relative paucity of population, territory and wealth, it makes for a volatile situation. There is always an opportunity for individuals to have a heavily-felt impact, because the companies are numerically small and have slight Qualities. In games set in Nain, it's going to be all about actions that raise those Company pools. Though of course, even with good boosts, low numbers make things risky. Or, if you prefer, interesting.

The Companies of Nain

There are three castles in Nain, each the center of a large commonblood settlement, each employing many drudge servants, and each built on a unique magical resource. Ostensibly, the purpose of each castle is to educate the next generation of wizards and unlock the very secrets of reality while providing for the defense of the nation from monsters and foreigners. (Unstated in the preparations of each is the possibility of battling against one another.) They are a combination military garrison (though sometimes with terrible discipline) and university (where the teaching assistants may be obligated to go kill thorn-bulls now and again). All the castles are as vast and impressive as generations of mages have been able to make them, all have underlying layers of tunnels, cellars and secret passages, and all have more secrets than anyone living there knows.

Glínrow

The massive white walls of Glínrow Castle lie beside the forest road, square and imposing. Rising a hundred feet high, behind their ten-foot-thick exteriors are barracks, armories and forges, only marginally less defensible from the courtyard they enclose. If an invading giant or even an army were to cross the moat, break through the drawbridge and penetrate the fine lace gate of Glínrow (a nearly transparent skien of fabric that repels enchantments and cannot be breached by any degree of force), once he (or they) got past the murder holes and the portcullis, the enclosed space would be a shooting gallery from the interiors of the walls.

The massive, four-sided building is known as the Glínrow fortress. Glínrow castle is in the middle of it, like a jewel in a toad’s skull, and though both are made of the same snow-colored granite, the castle’s profile has no hard corners, while the fort has nothing but. Circular walls, long curving halls, ramps and ovals come together in a baffling labyrinth where the only right angles are the connections to ceilings and floors. Even the broom closets are oval.

Glínrow loyalists have a story about how the design for the castle came to Aurex Glínrow as he meditated on the churning water at the base of a waterfall. The less charitable are more likely to compare its floor plan to a plate of noodles.

Deep in the bowels of the earth under Glínrow Castle lies its greatest prize: The White Anvil. Composed of ice-colored stone that cannot be stained, the Anvil is immutably hard and infinitely durable. Upon that stone the sword Kitāk Ahur, the Triumph of Light, was forged. To this day the Glínrow Blades that signal a completed course at the school are hammered into shape there. The instructors of Glínrow have access to the White Anvil, as do the most trusted students and graduates: For those who know its secrets, it is of immeasurable help when creating magical artifacts.

“Immeasurable” Help?

Well, for rolling dice, its help is measurable. It adds a +2d bonus to any attempt to create a magical item out of metal.
The Precepts of Honor

All sorcerers pay, at the very least, lip service to these common ideas. Nowhere are they taken as seriously as at Glinrow, of course.

* Leave no insult unaddressed.

* To refuse to aid to one who is genuinely helpless is base, even if it be your worst enemy.

* Using magic to do violence to drudges, children or the elderly is despicable.

* An excessive love for money is worthy of contempt.

* To strike from concealment is the definition of cowardice.

* Faith in oneself is strength, but obstinate support of folly is the gravest weakness.

Unlike the other schools, where an education in swordplay and equerry are, at best, 'available,' they are required at Glinrow. Students are awakened at the first light of dawn and taken to the courtyard for an hour of drills, marching and exercise. Rain or shine, snow or summer’s heat, there are no exceptions to the rule. The only days Glinrow students have no exercise are on Aurex Glinrow’s birthday in late spring (an occasion celebrated with deep drinks and carousing the eve previous) and the day before the winter solstice (when the staff and advanced students who have crafted wands prepare themselves to follow them to their new protégés).

Glinrow is a loud and vigorous place, where the clash of weapons can be heard any time of day or night—and not always in practice. Honor is the school’s highest virtue. A slight or insult may be met in kind, or may escalate to fisticuffs or spells in the halls. While frowned upon, this is rarely a cause for expulsion unless (1) somebody dies, (2) uninvolved students were harmed cavalierly, (3) the staff were looking for a reason to expel someone or (4) it has become a habit.

Rather than risk being send out of the school in disgrace, students with grudges are more likely to engage in a duel. Glinrow rarely has more than one duel a week (fewer in summer and more in winter, when people are cooped up and cranky) and duels to the death happen only every few years. Any duel attracts a crowd. Magic duels get more onlookers than duels of arms, and lethal fights are the best attended of all. Winning a duel is a sure way to improve one’s social standing, but any conflict of enchantment runs the risk of revealing the sources of one’s power.
The Glinrow Code Duello

Whereas the holding of grudges is small-spirited and unworthy, any insult, of word or through action, can be resolved through challenge. The aggrieved party (hereafter "the challenger") must state the nature of the complaint and its reason to the giver of insult (hereafter "the challenged") in public, before at least three witnesses of good repute. The challenged may, at that time but at no point thereafter, beg forgiveness with bowed head and bended knee. The challenger must forgive if pardon is begged, and thereafter there is to be no further hatred between them.

Should the challenge be accepted, each party to the duel selects a second. The purpose of the seconds is to manage negotiations for and with judges, to spare the fighters distraction. Each second selects one judge for the event, and the third (or "indifferent") judge is chosen when the two come to agreement. Should the seconds be unable to agree on an indifferent judge within the space of two days, the two judges already selected can choose a third.

Those requested to judge a duel are under no obligation to comply if they feel they cannot honorably execute their duties impartially.

The challenger time and location for the duel, subject to the agreement of the judges. The challenged selects the weapons, subject to the approval of the judges, in keeping with the severity of the insult. Similarly, the seriousness of the offense determines the extent to which the duel pursues expiation.

❖ Insults of the first degree may be settled by sword or wand, and the duel proceeds until first blood or yield. An insult of the first degree arises from coarse language; careless falsehood upon the person; indifference toward the challenger's property or animals; and unduly casual treatment of commonbloods under the challenger's protection.

❖ Insults of the second degree may be settled by sword, joust or wand. The duel proceeds until unconsciousness or submission after injury. An insult of the second degree arises from coarse language towards seeyan under the challenger's protection; insult to the challenger's family, loyalty or patron; physical insult; deliberate falsehood upon the person; and deliberate damage to the challenger's property or animals.

❖ Insults of the third degree may be settled with sword, joust and wand. The duel proceeds unto death, unconsciousness or utmost submission after injury. An insult of the third degree arises from injury to the challenger's family, patron, or any other individual the to whom the challenger has publicly declared allegiance; ongoing and concerted slander of the challenger's good name; or injury to the challenger's person arising from cowardly attack.

At the time and place designated by the challenger and the judges, all parties to the duel convene. At this time, the seconds are obligated by honor to pursue a reconciliation. Should this attempt fail, the judges place the duelists at an agreed-upon distance and facing. The judges and seconds retreat to a safe distance. The indifferent third judge signals commencement by dropping a scarf and crying "Schaxu" in a loud clear voice. Only then does the combat commence.
When they aren’t drilling with weapons and formations, or fighting one another, students at Glinrow study magic with an emphasis on movement, conflict and healing. Success at the school is measured with the most practical of metrics: Beast pelts. Advancing through the ranks of adeptness requires the slaying of increasingly dangerous beasts.

To go from apprentice to adept, one must spend at least three years at Glinrow for at least nine months of the year, and use magic to kill a bear, wolf or boar. The means by which the beast is dispatched does not matter. Smiting it with an arcane lightning stroke, holding it off with a shielding spell while striking with a spear, or shooting it with an enchanted crossbow bolt are all acceptable. Even arranging a group hunt is permitted as long as the apprentice being tested casts at least one spell that directly contributes, and as long as no one else casts. (Should someone else in the party use a spell for self-defense, it not only invalidates the test but is considered an indication of cowardice and a nervous disposition.)

From adept to full wizard, another three years of nine-month study are required, and the adept must kill a dangerous supernatural threat alone. Deadlights, thorn-bulls, bellymouths, grendelkin, fence-walkers and drown-maids have all been killed, skinned and presented as proof of talent. (Some adepts kill more impressive creatures, but it doesn’t get them a free pass to master enchanter.)

About a third of the students who pass through Glinrow’s gates reach this level of achievement, thereby earning a Glinrow Blade forged to their particulars. Another third complete their education and leave the school as adepts without achieving the solo kill. The final third die trying.

To become a master enchanter of Glinrow, a title currently held by only the Regent of Glinrow and two of his professors, one must kill a dragon alone. But on the plus side, by the time a wizard is soloing against dragons, no one really cares if he uses magic against it. Not that any lone wizard has ever killed a dragon without it.
Life at Glinrow, then, is about dashing conduct, burnishing one's good name, killing monsters, learning to fight and (of course) courtly romance.

Twice yearly, select students travel to the other castles to participate in cultural and intellectual exchanges. Berths on these journeys are eagerly sought, not only for the glory, but for the extra attention from teachers... and perhaps the right to skip dawn exercises while away from the school.

The Glinrow Tournament

Once per year, Glinrow hosts competitors from the other castles in a week-long test of skill, courage and raw magic power. The Glinrow Tournament begins with a welcoming feast the night before its official opening, which occurs on Aurex Glinrow's birthday. As previously mentioned, the eve before the tournament is a feast, a dance, and an opportunity to mingle with students from other castles.

The next week begins the contests. Tournaments and fencing competitions are traditionally dominated by the host (though there are upsets now and then, to the great glee of Murhalx partisans and the quiet satisfaction of the Monastics). The Bleak Monastery traditionally gives close competition in archery competitions, and does well in contests involving finding hidden objects. The Murhalx teams are the perennial underdogs, though they often defend their poor performance by suggesting that they have more fun than anyone else. But the victor of the last day's Game for the Skull is always anyone's guess. A complex game involving a six-sided field with equidistant goals for each school, the tactics are complicated by spells that repel anyone but school defensive players from proximity to the goal and the constant need to balance teaming up on the point leader against teaming up to score points or defend. Moreover, in the first hour of the game, the ball (a small and light one) isn't allowed to touch the ground, and anyone who permits it to drop takes a penalty. In the second hour, a heavier ball comes in to play, one no one is allowed to touch. It can play along the ground just fine, but it can only be moved with sorcery. In the third hour, the ball is replaced with an round black stone, head-sized and heavy, which is enchanted to repel all magic.

Traditionally strong fliers, the Monastic teams often have maneuver advantages throughout, and the physical prowess of the Glinrow hosts can be decisive, but about a third of the games are won by Murhalx. Sometimes they take them with novel and unforeseen strategies, or adroit maneuvering to keep the other two leading and battling until they exhaust one another, or luck. Sometimes, no one can quite explain how Murhalx came to win, other than they just made fewer mistakes. And the ball players of Murhalx grin, and load the great dragon skull onto a cart to be dragged to their castle.

(As a side note, the grand trophy for the Game of the Skull is the largest specimen of its type, and every winner is permitted to add one decoration to it during the year they hold it. It is resolutely nonmagical, but over the years has become increasingly adorned with gold, silver, gems and commemorative plaques.)

Graduates of Glinrow

Typically, an apprentice at Glinrow has no exceptional skills, but by the time a student becomes adept they learn Weapon: Sword +1 at the least, along with Vigor +1 and Riding +1. A graduate wizard usually has Vigor +2 and Sword +2.
The Bleak Monastery

High in the mountains of Northern Nain is the smallest of the three enchanted castles. Or at least, the one with the fewest visible parts. The Bleak Monastery is gray and unadorned save for its famed 'thousand windows' and the hideous gargoyles who line its towering, sharp-ridged roofs. Everything of the Monastery is tall and thin and gray, gray, gray.

(Nearly everything.)

Unlike the fortified gates of the other schools, there is no curtain wall around the Monastery, nor is one needed. Built on the narrow top of a mountain, surrounded on all sides by peaks as pointed as spears, there are only two obvious approaches. One is a thin, winding track barely wider than a horse's hips, with a sheer wall on one side and a plummeting chasm on the other.

The other clear way to the monastery is to fly.

Within, the public spaces are soaring and vast, usually unadorned but often striking for the placement of tall windows that cut the light into spare but pleasing compositions. In its smaller rooms, the monastery is less austere. Fireplaces abound, as do lamp-lit desks and heavily padded chairs for study. Nearly every private room (meaning, one intended for the use of residents and not widely open to strangers) has a blanket or even a fur to keep one cozy day or night. Unlike the rowdy apprentice barracks or dormitories of the other schools, everyone at the Bleak Monastery has a space that is his or her own alone, from their very first night. Every sleeping room has a fireplace of its own and it's strictly forbidden for others to enter without the permission of the resident. The only exception is for the Abbott or Abbess in person, to whom no door is closed.

Many guests at the Monastery see nothing but the cavernous common rooms, the mazy library and perhaps now and then a comfy wood-paneled study. (Often they assume that these comforts are there for them and are atypical, an assumption monks rarely contradict.) But the third aspect of the Monastery is as big as either of the others, and it is completely subterranean. Here are the workshops where experiments are conducted, not only in magic, but in esoteric fields such as motion physics, the properties of matter, and the composition of bodies both human and animal.

The dissection of human cadavers is a closely guarded secret, even though nearly anyone who makes their sixth year in the Monastery would agree that there is no harm in learning from the flesh after the spirit has moved on. But long ago—two generations past, though not so long that there aren't still greybeards who were alive for it—the Bleak Monastery was the heart of black magic in Nain. The pursuit of the forbidden has a long history at the mountain fastness, and the twisting passages in its dungeons hold torture chambers, oubliettes and, worst of all, secret rooms of vile devices and tomes even worse. The secret research of the Bleak Blasphemers was never completely uncovered, and never fully destroyed. Caches of forbidden texts and powerfully evil artifacts still lie concealed, under the very noses of the Nain's greatest diviners.

Beside the monastery a spring of pure water jets from the side of Oginheam, the Great Mountain. Besides filling the school's cistern, driving several water wheels, and reliably producing rainbows for a couple hours around noon on sunny days, the spray falls a thousand feet to Nud-Umvau, the Lake of Visions. A thin and perilous trail leads from the back of the Bleak Monastery down to the Lake. The only other access to the lake would be to come upstream through miles of rapids that run along treacherous rocks between towering cliffs—and then face the Guardians of the Lake, two gifted adepts who watch the mouth of the Vision River with constant vigilance. To become a Guardian of the Lake is a great honor, indicated by the right to braid a single blue cord into one's rope-belt. The Guardians comprise 35-50 of the school's most trusted students and instructors.
In addition to bragging rights and a much needed splash of wardrobe color, Guardians are permitted to go to Nud-Umvau any time they want, and the Lake of Visions is a powerful resource. They can go there and meditate, hold rituals, drink or bathe in the icy waters, bottle it for use as a touchstone (see the “Magic of Nain” article) or, even better, make a touchstone by enchanting it into permanent ice if they have the skill.

Even those who aren’t Guardians are permitted to go to the lake, with supervision. It’s a frequent site of classes specializing in sensory magic (what the monks call “Clearing the Inner Eye”). The Monastery is also home to Nain’s largest library of magical texts, and while enchanter from all over the country visit to research magic theory, history and allied trades, if they aren’t monastics themselves they do so after even the most callow of apprentices. By far the most intellectually rigorous of the three schools, the Bleak Monastery has mandatory classes in plant lore, the reading of the sky (both the stars’ positions and the changes of weather), and mundane bone-binding along with an hour of still, silent meditation every day.

Not all life in the mountains is study, of course. The towns and villages below send messengers when monsters roam down from the hills, and the monks succor them. Indeed, many of the upper students avidly hunt through the peaks. Some look for magical beasts, to kill them for power or glory, while others pursue rare herbs or the eggs of trainable birds. (The tallest tower at the Bleak Monastery is its mews, and an instructor is more likely to have a hawk, falcon or even an eagle as a pet than not.)

To pass from apprentice (also known as an ‘acolyte’ in the Monastery) to adept (or ‘monk’), one must pass a series of written exams, demonstrate a number of pre-described spell effects, and navigate a series of puzzles using wits, will and wand. This series of tests is permitted after two years at the school, and after two more, the monk can become a full Monastic wizard by passing a much harder and longer series of tests. To become a Monastic master, the wizard is set a highly personalized and individual test, one designed by the instructors who know him best to test his weaknesses and threaten him as personally as possible.

The garb of an acolyte is a drab and dark gray robe, only a shade above charcoal. It’s girt around the waist with a white rope (representing the apprentice’s ambitions). The adept’s robe is medium gray, the wizard robe is light and cloud-colored, and only the masters wear robes of white. Upon graduation, the wizard is permitted to line his hood and robe with green and braid a green cord into his belt.

The Bleak Symposium

At midsummer, the Bleak Monastery hosts a symposium, an intellectual convention at which magicians (and select other craftsmen) are invited to give presentations about their theories and experiments, or conduct high-level classes in their areas of expertise. There are also panels on topics...
ranging from touchstone protection (always a favorite) to defense against dark enchantment to political questions. Rarely is anything decisively settled, but people make friends, hone rivalries, get attention from notable personalities (favorable or not), strike alliances, develop infatuations, embarrass themselves, and sometimes make intellectual breakthroughs.

Only now is the line of travelers up the winding path as thick as it was decades ago, only now are the flying wizards stepping onto balconies coming in small flocks and not alone, and only now is the stain of the Blasphemous Symposium beginning to fade. For two generations past, when the Bleak Blasphemers began their reign of terror, it all started with murder at the Bleak Symposium. Dami Glinrow was killed at table with a stab to the back, becoming the first victim of a vicious purge that would eventually claim her entire family. Though the Glinrows suffered most during the Blasphemous Uprising, they did not suffer alone. Even today, a cloud of suspicion hangs over the Bleak Monastery, and in response its instructors and students are more sensitive than any to accusations of black magic.

Murhalx

Unlike fierce Glinrow or the gloomy Monastery, Murhalx Castle is renowned for revelry, hospitality and joy. Or, if you attend a different school, for being dissolute, weak and spendthrift.

Murhalx Castle is the only one of the three great sorcery schools with a hereditary, family tie, and while the Murhalx geniality is legendary, many have pointed out it’s easy to be genial when everything goes your way. Many acres around the castle grow wheat, corn and (most valuable of all) the grapes from which half the nation’s wine is pressed. Most of those acres are governed, directly or via influence, from the castle.

As the largest and most popular of the magic schools, Murhalx is known less for discipline or intensity than for variety and energy. They approach the study of sorcery the way a child approaches a wrapped present—without little caution but great enthusiasm. Enchanters of Murhalx are curious, engaged, sometimes even obsessive about their studies and often quite careless when it comes to negative effects.

The great central treasure of the castle is the Murhalx Tree. Soaring higher than any man-made building in the nation, the pine continues to grow ten feet in height every year, and gain at least a food in girth. Touching it is forbidden to all but the Prime (as Murhalx’ highest educator is called) and those who have her permission. Disobeying the command is punished with greater vitriol than fighting, cheating, tale-bearing, pilfering or being out of bed after curfew, and is dangerous besides. Anyone who touches the tree without properly propitiating it is likely to find their hand drawn into a crevice of the bark with a crushing grip like iron. Trapped students are found every few years, their hands mangled and being slowly drawn, inch by painful inch, into the tree itself. Often the damage to their limbs cannot be repaired, even with great sorcery. And yet, even some who’ve been wounded by the tree insist that it was worth it. The tree is a focus of fertility and
virility, and even studying in its shade is said to
give insight into those types of magic. Moreover,
its needles (which can reach up to eighteen inches
in length) are often used in wand-crafting.

At least a third of the instructors at Murhalx are
either of Murhalx stock, or are protégés of
Murhalx magicians. The quality of the education
varies greatly, since getting a position at the
school depends more on clout and political
connections than talent at either enchantment or
pedagogy. An excellent education can be had
there, but only for those who care enough to
assiduously
find the
knowledgeable
teachers and
compete for
their attention.
If one wants to
take easy course
and laze
through, that's
an option as
well.

There are
examinations,
but unless one
fails dismally,
they mean nothing. One passes from apprentice
to adept after three years as long as one does
nothing utterly disgraceful more than once per
year. Another three years qualifies one for wizard
status (provided one isn't a complete idiot or a
magnificent embarrassment to the castle).

Mastery is simply conferred by the Prime and, to
her credit, Murhalx masters are as rare as those of
the other schools and typically as effective in their
areas of expertise.

In between classes (or even during them) Murhalx
students amuse themselves with flirtation,
drinking, art, hunting, music, political ambition,
various sporting teams and assorted arcane
societies. These groups are typified by grandiose
titles ("Supreme Exarch of the Ice Scholars"),
elaborate decorations to one's robes, and
negligible effect on anything other than clothing.

Centrally located, Murhalx is as close anything
else to a capital city for Nain. Politics among both
sorcerers and seeyan are laced throughout the
Castle Whose Doors Never Close and the town
that surrounds it. Their influence colors
everything that happens within sight of the Tree,
and if the rivalries are rarely settled with duels,
that doesn't make them any less bitter. If
anything, they're worse.

Murhalx Castle's
Qualities
Influence: 4
Might: 1
Sovereignty: 1
Treasure: 3
Territory: 3

In addition, Murhalx
Castle has the Assets
Eloquent Diplomats
and Predictable Bounty.

The Castles

Rules for the Tree

The Tree accepts anyone who gets a success at a spell to demonstrate respect. Any such spell
needs to use marouf, the power word for ‘tree.’ Combining that with chihan ("love"), ichihan
("happiness") or even nanab ("pass") can work. But trying to protect oneself from it with ba
("halt") or gahar ("shelter") is likely to just upset it. Any such spells are cast at a -2d penalty
when trying to protect from the Murhalx Tree.

Anyone who casts a spell using guph ("growth") near the tree gets a +1d bonus. Anyone the tree
has accepted gets an additional +1d bonus on top of that.

People accepted by the Tree can buy points in the power word marouf for one point less. Trying
to create a wand from a needle gets a +1d bonus, with an additional +1d bonus if the attempt is
made near Murhalx Tree, and a +1d bonus on top of that if the caster has bonded with the Tree.

Finally, those who touch without respect can still learn from their folly. If it’s a PC, offer a choice:
Take three points of Killing damage to the touching limb, gain nothing, but have the injury heal
normally; or lose a wound box from the limb permanently, have your hand visibly disfigured, but
gain a free point in the power word marouf.
The Sorting of New Vessels

The most important gathering of the year for magicians of Nain (which means, of course, the most important for the nation) happens the week after the Winter Solstice. On Solstice Night, during the Festival of New Vessels, wands crafted during the year glow, float, and seek out the magus destined to hold them. Indeed, though they can only move at a walking pace, some wands come alive as much as a month before the festival, leading their makers on long, cold journeys across the whole country to the right enchanter. After those wands have found their new owners, it is the duty of the wand-crafter to escort the protégé to Murhalx and lobby for his education.

Here's how the Sorting works. Every year, the first choice of new students goes to a different school, and the second and so on. Each castle, in turn, can offer admission to a new wand-holder, and it is that new mage’s choice (and no one else’s) whether to accept or refuse. Should a student refuse all three schools, it is the duty of his wand-crafter to educate him for the first year (and then, typically, to beg, bribe or blackmail the student into a school thereafter).

This draft of students begins seven days after solstice night, when the representatives of various schools (instructors and upper-level students of trusted judgment) have had a chance to look around and get impressions of the newcomers. Some students are eagerly sought by all schools, some by only one, and others aren’t particularly wanted by any.

What makes one apprentice valued and pursued, while another is left in suspense until the end, one of the dregs of selection? There are many, many factors, and the formal tests of magical aptitude (“Can you conjure sparks? Good. Try to lift that rock with magic. Say ‘Rampa Heam.’ No, not ‘ham,’ Heam, hear me? Don’t worry. Many children are unable to lift it on their first try”) are sometimes incidental, though every school wants a prodigy. Glinrow pursues tall and clear-eyed children, those who are unafraid (or who simply can’t sit still) or who show signs of being strong or aggressive. Murhalx generally gives preference to children with the Murhalx name, though some hellions scandalize their parents by refusing (thereby hoping to curry favor at another school by embarrassing their mighty relatives) and considerations of wealth, lineage and influence are more likely to yield a coveted early pick at Murhalx than any quality of the student herself. As for the Bleak Monastery, their reasons are opaque. Often they express interest in a particular student in order to create tension with another school who also covets him, thereby creating an opportunity for bargaining. Sometimes they pick students highly sought by other schools simply to be difficult (or so the others claim). But every year the Monastics make a few selections for no reason that anyone can determine. Such ‘mystery pupils’ are told their destiny in the Bleak school was foreseen in the Lake of Visions, and whether that’s true or not, such students often seem to lead exceptional lives.

Graduates of Murhalx

Even apprentices at Murhalx possess a point of Graces, if they know what’s good for them, and even if they don’t they often absorb some manners through simple osmosis. By the time they reach adept, it’s usually accompanied by Fascinate +1 along with Lie +1 and Empathy +1. All those Skills can be exercised vigorously at Murhalx, and it’s a rare wizard who leaves the school without either the Patron Advantage or a deep and bitter resentment of the court favorites.
Once there were eight, but during the rise of the Bleak Blasphemers, the Glinrow family—already in decline—was butchered beyond recovery. The monks of evil didn’t kill off everyone of Glinrow blood, but the survivors were too aged for new birth, or were too frightened to keep the name, or (as some legends claim) they fled down the forest road by night, taking the bright blade Kitiak Ahar with them.

Seven remain, families in whom the spark of sorcery is strong. They have their members without the magic, and generally they keep them hidden away and protected. But each of them has its own way of dealing with “unfortunates.”

**Murhalx**

The greatest of the seven, by their own reckoning, Murhalx is wealthy, storied and revered. It has its own school of magic and, through that, access to the Murhalx Tree. But never let it be said that the Murhalxes are cruel, or stingy or disinterested in the troubles of others. They are generous, magnanimous and deeply invested in the image of themselves as benefactors of Nain. If this sometimes makes their kindnesses a bit self-serving or self-aggrandizing, it does not make them less kind.
Murhalxes are often blonde, sometimes platinum haired, and flush easily. Tall and willowy in youth, Murhalxes often gain weight prodigiously after their thirtieth birthday feast.

Traditionally, the eldest male wizard in the family is given the title “Lord Murhalx” and oversees the lands under the family’s control, until death or retirement. The most powerful female wizard in the family receives the title “Prime Murhalx” and runs the castle school.

The eldest family member with no magic has no title, but serves the other two, acting as a go-between, and smoothing out any conflicts between land and school. In practice, this person manages all the tedious mundane details that the Lord and Prime are too busy feasting and studying (respectively) to attend.

Chaun

More Chauns were in the dark fraternity of evil sorcerers two generations ago than any other family. (Only Glinrow was innocent of all involvement, and they had long been bitter rivals of the Chauns.)

Even in the resistance to the dark magi, the role of the Chaun family is somewhat suspect. The family’s heroes of the war, Tolo Chaun and Zemeck Chaun, were neither one warriors. Tolo gave warning of the Bleak Blasphemers’ plans beforehand (though some say weak warning, and too late) and supplied secret information on them from within their number. As for Zemeck, he was one of the first Blasphemers, a butcher of a round dozen Glinrow wizards, who only turned against them after a final romantic rejection by Aissa Scath, their vicious leader. It’s indisputable that Zemeck’s wrath against his onetime allies was as great as or greater than the cruelty he heaped upon the Glinrow, and that if he hadn’t killed Aissa, no one else might have had the skill. But his change of heart came as things were already beginning to turn against Bleak cabal, and he never rejected their philosophy or aims.

Today the Chaun keep a low profile, sending many of their apprentices to the Bleak Monastery as they did in years past. They have retained much of the land they seized from the lost Glinrow, and only well-placed family allies in that school and at Murhalx have gotten that situation accepted. Other than historic vileness, the Chauns are also known for red hair, freckles, prodigious birth rates, and genteel poverty.

Chaun's Qualities
Influence: 1
Might: 2
Sovereignty: 2
Treasure: 1
Territory: 2
The Chaun also possess the Asset Sinister Operatives.

Murhalx Family's Qualities
Influence: 2
Might: 1
Sovereignty: 2
Treasure: 3
Territory: 2
Note that the family is a subordinate company within Murhalx Castle. That is, to attack the family often means assailing its loyalists at the school that bears its name. But by the same token, if one can undermine the family subtly, it can weaken the Castle in turn. The family has the Entangling Alliance Asset with Murhalx Castle.
The Seven Mage Families

Guerck

The great value of the Guerck family is their loyalty. Swarthy, steadfast and slow of speech, the Guercks are rarely generals but often officers. They do not come up with brilliant plans, but they follow them with meticulous faith. If a great man convinces a Guerk to follow him, his greatness can only increase. If an evil man is backed by Guerks, his power becomes far more entrenched.

Guerk's Qualities
Influence: 2
Might: 2
Sovereignty: 3
Treasure: 1
Territory: 1

Stereotypes

The descriptions of the families are stereotypes, of course. They're only as true as the stereotype that Americans love cheeseburgers. Can you find vegan Americans, traitorous Guerks, plain-but-honest Scaths? Sure. But there's often an element of surprise when you do. The expectations arise from family cultures, and those habits and traditions are deeply ingrained.

Talmack

Neither as smart as the Fessen, as fiery as the Domhurden or as beautiful as the Scath, the Talmacks combine something of all. More than anything else, Talmacks are notorious for their aplomb. Whether it's a challenge of swords, a battle of wits, a tough scholarly problem or an uppity drudge who needs to be put in his place, the Talmack handle it appropriately. They may not succeed, but they fail with minimal embarrassment.

The other thing the Talmack family's known for (other than great hair, which is really just a subset of "perpetual appropriateness") is a modicum of musical talent. Many Talmacks are decent on strings or woodwind. There's never been a genius musician from the Talmack line, of course. Indeed, they've never produced anyone who's the best at anything.

Talmack's Qualities
Influence: 2
Might: 2
Sovereignty: 2
Treasure: 2
Territory: 2

Fessen

The current Abbot of the Bleak Monastery is Tuer Fessen, a scholar from a long line of scholars. As the public face of the family (as much as it has one), he's the archetype: Studious, tall, stooped, taciturn to the point of reticence, brilliant, feverishly intense about his topics of interest and slow to anger. The Fessens have guided the Bleak Monastery more often than any other family (though they were supplanted by the Scaths for three leaders before Aissa became Abbess) and their intense, humorless focus often degenerates into obsession or fanaticism. There's also a family history of club feet and supernumerary nipples.

Fessen's Qualities
Influence: 1
Might: 2
Sovereignty: 2
Treasure: 2
Territory: 1
Domhruden

Mage families have, in the past, been led by patriarchs or matriarchs without wands, but it's only happened more than once for one family, and that is the Domhruden. Magic is persistent in their blood, but never particularly strong. There are occasional Domhruden masters, but none in the current crop of conjurers. But as with Glinrow (their preferred school), the Domhruden are more likely to judge by outcomes than methods. Magic is one of their weapons, but only one. If you ask them, they say their greatest strength is not enchantment, it's courage.

That said, the family has more than its share of bullies, blow-hards, brawlers and flat-out murderous beasts. A "Domhruden temper" is a common reference for a very good reason. If that's the price they pay to lay claim to two commonblood dragon slayers, the Domhruden consider it cheap.

Scath

Beautiful and vicious. Oh, the Scath are known for being brilliant and selfish and innovative and courageous, but mostly for lustrous black hair and evil black hearts. Both those traits, along with their gift of enchantment, seem to travel along the female line, as it happens. A woman of Scath is three times more likely to be an enchantress than a male of the family. If a Scath sorceress marries a commonblood, it’s tradition that she keeps her name and passes it to any children. The family is guided by a matriarch, determined through convoluted lineage charts held at the family’s central mansion. The current matriarch is Vian Scath, who only nearly missed out on becoming Abbess at the Bleak Monastery. She would have been the first Scath matriarch to serve in that role since her grandmother Aissa.

Domhruden's Qualities

- Influence: 0
- Might: 3
- Sovereignty: 2
- Treasure: 1
- Territory: 2

Scath's Qualities

- Influence: 3
- Might: 0
- Sovereignty: 2
- Treasure: 2
- Territory: 2

In addition, they have the Magic Resistant Asset.
Of course there are secrets in Nain. Blatant magic power is lovely for those who have it, but most great sorcerers in Nain’s history fell to treachery (which is close to simply being applied secrecy) rather than spellcraft. Few died in bed.

The Night Wizards

Before the Bleak Blasphemers, black magic was generally practiced privately. Individuals pursued the path, perhaps with one apprentice or protégé to run errands and take the fall if things went bad. At times, Vounain (as they’re known) would band together to pursue collective interests, but the Bleak Blasphemers were one of the rare groups that used Voun methods in the name of an ethos. They were chasing endless life by becoming one with netherworld spirits and, though few talk about it, one of the Blasphemers’ first actions was to assault unaffiliated dark magicians and offer them the choice of slavery or death. Really, it’s just common sense: The Blasphemers had a fine sense of how dangerous a black magician is in a fight. If they couldn’t recruit them, better to dispose of them quietly, before the naïve masses realized there were new dark gods in their midst.

The Night Wizards have no such ambitions of immortality. Well, a few do, but it’s not a collective goal. They espouse no philosophy, but are united by a belief that dark magic is a legitimate technique for the pursuit of power. They exchange research, they work together to downplay evidence of black sorcery, they have some friendships or loyalties and some rivalries or outright hatreds. But each accepts that his own will and desires are the highest good and that any act of malice, cruelty or simple indifference is justified as long as it’s expedient. Indeed, it doesn’t need to be justified. ‘Justification’ is a lie, premised on some laughable notion of ‘justice.’ They want what they want and they seek what they seek. If they can help one another without undue exposure, they do. If one puts another at risk, the risk must be… contained.

Interestingly, a number of Bleak Blasphemers (acknowledged to the Night Wizards or not, second generation or first) are now Night Wizards. While the Night Wizards aren’t going to exert themselves to chase the Blasphemers’ dreams of apotheosis, they are a resource of denial, concealment and rescue. Sometimes.

The Balance

Sitting athwart the Night Wizards’ selfishness and vicious individualism is a small and dedicated group known as The Balance. One doesn’t have to be a white magician to join The Balance, but if you’re not you have to be dedicated to the service of one. Moreover, only those on the path of Niak are trusted with the secrets of the order. In other words, while the followers of one white mage may all know one another, they won’t be allowed to learn the names and faces of another white mage’s followers without that sorcerer’s permission. Such subordinate members aren’t supposed to know the name of any magician in The Balance other than their personal patron. (But of course, secrets are hard to hide, especially among the honest.)

White magicians are a rare breed, and while most of them are in The Balance, there are some who are considered unsuitable or indiscrete. The white magi are most often stationed at castle schools, with other teams of wizards roaming the country,
often in pursuit of mundane goals as well as the furtherance of Balance goals.

There is only one living white magician who is also a master enchantress. She is an instructor at Murhalx castle and is the unofficial leader of The Balance. (Individual white magicians have great discretion with the direction of their followers, but major decisions are made by the white magi in council.) There is only one other master magician in The Balance, serving a white mage at Glinrow. Though he vehemently denies it, it irks his pride to be subordinate to an inferior enchanter who has chosen to give up power.

The Balance has two goals. The reactive (and therefore most urgent) goal is to eradicate the use of black magic throughout the world. Its members therefore are constantly poking their noses into suspicious situations, looking for evidence of dark enchantment. Their proactive goal is to peacefully transfer all governance in Nain from mundane hands to wizards.

Hammer-Thane: The Family Warrel

There are two keys to understanding the company called "Hammer-Thane." The first is the strange nature of the Warrel family. The second is the power of a good story.

It’s accepted throughout Nain that every family has a wizard in it somewhere. Accepted, but wrong. There are no Warrel enchanters, and the family knows there will never be one. Certainly in the family’s hundred-year history, there’s no record of one. The Warrels mention their hedge magician cousins in far provinces and everyone believes it, if the question even crosses their minds.

Warrels aren’t magic. And maybe one in ten is actively magic resistant.

Now when you live in a country where magicians are common, prominent and powerful, you don’t want to go around declaring your ability to waltz past their wards, ignore their insults and skip through their spells. There are just enough weak wizards with strong blades, and more than enough drudge archers of low morals with lots to gain by removing an obstacle for an enchanter.

Enter the myth of the Hammer-Thane.

Maybe there really was a Hammer-Thane long ago, an unusually large and powerful hammerwight (see "Creatures of Nain") who could talk and use sorcery. Certainly there were stories. Even the hammerwights believe in the Thane these days.

### Advantages

**Warrel Magic Resistance (5 point Advantage)**

Any spell that targets the protected Warrel has its Width reduced by 1. If this causes the spell to fail, the spell causes backshock (unless it was cast by a white magician). If there are other sets that can be used against the Warrel, those sets also have their Width reduced. However, a set with Width of 3+ still takes effect, just at its reduced Width.

So far, only those of Warrel descent can take this Advantage; they can only take it at character generation; and it cannot coexist with any form of magical ability. However, there could be exceptions to any of these rules if the story is compelling enough...
And the Warrels? Well, those with the power (and a few crazy-brave Warrels without it) take up the maul and watch for wizards whose arrogance and entitlement crosses a line. (What line? Depends on the Warrel. Some just want to keep wizard rapists and murderers in check. Others want to drive the sorcerers out of Nain altogether, or into graves beneath it.) For every sorcerer bludgeoned to death by a costumed Warrel (usually with a few brothers and sisters backing him up from the shadows), a dozen more live in fear.

Wizards are a cowardly and superstitious lot.

Qualities of the Hammer-Thane Conspiracy

Influence: 2
Might: 2
Sovereignty: 3
Treasure: 1
Territory: 1

The Warrels also have the Assets Sinister Operatives, Irregular Forces, Patriotism, and Magic Resistant.

The Commonwealth

The governance of Nain is known as "the Commonwealth" and while there are wizards within its ranks, drudges control it simply through sheer force of numbers. Even when a sorcerer is in a powerful position, he can't get his orders implemented without the efforts of dozens of commonbloods. And of course, it's only human nature to do a better job carrying out orders you believe in.

More often, the offices of regional governors, mayors,burghers, tax assessors and civil surveyors are occupied by the unenchanted because wizards have more dramatic matters to occupy their attention. Generally, an enchantress only takes a position in the Commonwealth if she's uniquely suited by ability or inclination, or if it's one that involves lots of feasts and accolades and pomp. The real business of government is largely left to those who understand how to divorce authority from glory and use empty pageantry to distract those whose idea of power is limited to mere magic.

Commonwealth Qualities

Influence: 4
Might: 2
Sovereignty: 1
Treasure: 2
Territory: 3
While there are a few devil-worshippers, pantheists and nature cultists in Nain, the main religion among enchanters is a sort of pragmatic agnosticism. Most of them feel no need to seek paranormal powers outside their own.

For most commonbloods, there’s the Unmoved.

In some ways, Unmoved theology is standard, white-bread, no-miracle monotheism. The Unmoved is a distant and benevolent creator deity, but it doesn’t answer prayers. What sort of omnipotent deity would bother to create humans if it was just going to constantly meddle in their lives? No, the Unmoved cares and it watches, but it doesn’t interfere. Humans make their way by their own merits and what comes after, comes after. Believers speculate about an afterlife (or lack thereof) but there’s no text of revealed sacred wisdom because revealing itself would make their god a mover, not Unmoved.

That’s not to say there aren’t texts and priests, but the texts are all theory and the priests aren’t invested through ritual or part of a large, organized brotherhood. Anyone who can read can study any holy books to which he can gain access (and literacy is surprisingly high in Nain—children are taught their letters because anyone might turn wizard, after all). Anyone can declare himself a holy scholar. But unless he counsels and consoles people effectively, helps them with their problems and emotional crises, he’s going to be a pastor without a flock.

That said, there’s an emergent philosophy among the scholars. They believe that meditating on the Unmoved and praying to it has great benefits. It doesn’t help the Unmoved. How could the efforts of mere mortals do so? No, praying and study helps the human. It makes him wiser, frees him from the illusions of temporal wealth and power, widens his heart and lets him escape the traps of petty jealousy and hatred.

Incidentally, most scholars of the Unmoved also believe that if there is an afterlife, wizards don’t get it.
Nain is a magical nation and, in fact, “Nain” means “magic” in what the sorcerers call the Great Voice. The resounding tones of the Great Voice echo through the land, shaping forces and matter according to the will of those born with the gift. Without that inborn spark, a commonblood can say all the magic words he wants and wave a wand frantically. Unless one is born to it, there is no enchantment.

Some wizards rely on powerful feelings to fuel their sorcery, while others, less emotional, study the principal techniques to become more reliable. Almost all avail themselves of aids and devices to raise power and increase the odds of success.

Mechanically, this means that there are three ways to add dice to a casting pool.

**Passion**

Normal people can use Passions (Duty, Mission and Craving) to add dice to any actions. Wizards can’t. They can only apply their Passions to enchantment, but their reward for this narrow focus (above and beyond *casting spells*) is that Passions never penalize spell pools. If you have a Craving for safety, it gives its bonus when you’re casting a defensive spell, but doesn’t impede you when you throw that fat *Ipra Schaxu* at someone likely to respond in kind.

**Knowledge**

The words of the Great Voice are more than simple syllables. Every spell uses the Great Voice and those who dedicate themselves to delving into the mysteries of a single word can become far more proficient and reliable with spells that incorporate that element.

This means that wizards can buy levels in a Great Voice word like *Evus* or *Umvau* and, when casting spells involving (respectively) flight or insight, use their levels as the basis of their dice pool (enhancing it with any available touchstones and passions). Only one word can be used at a time, however. If you have four dice in *Umvau* and five dice in *Evus*, and want to cast an *Umvau Evus* spell that gave you a vision of the nearest bird, or closest flying thing, or lets you see from the perspective of something up in the sky, you’d start off rolling five dice, not nine. It is possible to gain Master and Expert dice in Great Voice words as well. It’s up to the caster to decide which pool to use when more than one applies.

**Wands, Tools and Touchstones**

Touchstones (or “magestones” to the formal) are magical tools that wizards use to focus either their emotions, or sympathetic energies, or both, into spells. Touchstones are powerful, though their use is not without some risk (see “Side Effects,” on pages 45-49).

Every magestone is associated with at least two words of the Great Voice. (The best have two words plus the word *Nain.*) If a wizard casts a spell that incorporates a concept embodied in one of those words, and uses the touchstone, he can add +1d to his pool. If a spell uses *both* concepts, he can add a +2d bonus.

The first and often most useful touchstone a wizard holds is the wand. Most wands use the words *Nain* and *Oa*, which mean “magic” and “self.” Consequently, anyone who casts *any* spell can add +2d to their pool because, by

**Advantage: Born of Nain (7 points)**

Those with this Advantage can learn the Great Voice magics of Nain. Those without, cannot. Generally, this Advantage should only be available at character generation, though exceptions can make for interesting stories.
definition, both self and sorcery are part of the mix. “I can’t cast a spell without ‘I’ and ‘spell,’” as an instructor at Glinrow puts it. (More detail on the specifics of the Great Words is given word by word, starting on page 53.)

One cannot simply grab an object, even one with magical nature, and make it into a touchstone. There has to be an intense emotional investment. A basilisk fang is magical, but if you just find one, you can’t turn it into a touchstone unless the circumstances of its finding evoked powerful feelings (and no, the feeling of “Oh boy! I can make a magestone from this!” is a bit too solipsistic to count). But a childhood toy, a lock of a lover’s hair or a basilisk’s tooth after you killed the basilisk? Those qualify.

Example: Orvin has sorcerer parents who’ve done an imperfect job of shielding him from the sense that they’d stop loving him if he turned out drudge. When the wand his mother crafts comes to him on the winter solstice, there is great rejoicing. But when he goes to Murhalx to see what school will have him, a Glinrow wizard asks him to lift a small stone with magic. Though he tries, backed by his parents’ intense pressure, he only produces a loud whining noise. As his father berates him, Orvin pockets the rock. Later at school, he turns the pebble he failed to lift into a touchstone for the words Rampa and Sile—“movement” and “humiliation.”

Two years in, after making the touchstone, a bullying upperclassman torments Orvin, who responds by pointing his wand and shouting “Rampa Nain!” He intends the spell to lift the snotty older boy into the air and dangle him upside down. Rampa moves the target, and Nain can mean ‘magician.’ Moreover, because he’s deeply embarrassed, he can apply the Sile element of his magestone, even without speaking it. If he had bought two points in, say, the word Ting for ‘male,’ he could use that skill as the basis for a spell that lets him (Oa from the wand, +1) lift (Rampa from the stone, +1) a wizard (Nain from the wand +1) (Note that the wand’s Nain could also apply to Orvin himself or to the magic used to cast the spell—it’s a versatile word!) who is male (Ting, his skill, +2) while Orvin himself is humiliated (Sile from the rock +1). Orvin has 6d to hoist his rival, even without using Passions: He gets 2d from his mastery of the Great Word and +4d from his touchstone wand and rock.

If touchstones overlap, sharing a Great Word, they can’t both be used in a spell. If Orvin had another touchstone associated with Rampa, he wouldn’t be able to use that with his lifting spell also. There is only one exception to this, but it’s an important one: The word Nain can be used as many times as one has touchstones with it. But an object can only be attached to that central word if it already has magical nature.

Creating a two-word touchstone always costs the sorcerer 2XP. However, no XP have to be paid for a wand, since they seek out the mage.
Touchstones with Magic Nature

If a character can, through some emotionally intense episode, obtain a magic plant or animal (or part thereof) he can create a special touchstone with three Great Words instead of two. It gets two appropriate ones, as determined by circumstances and the player, and as its third word it gets Nain.

Example: Orvin’s common-born classmate Eeyis, through a combination of cleverness, pragmatism and mad courage, kills a manticore. Taking its claw, she performs the Magestone Ritual and makes it into a touchstone with the words Detch (monster), and Schaxu (fight). She could do that with any object that reminded her of the fight. But because she’s incorporating a part of something magical into the touchstone, it has the third word Nain in it. If she uses her manticore claw touchstone to cast a spell harming a monster, that spell gets +3d from the touchstone.

Three-word touchstones always costs 3XP.

Wands

Wands are a unique resource for magi. The ritual to create one requires either a component with magical nature (cockatrice feathers or drownmaid blood, for example), or the sacrifice of a touchstone. With those in place, there’s several hours of chanting amidst candles of beeswax and powdered silver with cat-whisker wicks in golden candelabras, shaping with a pure copper knife on a table of unblemished white marble and alignment with various rare and precious crystals.

The spell is an Umvavu Nain and if it’s successfully cast, eventually the wand rises up, glows, and starts moving at a walking pace towards the sorcerer for whom it is destined. If made by a wandless wizard, it usually goes straight to its maker. If destined for a newly awakened enchanter, it waits until the Winter Solstice approaches before beginning its gradual journey. (If it starts moving a week or more before the Solstice, its maker knows there’s a long trip ahead.)

Enchanted Objects

Given the uncertainty of casting a spell even with a good pool, many wizards seek to keep their effects controlled by any means possible. One of the best ways is by creating a tool to contain a spell until it’s ready to use. That way there’s no chance of side effects or, worse, an ill-timed backshock. (Backshock is described on page 50.)

Rituals are often used to create magic objects that can cast spells themselves. If the ritual succeeds, the item can produce that spell effect over and over and over, any number of times... but not reliably. Instead, it has a die pool equal to the width+1 of the set rolled to create it. Roll a 3x10 to create that flying carpet, it rolls a 4d pool to get aloft when the user is alarmed or agitated. Used this way, magic objects never have side effects or backshock.

When the user is calm, it just works without a roll. You know how you don’t need to roll to hit a bullseye when there’s nothing on the line? Same here. This is why drudges often have trouble with magic items, even thought they can activate them like anyone else. A magician is going to be much calmer using a bell that turns deadfalls into cut timber, or gloves that let you swim through smoke.

Magicians can also use a sorcerous tool to bolster their own powers. It can only be used to create exactly the effect the item was designed for—so those smoke-swimming gloves won’t help you with seeing through smoke or moving it around. In this case, magicians start with the object’s pool and add on other dice per usual. Since the item is more or less working like a specialized touchstone, there’s once again the chance of side effects and backshock (possibly destroying the misused object).

Also, there is (to current knowledge) no way to make an item based on Schaxu, which is probably just as well for everyone.
Potions

Potions are powerful because they permit emotional influence, which is not easy for magic. If someone who is under the influence of one potion drinks another, roll two dice. If the dice don’t match, the new potion takes over. If they do match, both effects kick in, along with the ritual side effect.

It’s possible to make potions that do other things as well. Just about any spell can be held in a potion until consumed, so when you see someone swigging from a flask, they might be about to breathe fire (Ipra Schaxu), shrink (Tuip Oa) or change into a tree (Abro Marouf). In these cases, the drinker rolls one die. The spell is cast as if the effect got a 2x set with a height equal to whatever number comes up.

Mentor and Protégé

Almost every wizard starts out with a wand crafted by another wizard. The wand-crafter becomes that person’s mentor. The one the wand finds is the maker’s protégé.

Often the relationship between them is simple, especially the mentor is also a parent or older cousin or other family member. The deference expected from the apprentice and the mentor’s tolerant patience come easily.

But sometimes there’s conflict. Given how emotional wizards tend to be, it’s inevitable that every year there’s a protégé from a wealthy magical family mentored by a poor bumpkin hedge wizard, or more extreme, a wizard who has only disdain for the Seeyan gets a protégé from three generations of village commonbloods.

Protégés don’t have to like their mentors, but they are expected to respect them. If a mentor sets a task and the protégé refuses it, there’d better be a damn good reason. No protégé can be obligated to take arms against his mentor under any circumstances.

The mentor is under no such onus to treat the younger wizard well, and if he speaks (or acts) abusively, there’s nothing the wand-chosen can respectably do except take it and bite his tongue. But protégés reflect strongly upon their mentors. A mentor who lets his protégé go into foolish danger and die is considered not only heartless and callous, but stupid. Many wizards murmur that wands are wiser than their makers and seek out people who somehow reflect what the crafter has rejected or hidden about himself, for good or ill.

But while power and knowledge and wealth are all very pleasing to a wizard’s vanity, an admired and respected protégé is an adornment that cannot be replaced with anything else, except perhaps an admired and respected child. No one makes a wand and then ignores it. Wands are almost always crafted with the expectation that it finds someone the wizard can teach, guide and mold. Of course, as with parenting, it’s far too common that magicians attempt to live out their own failed dreams of glory through the followers who owe them so much...
There are two types of spells: Craft spells and Rituals. Craft is commonplace (for wizards) and everyday. An enchanter can pull out a wand and, with a few moments thought, put together a craft spell to fly, call fire, or pass without trace through a stone wall. Craft spells are useful and versatile and most wizards have favorites they can cast without even thinking about it hard. But witchcraft is limited in scale, scope and duration.

Rituals require hours of preparation and no small effort. Most also involve elaborate equipment and great expense (unless you’re at a castle school and can requisition the appropriate tomes, cauldrons, taxidermic crocodiles, flags, silver-etched mirrors, graven stone monoliths, flawless white doves for sacrifice and so on). They are also proportionally more dangerous to fail. On the other hand, they are far more powerful than everyday craft and can create permanent effects or objects of magical power. To most magi, that justifies the risk. Even the most timid know the formula for building a Magestone Ritual by heart.

Assembling a Spell

Creating a spell involves figuring out what you want to happen and which words (if any) in the Great Voice make that possible. Then you add up the factors—expertise with Great Words, Passions, touchstones—to determine your dice pool.

Craft Spells

Preparing a spell on the spur of the moment limits one to craft-level effects. To put the spell together takes one combat round for every two Great Words involved. Thus, the more time one spends, the more factors one can incorporate to swell the pool, making it more reliable. Then again, when someone’s trying to feather you with arrows, every second counts.

That’s why many sorcerers prepare spells beforehand. To do this, a player has to write the spell down and show it to the GM. Even if he has it written but hasn’t handed in the homework (so to speak) before the combat starts, the spell requires a round for every two words.

Here’s why this is: Combat can already be slowed down by people trying crazy actions, calculating pools and penalties, checking Martial Techniques and the like. Asking everyone to wait while the sorcerer character (who’s probably already getting plenty of attention in Nain if there are drudges in the party) does the math is unfair and a bringdown. So if you want your character to be quick on the draw with a particular spell, write it out beforehand, show your GM so she can check it over and correct any inaccuracies before things are hectic, and accept any disagreements with good grace.

Ritual Spells

It’s largely the same as with craft, but instead of combat rounds, it’s an hour for every two words incorporated. Furthermore, while simple witchcraft takes a single round to cast (once prepared), rituals can only be rolled for after a number of hours equal to the dice pool, and only then if the sorcerer has been casting uninterrupted.

As with craft, if a player wants a character who knows a ritual by heart, he just writes it out and gives it to the GM well beforehand.
Determining the Pool

As mentioned above, there are three elements that can contribute to the pool of a spell: Great Voice mastery, touchstones, and Passions.

Great Voice mastery is bought like a Skill, but it’s narrow. Each level of skill applies only to the use of a single word.

Most touchstones are associated with two words. They can add +1d to a pool if one of its words is involved in a spell, or +2d if both are used. Touchstones created from something with magical nature also give a +1d bonus from Nain for any spell for which they’re used.

Each Passion (Mission, Duty or Craving) can add +1d to a spell. Note that Passions do not penalize spells when transgressed.

Side Effects

There are risks to spellcasting. Even a spell that does what the caster wants may, also, do something the caster didn’t want. Only lucky, careful or powerful magi cast without side effects.

Here’s how you determine a spell’s side effect. If the spell succeeds, find the highest loose die, that is, the largest number on a single die that isn’t part of a set. The number on that die shows what the effect is. If the spell fails, there’s no side effect. Instead, the highest die yields backshock, which is described on pages 50-52. It’s much worse.

Deliberate Side Effects

Any enchanter with a wand can, if he wishes, produce a ‘side’ effect with no main effect. For a ritual effect, he has to spend two hours with elaborate equipment, chanting and casting. For a craft effect, all he has to do is wave the wand, and for those effects where it’s an ‘or’ thing or ‘GM picks,’ the magician instead chooses. No roll is required. These effects can never harm anyone directly, or impede their actions or senses beyond what would naturally happen if (for example) it got darker suddenly. Ongoing side effects of either type can be undone with a simple craft spell of Nain Utag, with the sole exception of the Doom Bond. Even though white magicians (page 64) are exempt from side effects, they can create them deliberately as long as they have a wand.

Side Effects for Craft

1. Caster develops a spontaneous injury. It’s not enough to merit a point of Shock or Killing, but his nosebleed, lump, or bruise is slightly disfiguring and inconvenient.
2. Small plants within ten feet wither and die. If there are no plants within that radius, vines and leaves sprout spontaneously from some object of the GM’s choice.
3. All animals the caster can see give voice, unless they were already barking/cawing/hissing, in which case they instantly fall silent. If there are no animals nearby, nothing happens.
4. Lights dim or flare (GM’s choice) within a hundred paces.
5. The temperature within ten paces either drops or rises severely for a minute. Neither is enough to cause damage, but it can be noticed.
6. Some object, person or patch of ground changes color for about five minutes.
7. There’s a loud noise.
8. The caster or his wand emits a shower of sparks or some other pyrotechnic display. This cannot catch things on fire, but it’s visible.
9. There’s a minor trembling in the earth, enough to knock over small objects like chess pieces within ten paces of the caster.
10. No effect.
Secret Side Effects

The typical side effects for witchcraft are the natural, instinctive, statistically frequent occurrences from uncontrolled excess enchantment. But they aren’t the only side effects possible. Here’s a second random chart to keep Nain’s wizards on their toes.

1. **Object Away:** Some object in the wizard’s possession moves from his body to an open space no more than ten paces away. It has to be small and light enough that it could be lifted easily in one hand. It won’t show up in someone else’s pocket or inside a closed drawer, but it goes away from the wizard and appears in the open. This cannot be used as an attack, even if you deliberately teleport a rock over someone’s head.

2. **Dysflavia:** The nearest piece of food randomly changes flavor. There’s no visible change, but that apple may suddenly taste like guava, or grilled goat, or bleu cheese.

3. **Ventriloquism:** The wizard’s voice is heard, saying… something. If deliberately invoked, this can be any phrase that can be expressed in a single breath. If it occurs accidentally, it’s probably something weird, random or indicative of his state of mind.

4. **Object Arrives:** An object that could qualify for ‘Object Away’ teleports into the sorceress’ pocket or somewhere else in her possession. Again, this can’t be used with terrible subtlety. The object has to be in open, obvious view. It can still be useful for when you don’t want to get up to grab that next wine bottle, however. Or when you can’t.

5. **Foul Odor:** Silent and appalling. Rotten eggs, spoiling cheese, sweat-reeky armpits, the distinctive effluvia of the aardvark… anything’s possible.

6. **Random Vandalism:** Something gets scraped, scratched or dented. Nothing too serious, just irritating poltergeist stuff.

7. **Puff of Smoke:** A streak of smoke about ten feet long shoots out of the wand, or else, billows out of the base, filling an area about six feet tall and three feet across. The smoke may be colored. It’s heavier than air, so it tends to drift downward pretty quickly.

8. **Gust of Wind:** Just what it sounds like. A breeze that ruffles papers, makes vain young people worry about their hair, clears foul odors and breaks up smoke clouds. Not strong enough to move anything heavier than paper.

9. **Spontaneous Change of Organization:** If you’re in a disorderly area, light objects within ten paces swirl around and place themselves in a tidy position. (If you’re a slob, this is a great way to clean your room!) The position may not be very intelligent—books arranged on shelves by size and color instead of subject or author, chairs stacked on tables in elegant towers that collapse as soon as you move one, garments stuffed one inside another from smallest to largest—but it’s order. On the other hand, if you’re in a tidy place, everything light within ten paces becomes chaotically disordered.

10. **None**
Advantage: Secret Side Sorcery (1 Point)

Nain wizards can easily reproduce the nine standard side effects without even vocalizing. One lazy wand wiggle is sufficient to produce some sparks or shrivel an herb garden. But these rarer side effects, stumbled upon by accident, are harder to reproduce. Except, of course, for those wizards who make a study of it (and sink in some experience points).

You can buy this Advantage up to ten times. Each time you buy it, pick a slot where a side effect would usually come up. Now, if you randomly get that side effect for witchcraft, you can choose between the normally rolled effect and your Advantage effect. Moreover, you can make that effect occur at will, increasing your pool of at-will minor effects by one.

Example: Myarkus Chaun is sneaky and devious, and he’s tired of having his plots spoilt by loud noises from his wand. He takes the Secret Side Sorcery Advantage and chooses “Puff of Smoke.” He makes that an alternate to result 7, “Loud Noise.” Now, every time his highest loose die on a witchcraft roll is a 7, he can choose to either have that tell-tale sign, or a silent (though visible) cloud of smoke. Moreover, if he wants to conjure a cloud of colored smoke at will, he can do that.

It’s possible to take this Advantage with result 10, “none” and thereby remove one of the unexpected side effects. Buy it nine times and you never get side effects, just like a wizard in balance. You’re still at risk of backshock, though.
Common Side Effects for Rituals

1. **Doom bond!** Caster and a magical animal within a hundred miles of the ritual site have visions of one another. Each can sense the direction and proximity of the other with a simple Sense+Direction roll thereafter. Each instinctively knows that unless one of them dies within a year and a day, both are fated to perish.

2. The area in which the ritual takes place becomes bigger. Referred to as a “place bubble” by wizards, this can make a room bigger or, if the ritual was outdoors, create a space that is bigger within than without. A space of about ten paces across grows until it’s twenty paces across—when you’re inside it. But from outside its original radius, nothing changes. (This is how wizards build those houses that are bigger on the outside than the inside.)

3. All touchstones involved in the ritual are destroyed.

4. The caster takes a point of Killing damage to a random location.

5. The caster takes a point of Shock damage to every location.

6. Some of the magical paraphernalia involved with the ritual explodes, catches fire, turns into a vicious magical badger or otherwise winds up useless in the long term and dangerous in the short term. All present roll 2d and, if a set comes up, take two Shock to the indicated location.

7. The caster forms a dream bond with someone he already has strong feelings about. The pair of them dream alike and have a vague sense of it when the other experiences powerful emotion. This lasts about a month.

8. One object involved in the ritual gains a permanent glow.

9. Caster’s hair, eyes or skin are permanently drained of color.

10. No effect.
The Process of Enchantment

Unusual Ritual Side Effects

1. **Tamper In God’s Domain:** The most valuable piece of ritual paraphernalia involved is transformed into a magical animal. This is permanent. The creature enough dice on the random creature generation table to entertain the GM. Its attitude towards its creator may be grateful, wrathful, or ambiguous.

2. **Cloudburst:** A dramatic thunderstorm whips up in the course of 2-3 hours. Driving rain floods unprepared peasants, shingles are torn from roofs and trees are blackened by savage strokes of lightning. At the GM’s discretion, this can give a nearby Company a +1 Territory bonus (if copious rainfall is desirable) or a -1 Territory penalty (for the flooding and crop destruction).

3. **Temporary Annihilation:** For the next 3-30 hours, the ritual caster ceases to exist. People remember her, but she can’t be found. She vanishes from all time and space and has no recollection of where (if anywhere) she was when she returns.

4. **Swept Away:** The caster is teleported to a random (but safe) location within ten miles of the ritual site. By “safe” it means somewhere solid the person can stand for a fair amount of time without freezing, burning or tumbling to a watery grave. The area is also free of human and large animal life.

5. **Brute Transmogrification:** The caster is shrunk to 1-10% of her unenchanted weight and changed into a common mammal typical of that size—a cat, dog, squirrel, badger, chipmunk or small deer. While transformed, the character has her full mental faculties but cannot use magic. This lasts 1-10 hours, or until the spell is broken by another spellcaster. All the wizard’s touchstones are transformed with her.

6. **Gender Switch:** What it says. Until one sunset and one sunrise have passed, the character is the other gender. (This can also be reversed with magic, though many sorcerers mirthfully refuse the counterspell.)

7. **Anti-Alchemy:** All gold within ten feet turns to lead. This is permanent. If magic is used to change the lead to gold, it reverts to lead as its ‘natural’ state.

8. **Buoyant:** One object becomes incredibly buoyant. Indeed, water cannot get closer than one quarter inch from the object. No matter how heavy it is, it floats. This is permanent.

9. **Cordial Petrification:** One person for whom the caster feels strong positive emotions (love, friendship, admiration) is turned into a stone statue. There is typically some balance between the intensity of the feeling and physical proximity, so you’re more likely to petrify someone you like a little bit if he’s in the same room than you are to stone a beloved parent miles and miles away.

10. **None**
Failure and Backshock

Summoning up magic power is hazardous if it gets away from you. (Indeed, it can be dangerous even when it’s doing what you want.) Failing at a spell can have dire consequences, and the more power was invested, the worse the consequences (known to sorcerers as ‘backshock’) tend to be.

That said, the backshock effects are determined just like side effects: You look at the highest die. However, the severity of the backshock is independent of whether a spell is ritual or mere craft. (Whether this is good or bad depends on your perspective.) Failures where 6d or fewer were rolled use one chart. Those of 7d+ use the other.

### Common Backshock for 6d or Less

1. All spells are at -2d for the rest of the scene.
2. Everyone within ten paces takes an Area 1 Killing attack.
3. The caster takes a point of Shock to the head.
4. Everyone within 100 paces takes an Area 1 Shock attack.
5. Everyone present gets a vision based on one magestone involved, showing why it’s important to the magician.
6. The magician is temporarily disfigured: He gets a horse’s head instead of his own, inflates to morbid obesity, or is covered with suppurating warts. This lasts three days, unless removed with magic.
7. Mark of Hysteria. Animals that see the caster for the next hour and a day become terrified and impose a Difficulty of 8 to all attempts to calm or use them. Humans feel it too, but can dismiss it.
8. The caster passes out, as if her head were full of Shock, though no Shock damage remains when she’s revives.
9. The caster is stricken with chill tremors, giving a -1d penalty to all Body or Coordination rolls for the next hour.
10. No effect.
The Process of Enchantment

Uncommon Backshock for 1d or Less

1. **Tongue-Tied:** The caster is struck mute for a number of hours equal to her Body Stat. She can still cast spells, but only silently.

2. **Struck Blind:** The caster loses all sight for a number of hours equal to his Coordination Stat.

3. **Deafened:** The caster cannot hear anything at all for a number of hours equal to his Knowledge Stat.

4. **Woodfist:** One of the caster’s hands (randomly determined) transforms into wood, blending into the flesh of her wrist, trapped in the position it held when the spell failed. The Location (4 or 6) gains Armor 1 but if any damage gets past the armor, one Wound Box is permanently removed from the location when the hand changes back. (It returns to normal after 1-10 hours.)

5. **Clothes Evaporate:** Any garments the caster is wearing turn into mist and are gone beyond recall. This does not work on objects the character is carrying, particularly magestones.

6. **Magnetized:** For the next 1-10 days, the character is mildly magnetic. If Nain had compasses, they’d point at him. Small metal objects cling to him—keys, silverware, small ritual objects, some metallic reagents. There’s no magical way to cure this condition: Nain’s current scholarship has no grasp of magnetism or how it differs from Rampa magic.

7. **Untethered.** The character develops negative weight, like a helium balloon (if anyone in Nain had seen such a marvel). Unless weighed down, he drifts off up into the sky. His period of lightness lasts from 3-30 minutes and while it sounds delightful, in truth it’s spectacularly dangerous. First off, while untethered, the wizard can’t use any form of normal (Evus) flight magic on himself, though Rampa Oa can give crude maneuvering ability. Secondly, his repellence from the ground starts out slight but increases by about five pounds per minute until it matches his normal weight. This means that while he starts out weightless, he rapidly gets pushed away from the ground at an increasing rate of speed. But while the bad gravity comes on slowly, it goes off all at once. The character then has just as much time plummeting downward as he had shooting upward.

8. **Hair Falls Out.** You would think that with all the great powers at their command, the wizards of Nain could counter simple baldness. And indeed, they can with the right potions and preparations. But there are often side effects and complications, sometimes hilarious ones, so *caveat emptor.*

9. **Frailty.** The character immediately has a dizzy spell, from which she quickly recovers, but she’s left feeling enervated and weak. That wears off too, but not a persistent feeling of being… off. For the next *week,* she fails every Vigor roll she makes. Endurance and Athletics are unaffected though she may *feel* like she can’t possibly run or lift a great weight.

10. **None**
**Common Backshock for 7d or More**

8 Caster permanently loses one wound box from his head. This cannot be restored magically.

9 One touchstone involved is destroyed (GM picks).

10 The person the caster hates most in the world has a vision of the caster’s failure, gets to pick one touchstone for the caster to lose, and gains understanding of the nature of all the caster’s touchstones.

---

**Uncommon Backshock for 7d+**

8 **Disfigured:** The character gains the Gruesome flaw, no matter how much of the Beautiful Advantage he or she previously possessed. This is permanent. It can be reversed, but only by a highly specific ritual. It’s a Difficulty 5 Lore roll to figure out how to restore the character’s mangled visage, and it invariably involves questing for rare and difficult-to-obtain reagents.

9 **Swap The Body:** The caster’s consciousness is removed from her body and placed in the nearest other person’s body. That person’s consciousness is similarly removed and placed in control of the caster’s body. (If this is hard to follow, go rent “Freaky Friday”—either version.) Note: The magic talent travels with the consciousness, just like the memories and Passions. This situation, however, lasts until reversed and, as with Disfigurement, it requires a tailored ritual. This one doesn’t have any Difficulty involved in figuring it out, but there’s still a Lore roll.

10 **Shattered Wand:** The wizard’s wand is sundered, but that’s not all. The wizard loses all magical abilities and no spellcasting can reverse this. However, the magical potential eventually returns on its own. The first dawn after the wand breaks, the magician can roll 2d10. If they match, the magic returns. If not, he rolls 3d10 the dawn after that, and 4d10 the third dawn, and so on, adding a die every day until he gets a set.
There are three kinds of words in the Great Voice. There are **target words** whose effects come into play for spells aimed at or involving an appropriate object or person. Target words include those for; animal, bread, castle, darkness, drudge, evil, fire, food, fruit, gem, good, ice, light, man, monster, night, rain, sail, salt, self, smith, stone, town, tree, village, water, wizard and woman.

**Passion words** are words for emotions. They are more limited than target words, only useful for craft spells if the emotion motivates the spell. You cannot make someone feel love with witchcraft, but if you love the target, you can bring in *Chihan*. Targeting someone who’s angry, you can use the word for anger.

The intensity that lets feelings fuel craft is anathema to ritual, for which one must be tranquil and intent. Passion words can’t be applied to ritual just because that feeling motivated the rite. However, ritual magic *can* force people to feel unnatural emotion, though it’s short-term. Ritual magic creates potions that force someone to experience a passion word. Particular effects and durations are listed under each word.

Passion words include those for; anger, boredom, confusion, exhaustion, happiness, humiliation, fear, love, pride, sorrow and triumph.

The final Great Voice category is **action words**. These words describe a particular change, action or transformation. Their effects are unique to the word. They include the words for; fail, fight, fly, growth, halt, movement, pass, perceive, restore, shape, shelter, shrink and suffer.

### Words of Action

**Utag** is forbidden at Glinrow and discouraged at Murhalx. The Monastery, however, insists that (used properly) *Utag* can be a nonviolent way to control aggression. They agree that *Utag Nain* is a dangerous combination, however. It increases the odds of backshock and *nobody* wants to be around that.

*Utag* requires another word to focus it. Combined with a passion word, it can only impede the person who provoked the emotion. With a target word, it interferes with that action.

**Craft**: The curse victim has trouble concentrating on, and physically performing, an action when it fulfills the conditions of the spell. Specifically, it gives a dice pool penalty equal to the Width of the casting roll. *Utag Rampa* with a 3x set would give someone a -3d penalty the next time they tried to move somewhere fast enough to roll. *Utag Nain* with a 2x set gives a -2d penalty on the target’s next spell. Note that it doesn’t matter if the cursed one casts that spell next round or next year. Multiple curses simply stack up, one after the other, but they’re consecutive and not concurrent. That is, if you cast *Utag Giork* with a 2x set to impede someone the next time they’re tired, and then cast it again with a 3x set, their next roll when exhausted gets the -2d penalty and the weary roll after *that* gets the -3d.

**Ritual**: The target of the curse takes penalty dice for a series of attempts at a specified action. The number of penalty dice is equal to Width+1. The number of damaged attempts is equal to the roll’s Height. *Utag* rituals are restricted and may only lawfully be used when two masters are in agreement that it’s needed for punishment. *Utag Nain* is even more restricted: To cast that legally takes five masters’ permission. Ongoing curses are difficult to dispel, requiring powerful Ba rituals that often involve rare components that can only be obtained through exciting side-quests.
This is the word you use to harm people, animals and monsters. *Schaxu* witchcraft rarely damages anything inanimate worse than a good stout blow with a hammer, however. Generally followed by a target word ("*Schaxu Detch!" to harm a monster) to aim the spell, or preceded by one to indicate the type of harm desired ("*Ipra Schaxu" to shoot fire or "*Heam Schaxu" to partially turn someone to stone).

**Craft:** The spell does Width in Shock and Killing damage, except as noted below.

**Ritual:** There are no rituals for this word.

Evus can be a target word when it indicates a flying creature. More often it’s used for flight.

**Evus**
*Bird, Fly*

**Craft:** The caster can fly for a number of rounds equal to Height, moving at his normal running pace.

**Ritual:** By sacrificing a touchstone with *Nain*, the caster can create a broom, carpet or other magic implement that allows any person using it to fly at the speed of a galloping horse.

Guph can cause objects, people or animals to temporarily get larger, but it’s far more popular as a fertility ritual.

**Guph**
*Growth, Increase*

**Craft:** An animal or person doubles in weight and gets one fourth again as big in every direction. This gives living beings +1 Body and a point of Armor to every location. It lasts Width in rounds.

**Ritual:** Cast against a Difficulty equal to a Company’s current Treasure+Territory, this ritual makes fields and livestock more vital and fecund. If the spell succeeds, the Company gets a +1 bonus to its next Territory roll. Multiple castings do not give additional benefits.

This is the blocking word. Coupled with a target word, it protects against a particular danger—*Ba Nain* to block a spell, *Ba Ipra* to shield against fire. A spell of *Ba Detch* (halt monster), if successful, forces magical creatures to spend an extra action to cross an area roughly ten paces across, while *Ba Seeyan* would similarly impede commonblood people.

**Craft:** Sets from this spell’s roll produce Gobble Dice to immediately interfere with appropriate pools. Alternately, if used against a moving target like a monster or a wizard, it can force it to spend an extra action, as described above, to cross an area.

**Ritual:** The ritual’s set is preserved and, the next time an appropriate danger or threat is rolled against the target, the ritual set dice become Gobble Dice and can apply regardless of timing. This protection occurs a number of times equal to the ritual set’s Width.
Rampa is the word for levitating objects. (It can be done on oneself, but it’s more efficient to use Evus.) As long as the caster is levitating something, he has to concentrate on that and can’t cast other spells or take actions beyond dodging, running or parrying.

Craft: If an object weighs less than the caster, he can move it around for one round at the speed of a flying sparrow (call it thirty feet per round). If the object weighs as much as, or more than, the caster, he can move it about ten feet per round. If it weighs three times as much as the caster or more, it cannot be lifted with Rampa witchcraft, unless multiple casters use the spell.

Ritual: The caster can levitate up to ten tons of matter at a speed of Width feet per round for a number of hours equal to the Height of the spell, or until his concentration breaks.

Nanab is the word of free travel. By using it with the word for fire, one can walk on fire without injury. With the word for water, one can walk on a liquid surface, Nanab Heam lets one pass through stone walls like a ghost and Nanab Marouf lets one run at full speed through thickets and undergrowth without leaving a trace.

Craft: The caster (or one target on whom the power is bestowed) can pass safely through the appropriate medium without impediment for a number of rounds equal to Width. If the object or person is still interlaced with solid matter when the effect ends, he or it gets ejected into the nearest open space with a point of Killing damage in each location.

Ritual: This can permanently bore a hole through stone. For every point of Width and Height, the caster can make a passage ten feet wide and high and twenty feet long. Theoretically, this word could permit teleportation, but no one has yet figured out how to accomplish it.

Umvoau, the Word of Visions is a common tool of spies and voyeurs, but with an Eerie roll, anyone targeted by Umvoau knows it, though the identity of the peeper isn’t necessarily revealed. The castle schools have permanent spells in most living quarters blocking these spells, supposedly to prevent cheating. It is always coupled with a targeting word and can’t work without one.

If something is seen with Umvoau, it can be heard as well.

Craft: With a success, see a vision of the nearest person or object relevant to the targeting word or see from the perspective of that person or item. The utmost reach of craft Umvoau is one mile. It lasts a number of minutes equal to Width.

Ritual: A particular person, place or object relevant to the target word is seen in a vision. Where the craft version lets you look out of the nearest fire, the ritual lets you spy through the fire at your family hearth. It has no range limit and lasts a number of hours equal to the roll’s Width.

From mending a broken spoon to a broken arm, the word Trum finds frequent use. It is not, however, a sovereign remedy. It won’t help with illness or age, and it won’t help if something’s essential nature has been altered. You can’t ‘restore’ a sword to its raw metal state, for example.

Craft: Trum removes a point of Shock and of Killing damage from the limb indicated by Height. For objects, they’re repaired unless the GM deems the damage catastrophic. It cannot repair anything bigger than a wagon wheel or heavier than a wagon axle.

Ritual: Restoration rituals are the only remedies for magical problems like petrification. Moreover, a Trum ritual can remove all the damage or poison from one person. It cannot, however, help with illness, much to the wizards’ consternation.
The power to turn one thing into another is contained in Abro. The limit on it is mass, which cannot be changed. A shaped item has to be a single object, and it has to be changed into a single object. You can change the bucket of rocks into a plate, but you can’t change all the rocks in it with one Abro. You can turn someone into a frog, but it’s going to be one big damn frog.

Living objects can be turned into inanimate ones, but when changed back they’re unharmed and remember nothing of their time as (say) a chair. Inanimate objects turned into animals always produce dead animals.

Craft: An object or willing person, up to the weight of a full grown bull or less, can be changed into form of equal weight for a number of minutes equal to the Height of the roll. An unwilling person is changed for rounds equal to the Width of the casting roll.

Ritual: A person (willing or no) or object can be forever changed into a new form of equal weight. The target has to be present throughout the ritual.

Where Ba produces active interference with something, Gahar makes a passive shield. Otherwise, their functions are similar: Like the “halt” word, Gahar needs a target, and only protects against that target.

Craft: The recipient of the spell has Armor equal to the spell’s Width against the targeted force for a number of rounds equal to Width.

Ritual: The recipient gets Armor against the appropriate force or target. The Armor Rating is equal to the roll’s Height. It protects against a number of attacks equal to Height and then collapses.

Alternately, this ritual can give a shield, wall, or piece of armor a permanent AR bonus equal to the casting roll’s Width.

Tuip is the opposite of the growth word, but much more efficient.

Craft: An object or willing person, up to the size of a large bull, can be reduced to an eighth of its original size. This lasts a number of minutes equal to the casting roll’s Height. An unwilling person stays shrunk rounds equal to Width. While shrunk, targets have an effective Body score of 0 for lifting and can only move two feet a round without a roll. (Call it five feet a round running with a roll.) They have one Wound Box at every location, but any normal-sized attacker can only hit with a 3x10 blow, or one with Width 4+.

Ritual: With a successful Tuip ritual, a targeted Company’s Territory drops by 1 until the next month.
Also known as the Hex Word, *Ectus* is not taught by reputable instructors. Its use on commonbloods is publicly frowned upon (though some wizards privately smile on it very much and as often as they dare).

**Craft:** It does Width+3 Shock damage to the indicated limb, but damage from *Ectus* can never change into Killing damage. It hurts grievously, however.

**Ritual:** Hex rituals are outlawed. If performed, the caster chooses a target he knows well and names a task relevant to an incorporated targeting word—*Ipra* for starting a fire, *Aho* for eating, *Ichihan* for any time the target is completely happy and so forth. When the target performs that task, he takes a point of Shock to a relevant location. As with all *Ectus* damage, this damage doesn’t turn into Killing in any circumstances. To remove a hex ritual typically requires a powerful *Ba* ritual requiring rare ingredients specific to the victim (and determined by the GM in order to create fun and awesome quests).

---

### Words of Passion

These words lack “craft” notes because they all have the same use for witchcraft: Fuel. If you feel bored, you can add *Tutous* to a spell, and if you feel sad you can use *Kyw*.

There is a second way to use passion with craft, but it’s tricky. If you’re feeling an emotion and targeting a spell at a wizard who has that emotion as a touchstone, you can use that wizard’s touchstone for the spell—exactly as if it was your own, even to the point of engaging any other words it has. It only works if you have the feeling and the wizard with the stone is the target, however.

Brief notes are given with rituals, but again, the passion words all function the same way: They can be used to create potions that temporarily give someone the relevant emotion.

**Ritual:** A draught of wrath (light red in color and slightly peppery to the taste) can be brewed in one of three ways. The first is a simple berserking potion. The imbibber immediately flies into a rage and gets a +1d bonus to all attacks (including damage spells) and a -1d penalty when doing anything other than attacking. The second incorporates a part of an individual (hair, blood, fingernail clippings) and, when imbibed, causes lingering anger at that person. It lasts until the next time the person is seen, when it culminates in a surge of hatred that gives a +1d bonus to assaults against the target, and a -1d penalty to any action beside that. The third version works like second, but instead of acting on a particular person, it focuses on the next person seen. The third type requires a drop of the caster’s blood.


**Ritual:** Boredom potions are a bland, oatmeal gray and have no taste. When swallowed, the victim is immediately overwhelmed with ennui and takes a -1d penalty to any actions requiring concentration, sitting still, excessive effort or any degree of coordination. However, any attempt to use the Fascinate Skill on someone under its influence automatically fails. It lasts until the next time the person gets at least four hours of sleep.

**Ritual:** Confusion potions are transparent and very gradually phase through every color of the rainbow. They have a mild, not unpleasant tartness. Once consumed, the target becomes disoriented, prone to mood swings, and often difficult to understand. He takes a -1d penalty to all Sense and Mind pools, and fails any Direction roll. It lasts until the next sunrise, or until he takes at least one point of Shock to the head.

**Ritual:** It’s a sleeping potion. It’s a light, opalescent blue and it tastes of honey and fresh-cut grass. Anyone who drinks it has to make an Endurance roll every ten minutes to stay awake. After six rolls, the potion loses its effect.

**Ritual:** Bright, opaque pink and intensely sweet in flavor, *Ichihan* juice has no mechanical effect. It just makes the drinker happy. Unfortunately, this happiness is fragile. As long as he’s sitting still and quiet, his mood bubbles pleasantly from tranquil contentment through complacent delight, with occasional spikes of giddy mirth. But with the first word or movement, the effect vanishes.

**Ritual:** The taste of humiliation is bitter, with a hint of iron, like blood. This black potion doesn’t even reflect light as ink would, and only a few drops are required for effect. Someone under the influence of a *Sile* potion takes a -1d penalty to all Charm and Command rolls and is, additionally, miserable and embarrassed until the next sunrise.

**Ritual:** As with the anger potion, ‘fear swill’ can focus the emotion on an individual whose hair or skin is used as a component; on ‘the next person seen’; or be undifferentiated terror that strikes immediately. However it works, its victim gets a +1d bonus on Run and Dodge rolls while it’s active, as well as a +1d bonus to rolls for climbing, swimming or stamina when getting farther from the source of the fear. The target takes a -1d penalty to Command Skills while terrified. The fear lasts an hour from the first moment of terror.

Fear swill is a transparent yellow-green, shot through with opaque black veins. It tastes like burnt corn.

**Ritual:** Is any enchantment more abused than the love potion? Colorless, odorless and only indistinguishable from water if you notice that it’s slightly thicker, love potions cause a brief but intense infatuation—either with a tailored target whose hair, skin, or other body component is used to make the drink, or (more obnoxiously) with the next person seen. It lasts until the next sunrise and gives its drinker a temporary Passion, with all appropriate +/-1d effects. Moreover, the person whom the drinker is enchanted to adore gets the benefits of the five-point Beauty Advantage, though only (of course) when dealing with the drinker.
Ritual: An amber fluid with a rough burr in the throat (like whiskey), pride potions can be tremendously seductive, once tasted. It gives a +1d bonus to all Command and Charm rolls, but a -2d penalty to Empathy and Dodge rolls. Moreover, any attempt to intimidate the drinker fails. It lasts three hours.

Ritual: Sorrow tastes bittersweet, looks like tears, and gives drinkers a -1d penalty to Fascinate and Jest rolls, but a +2d bonus to Empathy. Mostly, though, it just feels bad. It lasts until the next sunset.

Ritual: Similar in appearance and taste to the liquor of pride, Ahar elixir is, if anything, more powerful and more dangerous. Lasting until the next sunset, any time the imbibers rolls a success, it gets a +1 bonus to Width. He cannot be intimidated. Any attempt to deceive him automatically succeeds. Moreover, his overconfident nonchalance (or perhaps the concentrated alcohol the potion contains) gives him a -1d penalty to Coordination.

Silent Casting

Most enchanters are in the habit of loudly declaring their spells as they cast them, whether it's "Schaxu Detch!" to smite a monster or "Abro Miuve" to change spoiled fruit into fresh. Most can manage to cast in a whisper or murmur without a problem, but performing spells when gagged or without moving their lips at all causes a -1d penalty.

Advantage: Meditative Cast (4 Points)

Only wizards can learn this trick, which lets them cast spells without speaking or penalty. Any time a silent caster does speak out loud and clear, he gets a +1d bonus to his spell.

Target Words

These mostly work the same way, giving focus to an action word or defining the terms under which a spell operates. Consequently, there aren’t notes for craft or ritual.

Stott is the word for any tame creature without magical nature. (Magical creatures use Detch.) Note that there is not, currently, a Great Voice word for wild animals like bears, wolves and boars. This can cause some troubles when targeting them.

More specific than the generic word for food (Aho), Bock implies not only something you can eat, but something that was prepared from grain according to a recipe. (Wizards who bother to learn how beer is brewed realize that it is, as far as enchantment’s concerned, a form of bread.)
Caur implies a large fortification with stout walls. An undefended homestead could not be targeted with Caur.

Though it’s associated with evil (Voun), darkness itself is morally neutral.

Any person without the gift of magic can be targeted with Seeyan.

To most people, wizard or no, questions of morality are rarely clear. It’s said that everyone’s the hero of his own story, and many who do heinous deeds can make arguments that justify their actions. But to magic, there is objective evil, and this word can hone a spell that involves it. Indeed, this word can be applied to any spell that is deliberately cast in the pursuit of evil.

This makes a dark wizard who studies this word terribly powerful and versatile. But that course strips away his illusions. He has to admit to himself that he is selfish, depraved and corrosive to all humanity. Some embrace this idea and revel in it, but even people with cruel streaks or envious natures find it hard to get behind total adherence to chaos and harm.

An action may be wrong by human standards without qualifying as supernaturally evil. Any time the actor is conflicted about the action, or invokes a Duty, or is seeking the benefit of another to his own cost, the deed isn’t Voun. Total self-interest and utter indifference to suffering are the hallmarks of true evil.

Craft spells for perception and knowledge cannot detect Voun in people at all. Detection rituals can reveal a person as Voun only if he has successfully dedicated his life to black magic (see page 65). More commonly, Umvau Voun witchcraft finds nearby evil creatures (as described in the article “Creatures of Nain”).

Schaxu Ipra can quench a standard hearth fire, and reduce larger ones. Ipra Schaxu, on the other hand, does an Area 1 Killing attack on its target until he’s doused or until he takes an action to smother the flames.

Any naturally edible provender can be targeted with Aho, but if you transform a wagon wheel or hammer or other inedible item into food using Abro Aho, it turns into a bland, unappetizing, runny gruel. (Also, if you use craft with that Abro Aho spell, the item turns back fairly soon.) Turning one food into another works much better: You can turn a drumstick into a carrot (or vice versa), and you can turn your wife’s inedible turnip stew into luscious butter cake without problems. It changes back soon, but by that point it’s probably past your tongue and in your belly.

Abro Aho doesn’t work on liquids or potions, though Abro Nud can turn a potion into ordinary drinking water while retaining the potion’s enchantment.

No subtleties here. Apples, melons, grapes… that’s what falls under this word’s purview.
Nothing complicated about Makit. Any valuable crystal mineral is Makit.

As with the word of Evil, the magical appellation of 'Good' is narrower than the mere human use of it. Certain supernatural creatures qualify as Niak automatically, though not many.

White magi (page 64) can be detected as Niak with Umvau rituals, but not through simple witchcraft. Generally, spells can incorporate Niak only when they’re not selfishly motivated, when they seek to relieve suffering or facilitate forgiveness, and when they have no direct harms to anyone.

Any creature with magical nature, even one with Niak value, is Detch. It doesn’t apply to mundane animals, no matter how vicious (and mountain lions and grizzly bears have been known to win the occasional fight with manticores, so watch out).

Frozen water is Croice. For moving water or steam, you use Iftu, and for drinking it’s Nud. Croice can also be used when a liquid other than water is frozen, so while some wizards use Croice Schaxu to send daggers of ice at their foes, others use the same combination to freeze an opponent’s blood in his veins. (Both do Width Shock and reduced Body and Coordination by 1 the first time, then do Width Shock. Still, style matters.)

Though often associated with Good (Niak), light itself is neither good nor evil.

This applies to human males, be they wizard or commonblood. Note that there is no Great Voice for ‘human’ and the word for it in the Nainian language is rarely used.

The idea that men and women, wizards and drudges, are all part of a common group? That’s a thought for intellectuals up at the Monastery. It has little relevance to how 99% of Nain’s people live their lives.
This word doesn’t mean only the time between sunset and sunrise. If it did, one could use it for any spell cast after sundown, and it does not work that way. Night is a frame of mind. It’s concealment, uncertainty, the end of honest toil and the beginning of hidden (even shameful) projects. Those who understand this can use Ocht after hours when they go about night’s business, be it seduction, theft, deception or simple sleep.

Ocht is rarely used during the day, but it can be applied to delay a spell: If you incorporate Ocht into your craft correctly, it prevents a spell from functioning until sundown. Aissa Scath could reputedly use Ocht to keep others’ spells delayed until nightfall. But even if those legends are true, she gives every sign of having taken that secret to her grave.

Rain, snow, fog, running water… it’s all Iftu. The word does not apply to any other liquid or gas, however.

A craft that moves on water or a person who works on one is Tobo. Ritually, it could be used to make a boat more seaworthy or faster, but landlocked Nain has put little effort into such things.

The preserving crystal and food flavor. Nothing out of the ordinary here.

Works on any rock or any prominent heap of soil, but won’t work on metal, even if the metal is unworked.

Casters tend to be geographically and culturally isolated. If it doesn’t have a wall, a standing body of men-at-arms, or anyone living there who wasn’t born there, it’s probably Itta.
It’s hard to pin down when a village (Itta) becomes a town, but it seems to have something to do with how many people work there, as opposed to working in the fields but living in the village. There are settlements that (according to the magic that works on them) are towns, even though they’re less populous than other settlements that qualify as villages.

This is a word for ‘hammer,’ but the hammer is more a symbol of the smith’s action. This is the word for deliberate creation of a metal tool or implement through mundane effort, or of the transformation of something’s essential nature. It can therefore influence any act of such creation or any object created in that fashion. Tark doesn’t work on objects shaped by sorcery. It’s often incorporated in rituals for building magic objects.

This word works on any living tree and on any unshaped dead wood. It works on shaped wood (that is, something crafted by the hand of man into a tool or a toy or a decoration) but only to change it into a useless form. Unshaped wood, on the other hand, can be made into a tool or a straight pole or a perfect plank. But this word cannot be used to change (say) an axe handle into an unstrung bow.

Nud is specifically the word for still water you can drink. Falling or moving water is Iftu. Note that if a potion is transformed into Nud, it still has its magical effects.

Works on females of both drudge and magical nature, but not on animals or monsters.
Some magicians devote themselves to a path of harmony and compassion, vowing only to use magic to help others and keep the world in balance, not to fulfill their selfish urges and human weaknesses. The practice of “white magic” is not without sacrifice, but many masters have embraced the path with tremendous relief.

The Drawbacks

There are two ways to become a White Mage. There’s the slow way, and the hard way. The slow way is to develop a Ritual of Devotion. Different for every caster, the Ritual of Devotion is lengthy, difficult, and usually requires implements and ingredients obtained by the caster himself at great personal risk. Moreover, those who perform the Ritual of Devotion must give up some of their magical essence, forever after taking a -1d penalty to all spells. There is no way around this issue, if the Ritual of Devotion is chosen.

The hard way is to make a wrenching, life changing sacrifice of something loved, for the greater good. Giving up a kingdom, relinquishing a lover to a rival who treats her better or destroying a coveted item of occult power—all these fraught and noble actions can give one the opportunity (in a blinding flash of enlightenment) to surrender to the power of balance.

White magicians can no longer use magic to cause damage to anybody or anything.

Those in balance lose their Craving and can never regain it, or gain any other Craving in its place.

The Rewards

Magicians of the light are no longer subject to backshock or unwanted side effects. Their spells do what they want and only that, or they do nothing.
On the other side of the equation, there are magicians who devote themselves to selfishness, destruction and cruelty for its own sake. The premiere dark magi in recent memory are the Bleak Blasphemers, but there were evil sorcerers before them, and dark wizards who remain.

The Drawbacks

There is an ineffable unpleasantness about evil magicians, a stain that cannot be precisely described or even easily detected with magic, but which infects all their dealings. Dark wizards take a -1d penalty to all Charm based rolls and a -2d penalty to any rolls to handle ordinary animals.

Dark magicians are not just selfish, they lose the human instinct for fellow feeling. They lose their Duty passion and cannot regain it, or any other Duty to replace it.

One touchstone is ruined, and the memory attached to it becomes hazy, vague and unimpressive. The GM decides which ‘stone and memory are lost.

The Rewards

Countering any spell cast by a dark wizard is done against Difficulty 5.

Any damaging spell the dark wizard casts gains a +1 Width bonus. Even if he fails to roll a set, his lowest die becomes a set. (The backshock occurs normally, however.)

The stain of dark enchantment gives the wizard a +1d bonus to Intimidate rolls and a +2d bonus to rolls to handle dark-aspected monsters such as basilisks.

The character gains a touchstone with the word Voun associated, and this touchstone cannot be destroyed (or its nature revealed) by backshock or side effect. He can never give this up or else he loses all the benefits of dark wizardry, while keeping all the flaws.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abro: Shape</th>
<th>Nain: Magic, Wizard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahar: Triumph</td>
<td>Nanab: Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aho: Food</td>
<td>Niak: Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ba: Halt</td>
<td>Nud: Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bock: Bread</td>
<td>Oa: Self, I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caur: Castle</td>
<td>Ocht: Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chihan: Love</td>
<td>Rampa: Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croice: Ice</td>
<td>Ris: Salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahane: Pride</td>
<td>Seeyan: Commonblood,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detch: Monster</td>
<td>Drudge, Spellblind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durn: Town</td>
<td>Schaxu: Fight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ectus: Suffer</td>
<td>Shundus: Confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evus: Bird, Flight</td>
<td>Sile: Humiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feo: Woman</td>
<td>Sterzo: Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gahar: Shelter</td>
<td>Stott: Domestic Animal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giork: Exhaustion</td>
<td>Tark: Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guph: Growth</td>
<td>Tobo: Sail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heam: Mountain, Stone</td>
<td>Ting: Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ichihan: Happiness</td>
<td>Tuip: Shrink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iptra: Fire</td>
<td>Tutous: Boredom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iftu: Rain</td>
<td>Trum: Restore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itta: Village</td>
<td>Umvau: See, Perceive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitiaik: Light</td>
<td>Utag: Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyw: Sorrow</td>
<td>Veous: Fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makit: Gem</td>
<td>Vog: Darkness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marouf: Tree</td>
<td>Voun: Evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miuve: Fruit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger: Sterzo</td>
<td>Gem: Makit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird: Evus</td>
<td>Good: Niak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat: Tobo</td>
<td>Growth: Guph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom: Tutous</td>
<td>Halt: Ba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread: Bock</td>
<td>Happiness: Ichihan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castle: Caur</td>
<td>Commonblood: Seeyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonblood: Seeyan</td>
<td>Humiliation: Sile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion: Shundus</td>
<td>I: Oa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darkness: Vog</td>
<td>Ice: Croice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tame Animal: Stott</td>
<td>Light: Kitiak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drudge: Seeyan</td>
<td>Love: Chihan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil: Voun</td>
<td>Magic: Nain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhaustion: Giork</td>
<td>Man: Ting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure: Utag</td>
<td>Monster: Detch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear: Veous</td>
<td>Mountain: Heam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight: Schaxu</td>
<td>Movement: Rampa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire: Ipra</td>
<td>Night: Ocht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight: Evus</td>
<td>Pass: Nanab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food: Aho</td>
<td>Perceive: Umvau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit: Miuve</td>
<td>Pride: Dahane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nain is plagued by monsters, some of which have been successful enough to breed and produce entire monstrous races. Others are entirely unique and wander out of the woods or down from the mountains with no name but Detch.

Rather than spend valuable word-count and space on repetitive lists of abilities, I’ve instead set up categories of monstrous ability, broken down as one roll charts. This gives you two options: You can roll up an entirely random creature, or you can look up a known Nainian beast and work out its stats from its ‘roll code.’

As with REIGN’s many, many one-roll tools, this one is meant to inspire and not to constrain. The more dice you roll, the tougher and nastier the monster is (and feel free to set some dice to ensure results you want), but just copying a set of attacks and defenses from the lists misses the point. That’s just the framework, the blank canvas on which you can draw the details that make a creature interesting even before (or after) fighting it.

The Foundation

All monsters start out with the following traits, even before any dice are rolled.

- They have a normal human wound silhouette. If the monster is shaped like a horse or a lizard, it still has four Wound Boxes in the head at location 10, ten Wound Boxes in a torso at 7-8, and so on.

- It has a Fight pool of 4d and its attacks do Width in Shock damage.

- It has 2d in Body, Coordination and Sense if necessary.

Rolling

For a weak monster that could slow down a few starting magic students, roll 2d. For a serious threat to several adolescents, or to one well-trained fighter, roll 5d. Want something terrifying? Sky’s the limit. Ten dice, fifteen… some dragons have twenty.

Once you’ve made your roll, sort them into sets and isolate the waste dice. The more dice you roll, the greater the possibility of getting a set Wider than 5x. If that happens, just re-roll until they’re gone.

Sets

Consult the charts for your results. Each includes the previous levels, so if you roll 4x3, your monster doesn’t just get AR1 over its whole body. It gets that, plus another AR2 everywhere (the 2x3 result) and an additional AR2 on its head (the 3x3 result).

Waste Dice

Three separate charts for Waste Dice are provided, the standard table and two alternates with somewhat more complicated or exotic results. I recommend checking all three with your loose dice, just to make sure you get the most… interesting outcome. But the first chart is the standard. All the monsters described use that chart for their loose dice.
x1: Natural Weapons.  
Does your creature have talons, fangs, antler or something more exotic?  
2x1  Damage from Fight attacks is Width in Shock and Killing. Fight pool +2d.  
3x1  Poisonous bite or sting. The poison is Potency 4. The Minor effect is -1 to Body for a day. The Major effect is a point of Shock damage to every location.  
4x1  +1d Fight. It ignores 1 point of armor.  
5x1  +1d Fight. Damage increases by +1SK.

x2: Ranged Attacks  
Does it spit acid? Swallow stones and expel them with great force? Magically animate nearby trees to attack?  
2x2  It has 4d in its ranged attack pool, range equal to a longbow, and it does Width in Shock damage.  
3x2  The ranged attack also does Width in Killing.  
4x2  +2d to ranged attack pool.  
5x2  +1d to ranged attack pool, does an additional +1SK.

x3: Armor  
What makes it so tough? An affinity to the earth making its flesh stone hard when struck? Thick, matted fur? Does it craft elaborate leather armor made from human skin?  
2x3  +2 AR on all locations.  
3x3  +2 AR to location 10.  
4x3  +1 AR to all locations.  
5x3  +2 AR to all locations for defense against magic only.

x4: Size/Toughness  
Mechanically, this is just extra wound boxes, but does that mean it’s big? Or is it so dense that a blow that would behead a man merely dents it?  
2x4  +1 Wound Box on every location, +1d to Fight pool.  
3x4  +1 Wound Box on every location.  
4x4  +1 Wound Box on every location.  
5x4  +1 Wound Box on every location.

x5: Fear  
Monsters are scary, pretty much by definition, and some augment their native terror with magical enhancement. What about the creature is so frightening? Its roar? Its hideous face? The icy chill of death that all mortals feel when its gaze falls upon them?  
2x5  The creature produces a Morale Attack 6 every round. This is in addition to its other actions, it requires no roll, and it doesn’t penalize its other rolls.  
3x5  The creature has a 4d Terrorize pool. If it rolls a set with it, all who perceive the terrifying act (be it a sound, a look, or some other threat) lose a die from the Widest set they have.  
4x5  Terrorize pool gets +1d. In addition to causing all around it to quail, it can focus on one specific target. That target takes a penalty to his next attack on the creature, equal to the Width of the creature’s Terrorize set. This occurs whether the victim attacks the next round or after ten years of having nightmares about it.  
5x5  Terrorize pool gets +1d. In addition to the 4x5 effect, if its Terrorize roll beats a Difficulty of 6 and the target doesn’t counterspell, he’s turned to stone. Magic can restore him exactly as he was before petrification, if the statue is undamaged, but it requires a lengthy ritual.

x6: Wings and Flight  
Just what wings does it have? Flame-wreathed angel pinions? Leathery bat wings? Transparent insect wings? What tactics does it use?  
2x6  Locations 4 and 5 each become wing locations with 3 Wound Boxes each. The creature can automatically fly 15’ per round and has a 4d Flight pool. With a Flight success it can perform a difficult maneuver or increase its speed by 5’ per point of Width.  
3x6  Its base flight speed increases by 10/round and it gets +1d to its Flight pool.  
4x6  It gets two more Wound Boxes on each wing and +1d to its Flight pool.  
5x6  +1d Flight, speed increases by 5’/round, each wing gets another Wound Box.
x7: Supernumerary Head(s)

The creature has one or two extra heads. Are they identical to its primary head, or are they different altogether? How do the heads interact with its other abilities?

- **2x7** Location 9 becomes a secondary head with four Wound Boxes. As long as the creature has a Wound Box in one head and in its torso with no Killing damage, it's still alive, even if the other head is completely severed. It is not unconscious until both heads are full of Shock.

- **3x7** The secondary head gets +1 AR and another Wound Box.

- **4x7** Location 8 becomes a third head with two Wound Boxes. As long as it has an unshocked Wound Box in any head, it can stay awake. As long as it has a box without Killing damage in one head and in its torso, it survives.

- **5x7** The third head gains a 4d Bite pool that does Width in Shock damage. This is entirely separate from its Fight pool and is rolled separately.

x8: Flame Affinity

You can change this to "Frost Affinity" or "Acidic" or any other similar effect you wish. Perhaps it constantly gives birth to horrid, skittering offspring and it is these that produce the listed effects.

- **2x8** It gains +2 AR against fire at all locations. Anyone who gets within ten feet of it suffers an Area 1 Killing Attack.

- **3x8** It produces a Morale Attack 3 every round without a roll. If it already produces a Morale Attack from another result, that Morale Attack rating increases by 3.

- **4x8** It can create an Area 2 Killing attack on everyone within fifty feet, but this attack is Slow 1. This does not penalize or interfere with any Fight or other attacks.

- **5x8** Its Area attack rises to Area 3 Killing and it can do it every round.

x9: Speed and Cunning

What gives it these extra attacks? Is it just blindingly swift? Does it have swarms of tentacles, each semi-independent? Is it all down to cunning?

- **2x9** The creature gains +1d+MD to its Stealth and Sight pools.

- **3x9** It can attack with its full Fight pool twice per round.

- **4x9** Its attacks with full Fight pool are now thrice per round.

- **5x9** It gains +2d to Stealth and +1d+MD in Scrutinize. Now it stalks its prey...

x10: Evil

In Nain, there is the everyday evil of cruel choices and selfish weakness, but there is also supernatural Evil—a force of chaos and destruction that revels in sadism and seeks to subsume all that is kind and good and beautiful. Creatures with x10 sets are infected with supernatural Evil. Think about that.

- **2x10** By taking an action and doing nothing else, it can strike an individual within its sight with blasphemous terror. This replaces the target’s Craving (if it has one) with a temporary Craving to get as far from the creature as possible. (People without Cravings are unaffected.) This lasts until the person can no longer see, hear or otherwise perceive the creature.

- **3x10** All spells cast against the creature are at +5 Difficulty.

- **4x10** It produces a Morale Attack 5 every round without a roll. If it already produces a Morale Attack from another result, that Morale Attack rating increases by 5. However, none of its Morale Attacks affect creatures or persons already dedicated to the principles of Evil.

- **5x10** By taking an action and doing nothing else, it can inflict a stifling sense of despair on one individual within sight. As long as that person can perceive the creature, his Duty has no effect.
Primary Waste Die Chart (#1)

Roll  Effect
1    Vicious: Its natural weapons do Width in Shock and Killing. Are these fangs, thorns, razor scales or does its touch simply cause unnatural aging or disease?
2    Leathery: It spits venom or some other noxious substance. This attack has Potency 2 and its Minor effect is an Area 4 Killing attack on one target. The Major effect is that the target loses a point of Body per hour until death at Body 0, or until healed. Once the Major effect is stopped, Body returns naturally at the rate of one point per day.
3    Tough: It gains +1 AR to all locations.
4    Large: It gains an extra Wound Box at every location.
5    Obnoxious: It can inflict an Area 3 Shock attack on people in a ten-foot diameter ring within a hundred paces. What is this? A noxious scent, an eldritch blast, deceptively sweet poison?
6    Amphibious: The creature can swim 20' per round and breathe easily underwater.
7    Deadly Tail: Location 7 becomes a separate location with 3 Wound Boxes. If the target is standing behind the creature, its Fight attacks do an extra point of Shock and Killing damage.
8    Punishing: Anyone who successfully attacks the creature with a hand to hand or magical attack takes an Area 1 Killing attack. Is this a mystic curse? Does its flesh roll with unearthly cold that chills the blood of all who touch it, whether they use body or will?
9    Vulnerable: The creature has a specific vulnerability, and other than that it's hard to harm. (What's the vulnerability? Silver? Yew wood? Weapons anointed with phoenix blood or covered over and over with the magic rune for Bock?) All Killing damage that originates from a source that doesn't incorporate the vulnerability becomes Shock. But any source that uses the vulnerability can ignore all the creature's armor.
10   Virtuous: The creature is infused with supernatural Good. It seeks to defend beauty, purity and innocence. It can give itself or another person a +MD bonus to his next Vigor roll at will. (This requires an action in which it does nothing else.)

“I Shut My Eyes!”

Against Mesmerizing and Petrifying creatures, (described on the next few pages) PCs may opt to close their eyes. That's cool. They just fight with the disadvantages of the “Blinded” condition described on page 187 of REIGN and page 121 of REIGN Enchiridion.

Neither Mesmerization nor Petrification work through mirrors, but anyone attempting to hit a creature using a mirror to aim takes a -1d penalty to his attack, and this can’t be offset by aiming.
**Alternate Waste Die Chart (ev)**

1. **Venom:** In addition to standard damage from a bite, the creature has a Potency 5 poison on its glistening fangs. The minor effect is to lose a point of Body for an hour. The major effect is to lose two points of Coordination for a day.

2. **Mesmerizing Gaze:** If you meet this creature's glance, you're hypnotized and unable to look away until it does. Here's how this works. The creature rolls a 6d Mesmerize pool, and everyone nearby rolls a dice pool equal to their Sense. Did anyone's Sense dice form a match with the creature's Mesmerize dice? Any PC who formed a set caught a glimpse, and his actions are timed as if they had one point less Width... except for the guy whose set had the greatest Height. He's the one who's trapped, looking into its eyes, for a number of rounds equal to his result's Width. The creature has to hold still to keep him mesmerized, but it can attack him without penalty.

If you have more than one mesmerizing creature, it gets lots worse. Have the PCs roll their Sense only once, but each creature rolls 5d. Anyone who gets snared long term is immune to getting trapped by others. (Scant consolation, I know.) Anyone who gets a glimpse and takes the timing penalty only takes the penalty once and for a single point of Width. It's not like you met five things' looks and your action gets set back five times.

3. **Extra Dodge:** The creature's always in motion, and even when you think you got a piece of it, it manages to twist and contort so that your blow lands weakly. Every round, the creature gets a free Gobble Die at Height 10, usable at any time, for dodging.

4. **Regeneration:** Every round, the creature heals itself of a point of Killing damage or two points of Shock. Sometimes you can see the wounds closing up. Other times, it just looks like it's getting bloodier and more mangled without slowing down.

5. **Deafening Cry:** Once per combat the creature can emit a bloodcurdling shriek, audible for miles around. In addition to any other effects this howl might have (summoning its mate, alerting everyone in earshot, waking the baby) anyone within 20 paces of the creature loses his hearing for three turns and can only understand gestures or writing, not spoken instructions.

6. **Climber:** The creature gets a 5d+MD Climb pool and can climb vertically at half its horizontal movement speed.

7. **Human Disguise:** The thing looks like a person, to a greater or lesser extent. Maybe it can only pass from ten feet or more in dim light, or maybe it's completely human looking until it opens its mouth and shows the fangs and forked tongue. Usually there's some sort of tell-tale sign which an alert and educated person can spot with a Sight roll. It's up to the GM to decide if the Sight roll has to be requested or can be made spontaneously. (It all depends on how good the imposture is.)

8. **Cold Affinity:** The creature thrives in the cold. No frost-based attack can harm it, and anyone who grabs it (or gets grappled by it) loses a point of Body every round until Body hits zero. At that point the person is in a hypothermic coma. He can't act until someone makes a successful Healing roll (and if no one does that within eight hours, he dies). A successful Healing roll takes three hours to gradually bring him out of it without damage, but if the Healing roll fails he takes a point of Killing damage to both arms and both legs. He does still wake up after that, though.

9. **Spell Resistance:** When it gets hit with a spell, roll 2d10. Did either one come up 10? If either or both did, or if the dice both turn up the same number, the spell had no effect.

10. **Environment Warping:** The creature has some kind of influence on the world around it. Maybe it repels rain and dries the soil, leaving the world cracked and barren and ripe for a devastating ground fire. Maybe it brings highland frost with it wherever it goes and even in the height of summer it can walk through a forest leaving a trail of snow and icicles. Or maybe it radiates fertility and where it wanders the grass is lush, the trees and shrubbery burst into bloom midsummer, fields swell with bounty and squirrels fall into ecstasies of reproductive effort. Most of this can be handled with a simple +/-1 Territory adjustment, temporary but renewed every month the creature remains in a region.
**Alternate Waste Die Chart (#3)**

1. **Lays Traps:** The creature sets snares in the environment near its nest. These can be biological, magical, or built by hand. However they’re constructed, it’s a Difficulty 5 Sight roll to spot it. If PCs are moving through the creature’s territory, have everyone roll Sight. If no one beats the Difficulty, someone stepped in it or walked under it or otherwise set it off. Each PC rolls a d10 and the person with the lowest roll (or the people who tie for lowest) get hit. The trap does an Area 5 Killing attack. Once one has gone off or been spotted, however, the Difficulty of seeing it drops to zero.

2. **Petrifies:** If you meet the creature’s gaze, you turn to stone. Every round, it rolls a 3d pool, and everyone fighting it rolls their Sense dice as a pool. If anyone’s Sense dice match up with its Petrify dice, he’s at risk. The Highest set formed between a PC and the creature indicates which PC is now a statue.

3. **Attack Immunity:** There’s some specific assault which does no damage to the creature. For example: Metal weapons, fire spells, ranged missiles. They just don’t work. Simple.

4. **Vampiric Regeneration:** Every time it inflicts a point of damage on anyone, Shock or Killing, the creature heals a point of damage.

5. **Invisibility:** The creature cannot be seen. Anyone trying to fight it does so as if blind. Some creatures can turn invisible for short periods, others are just unseeable all the time. A few can only be seen in reflection.

6. **Tunneler:** The creature can dig with preternatural speed. When it starts to dig, it can put two hit locations per round under cover just by sinking them into the ground. Once it’s completely submerged, it can move 10’ per round under the surface, even through solid stone. Its direction is visible as long as it’s shallow, but if it takes a round to drop ten feet down, its course is invisible from above. People can follow along through the tunnels, but only at a rate of three feet per round. On the plus side, if it tunnels up under you and attacks, it can only every hit Locations 1 or 2.

7. **Vocal Mimic:** It can perfectly mimic any sound it has heard and, depending on how smart it is, it’s probably figured out that a little boy’s “Help! I’m drowning!” is a terrific lure. It may also ‘sample’ the PCs’ voices for added amusement and confusion. But the fidelity is so great that even a Listen roll can’t tell the fake from the genuine, though kindly GMs might let great Listen rolls indicate the position from which the sound came as a clue...

8. **Nocturnal:** The creature takes no penalties for acting in total darkness. In fact, when it’s pitch black it gets a +1d bonus. On **everything**.

9. **Wise:** This could mean it’s wise in the sense of having a deep understanding of reality’s secrets, or it could mean you want to say, “Oh, a wise guy!” to it. These creatures are usually haughty and playful, and it’s not uncommon for them to have a cruel streak. They have the Knowledge Stat at 5 and may know many important (plot-driving) secrets. But usually they want something in exchange for their hints and clues. If you’re really unlucky, they’ve got a riddle they insist you solve.

10. **Frightens Animals:** As soon as this thing’s within a quarter mile, normal animals panic. Wild creatures flee. Domesticated animals cry out and attempt to get away. Any Ride or Animal Handling rolls have their Difficulty increased by 5.
**Bellymouth**

These short, grey, headless creatures have human features that occupy the entire fronts of their torsos. Usually Bellymouths have crude, wart-strewn and ugly features, but some have been seen with lovely high cheekbones and clear, wide eyes. But all Bellymouths have pointy teeth and love nothing so much as the taste of human flesh. Bellymouths infest the forests and are found in the mountains as well. They maintain family groups much like humans, but Bellymouths are brutes. Despite some well-meaning attempts, they cannot learn language beyond deep grunts and their highest intellectual achievement is the pointed stick. They steal fire from humans and keep it burning at all costs, being unable to make it themselves, and they sometimes band together in large groups to attack villages.

Instead of having a head location at 10, location 10 is just another torso location. They have four extra Wound Boxes in their torso.

Roll Code: 2x1, 3

**Cockatrice**

A lizard with a rooster’s head, the dreaded Cockatrice can grow up to six feet in length. They prowl the mountains, dining exclusively on eggs after scaring off or petrifying the adult birds. Sometimes they make their way into the Nain valley and when they do it’s only a short time before they start terrorizing entire villages over their henhouses.

Roll Code: 2x3, 5x5, 7

**Deadlight**

Flickering yellow lights in the forest or the night, Deadlights are unusually intelligent for monsters. They lure unwary travelers into danger, feeding off the dead and then reanimating them as Xombi (see below). Deadlights are also spotted in graveyards and are known to sometimes dig up bodies for consumption.

Deadlights are largely invulnerable to normal weapons, unless the weapon has been soaked in lamp oil. If that’s done, the weapon ignites on contact with the Deadlight, causing it horrible pain. (They’re utterly silent except when harmed. Then they squeal horribly.) They attack by spitting flames at their victims. (At least, the victims hope it’s spittle.)
When killed, Deadlights leave behind only a thick, gelatinous slime, gently glowing. Some magicians theorize that Deadlights are the female counterpart to Hammerwrights. Certainly they've been observed working together.

Roll Code: 2x2, 2x6, 9

**Dragon**

The mightiest and most feared of monsters, dragons are thankfully rare and as prone to fight each other as they are to fight humans. But periodically they come to Nain demanding virgin sacrifice, snatching cattle or hogs or people for provender, or just burning down a town for the hell of it. They can be bought off with gold, but only for a time. Cunning, cruel and at least as intelligent as human beings, Dragons have Knowledge 4 and Lore 4 in addition to their other abilities. They speak human tongues and seem to recognize the Great Voice as well. Rumors persist of great spell-casting dragons residing deep in the hills.

Roll Code: 1, 3, 4, 3x5, 4x6, 4x8, plus between 0-6d of random additional powers.

**Drown-Maid**

Drown-Maids look like beautiful human women and can converse with some modicum of intelligence, but they can't breathe for more than an hour out of the water and they are incurious and single-minded. The illusion of humanity is persuasive. The best way to tell is that their eyes are fixed forward, never tipping up or down, never turning right or left. Also, they are cold to the touch, but by the time one's touching it may be too late. Their skin feels smooth and delightfully soft out of the water, but once submerged, it instantly stiffens and, though still looking human, feels more like fish scales. (It also takes on this texture when they're dead.)

The kiss of the Drown-Maid is powerful, affecting people like a couple stiff drinks. As with normal alcohol, some become addicted. This never ends well. Some have enslaved Drown-Maids and sold their kisses, keeping them in enclosed ponds, underwater cages or even tubs, but the creatures always die after a few months in captivity.

If they want anything to do with humans at all, they tend to lure them into water so they can drown them and then either eat them or (more commonly, alas) rob them of their human tools and weapons. They would never invent smithing on their own, but they value worked iron greatly. Their most common ruses are (1) seductions that end with a suggestion to go swimming, or (2) pretending to drown.

Their effect from their 9 die is this: They're difficult to harm when they're in water, but outside the water their armor is ineffective.

Roll Code: 2x1,3,6,

**Fence Walker**

By day, they sink into the soil and sleep curled up, only awakening if unearthed. But by night they arise and walk roads, riversides, walls and boundaries of all types. As one would expect from their name, they're particularly fond of fences.

They look like portly young children, 3-4 years old, but their eyes are ancient, their voices are bass deep and they move with a grace impossible in anything human. Worse, they feed on magic and stalk human lands seeking touchstones to steal and wizards to devour. They can drink any potion without being affected (other than to enjoy the magic) and they often hoard magical devices. While they immediately consume touchstones, devices like flying carpets seem to radiate magic that they can live on without destroying it. Sometimes they can be bought off with enchanted tools, but as with dragons, this usually just encourages them to step up their demands or to try extortion elsewhere.
They are easily as intelligent as most humans (Knowledge 3+) and are universally fascinated by riddles and games of chance. It’s often possible to get them to agree to some sort of contest, and they usually keep their word if they agree on stakes. But the reward they seek is usually help in bringing down a wizard.

Note: The armor rating doesn’t reflect actual armor so much as their inhuman grace and speed. They can simply squirm away from most attacks. In a fight, they flail with their pudgy fists and bite with their sharp little teeth, but they rely on sheer speed more than power or technique.

Roll Code: 1, 2x3, 4x9, 3x10

Grendelkin

The original Grendel was the last of the great mountain giants, slain by the eight great ancestral wizards of Nain. At least, that’s the myth. But Grendel couldn’t be killed as long as he was touching the soil, and though the great wizards levitated him and tore him to pieces, where his blood hit the soil it slowly formed stony warriors with a deep seated hatred for the works of man. Those are Grendelkin.

Ten to fifteen feet tall, Grendelkin look like they’re made of rock, mud and moss and while they’re perfectly happy to tear commoners and livestock to pieces if there’s nothing more attractive nearby, what they really enjoy is killing wizards and razing stone buildings. Wooden structures don’t offend them, but something about seeing stone in service to man pushes their usual murder frenzy to a higher level.

Roll Code: 2x1, 2x3, 5x4

Hammerwight

Hammerwights look like emaciated old men with yellow glowing eyes and fingertips. They have no mouths and seem to need no food.

Fairly common, as magical creatures go, Hammerwights are usually thieves. Like Drown-Maidens, they’re fascinated by the products of human craft, even as they, themselves, seem incapable of figuring out how to make (say) glass bottles themselves or of learning how from humans. So they sneak and steal, particularly around smithies, which they regard with covetous awe.

Some Hammerwights graduate to kidnapping, having realized that humans are willing to trade many tools for one of their young. They also sometimes sneak into homes and kill people (or, far more often, sneak into barns and kill livestock or steal lanterns to burn fields) for no reason other than spite.

Hammerwights who get tools use them clumsily, building awkward shacks in the wilderness or attempting to till the soil. (Why they bother with
farming when they don’t eat is a mystery.) One thing they can do is write. They have a sophisticated and beautiful script of their own, and many can compose in human languages as well. The Great Voice runes are beyond them, but a Hammerwright’s ransom note, it’s always legible.

Roll Code: 5x9

**Jewel-Toad**

Sometimes called “monster kings,” Jewel-Toads are a peculiar mixture of beautiful and hideous. They’re warty and fist-sized, with bulging eyes and the mottled patterns common to the mundane toad. They’re beautiful because, as they age, their skin turns silver and gold, while the lumps and protrusions deepen and turn transparent, developing into emerald and sapphire accents.

A Jewel-Toad skin can command a high price, and the ruby that nests in the center of its brain is particularly sought by wizards for its use as a touchstone or as a ritual component. The problem is, Jewel-Toads draw magical creatures. Something about their presence makes an area more hospitable to Grendelkin, Deadlights, Cockatrices and the like. Moreover, they aren’t defenseless. They discharge an odorless pale gas, reflecting the light like an abalone shell mist, that causes painless but dangerous rashes and lesions to those exposed. Those who try to harm the toad not only find themselves unwilling to mar its beauty, they discover that the peculiar skin-rotting gas is drawn to magic and is denser near the creature itself (if they can find it).

(The ‘reluctance to hit it’ business is really just description. Mechanically, this is just an explanation for how an animal the size of a puppy has as many Wound Boxes as a full-grown man.)

Roll Code: 5, 8, 2x9

**Kuikuli**

Picture an ape with a mirror at its waist. From the proper perspective you see a primate with no legs, four arms, and two heads opposite one another. This is somewhat close to a Kuikuli. But where the monkey with the mirror has both faces looking the same way, the Kuikuli’s second body is rotated opposite its first.

Also, it’s not really that much like an ape. It has coarse fur, but its muzzle is elongated, more like a wolf, and its ears are large, pointed and almost rabbit-like. It would look comical if it wasn’t typically seen dropping out of a tree, springing out of a rock crevice, or popping up out of deep grass to bite at someone’s throat and crotch simultaneously. (That’s if you’re ready for it. If it sneaks up on you, it bites for the top of the spine and hamstring at the top of the leg, so you can’t get away.)

Kuikuli are quick, sneaky, aggressive and territorial. They brachiate and climb adroitly, and on open ground they rush about with a sort of end-over-end handspring/somersault flip. That maneuver is comical even if it is trying to chomp your face and groin.

Roll Code: 1, 2x7, 3x9

**Manticore**

The standard Nainian Manticore has a scorpion tail, wings, and the body of a great cat. There are variations, though. But they all share a common filth and toxicity. They stink, they sicken the grass where they lie to sleep, and they can wither crops in a field simply by flying overhead and casting their shadow on it. But their worst habit is polluting water, which they do for no discernible reason. They’re (barely) smart enough to spot human settlements and they relish going upstream of its water source and making the water dirty enough to sicken any who drink. They do the same with wells, squatting on the edge to

---

**Known Beasts of Nain**

◆◆◆◇◆◆

---
discharge the poison of their tails (and probably other orifices as well).

On top of all that, they’re cowards. They put up a fierce display at first, but as soon as they’re injured they usually fly off. But they don’t go far. Once a town has their attention, they like to toy with it, like a cat playing with a mouse, for months.

Roll Code: 2, 3x1, 2x4, 2x6, 2x10, 0-4 other random dice.

Phoenix

The rare, burning Phoenix bird is considered an omen of good fortune (unless it attacks someone—that’s a sign that the attack victim is evil and that his friends need to seriously reconsider their taste). Its piercing song fills the sickly with hope and vigor, but those who would cage it usually wind up with their fingers burnt off.

The aura of flame surrounding the bird starts bright yellow but turns into a hotter red fire as it ages. Ultimately, when it dies of old age or is killed, it reconstitutes as an egg at the next
sunrise, which hatches as a baby Phoenix. (The eggshells are of great value to white magicians.)

The only way a Phoenix can fail to resurrect is if it’s killed by a spell that incorporates Voun. But the vile touchstones constructed of murdered Phoenix skulls or feathers are status symbols among black magicians.

Roll Code: 3x6, 2x8, 10

Roc

It’s a huge, huge bird. Without magic, nothing that massive could get off the ground. They’re no smarter than any regular raptor, but what they lack in brains, panache or beauty they make up for in ‘big.’ A horse in a Roc’s claw is like a mouse in an eagle’s talons.

When you’re that big, there’s not a lot of meat on the hoof that can satisfy you for long, so Rocs are ravenous. If a Roc sees your herd of sheep, it’s going swoop down, grab two (one in each claw), kill them, drop the bodies, grab two more, repeat, and get a final pair before it starts ferrying the corpses back to its nest. That’s a day’s provender for a Roc, if it’s unlucky. It probably supplements that with some wolves, deer, elk, birds or anything else it can snatch.

The one advantage to having a Roc in the region is, if it has the optimum combination of size, hunger, and stupidity, it’s one of the few things that preys on Manticores, Dragons and other large magical predators. The drawback is, if it doesn’t have monsters to eat, it just might figure out that people are still there when they go in a house and it can’t see them. That’s a genius-level insight for a Roc, but from there it’s only a short jump to prying off every roof and stocking its nest for the next season.

Roll Code: 2x1, 5x4, 5x6

Thorn-Bull

Thorn-Bulls are nasty creatures that can’t quite make up their minds whether they’re animal or vegetable. When they’re active, they look like large steers made of twined thorn vines, with two truly impressive horns. In this form they prefer to rampage through fields trampling and uprooting any domesticated vegetables and grains they can find. (They’re particularly prone to doing this in the spring.) They also attack people, goats, sheep, pigs and chickens (though not cattle), but just as Grendelkin seem incensed at the sight of man-mastered stone, Thorn-Bulls object to plants being put into orderly rows of all the same sort.

This is all troublesome enough, but they also have a passive phase, which they enter in the winter, through the hottest days of summer, or when they have their head or torso half-filled with Killing damage. When passive, they put down roots, sink into the ground, and then come up as a deep, thorny thicket. It can’t do this instantly, but it takes less than an hour to transform. (Once it goes dormant, it takes at least two months for it to switch phases and become mobile again, but when it emerges from dormancy it’s fully healed and ready to go.)

In this slumberous state it can’t move or even react to what’s happening around it, but neither can it be killed short of burning every leaf and stem aboveground, pulling up every single root below, and then sowing the earth with salt for an acre around it. Given the damage that does to the soil, most farmers actually prefer to fight them when they’re moving. Even more than that, they prefer to have wizards come kill them.

Roll Code: 2x1, 3x3, 3x4, 8
**Unicorn**

The regal Unicorn is a flawless white horse with a pearl, spiral horn. Its hooves, too, have a shimmering luster, while its mane and tail glow like starlight.

Unicorns aren't necessarily smarter than horses, but the fortunate few who've encountered them say they seem... _wise_. They are known to intervene to defend children and unmarried youths from bandits, monsters, wild animals, drowning and other perils. The touch of their horn eases the pain of injury and can purify poison. They have also shown up to spontaneously assault dark wizards or (on very rare occasions) mundane men who were just utterly evil.

White magicians seek their blessings, and have been known to make touchstones from single unicorn hairs or stones from their hooves. Dark magicians receive no gifts from unicorns but eagerly hunt them for magic talismans and to provide components of their disgusting rites.

Unicorns have the same movement rates as a swift horse.

Roll Code: 2x1, 2x4, 3, 10

**Xombi**

Xombi were once living humans, reanimated by the malice and magic of a Deadlight (see page 74). Since Deadlights can't dig, a proper burial is usually protection from reanimation, but people lured to their deaths by Deadlights, or dug up by Hammerwright allies, are susceptible.

Slow and stupid, Xombi are also relentless and remorseless. The fresher the body, the more they seem to remember the people they knew in life. Unfortunately, while Xombi return to familiar places, friends, and family, they only have one way to interact with human beings, and that is to kill them and eat their brains.

Roll Code: 3, 2x4
This is the story the elves of Ardwin tell:

Before all things were things, there was light. It fell from the heavens like a gentle rain, and in time became rain. But it was not rain as we know it, not mere water. The first rain was all things but light.

In this primal deluge, the tree of the world began to grow, and its thin roots caught the all-rain, slowing it. In time, it so slowed that it ceased to move altogether, and then lost its movement. It became earth, and as it formed around the roots, the world began to grow.

From the sky, light and liquid continued to fall, but in time the rains of liquid became fewer and fewer, until only water fell. Most things had settled out and become themselves.

That is the world in which we live, a world of light and water and soil. These three things combine and reform in countless ways, but at bottom there is only soil, water, and light.

This is the story the gnomes of Adrwin tell:

We’ve been here all along, from the plains, to the sea, to the forest in the west and the mountains in the north. We were here tilling the soil and raising the animals, as is our place. In the mountains, the dwarves mined and forged iron, as is their place. In the forests, the elves… did whatever it is they do in there. It’s their place, wild and uncultivated and welcome to it.

Commerce was strong between the dwarves and us, starting with the first trade fair held three hundred and seventy-one years ago. The dwarves prefer their trade by night, as they’re unused to sun, and perhaps that’s where the trouble started. In the dark, a dwarf doesn’t look so different from a gnome. Hearts being what they are, there were love matches between the peoples, and I’ll not speak against love lest its daggers stab me cruelly. But the children of dwarves and gnomes were like neither, being broad and strong and fierce. Some of these offspring were raised as dwarves, some as gnomes, but the more they grew the clearer the
differences became. They could stomach neither bread nor corn, and would taste neither beer nor whisky. Restless, and perhaps ashamed of their crude features, they took to the hunt, for only flesh would fill their bellies.

Some who went off to hunt in the wilds never came back, and marriages of gnome and dwarf were rare. But two hundred and twelve years ago, in the dead of winter, half-breeds stormed the gates of a dwarven town. That taken mine was Greyhill, but the attack was so fierce that they renamed it Redhill. Redhill is still a stronghold of the orcs, for that is what the creatures named themselves. The cast off hybrids of two cultures had found one another and bred true.

The dwarves warred against Redhill, and perhaps the blame lies on us for the wars that followed. Had we joined the dwarves when asked, we might have broken the orc nation in its youth. But despite three great Orc Wars and lesser battles against the elves and the goblins, there is peace today, even some trade. Indeed, marriages of dwarf and gnome are more common than ever, and proper orcs of the first generation are honored citizens to both nations. But the deep-breasted orcs are of a different mind, insisting on their own lands (poor though they are), governance (though wars of orc on orc are so common they barely rate notice) and even their own absurd religion.

But not all love is doomed to yield monsters. In some cases a gnome maiden or swain has taken an elvish lover, and who can blame them? The children of these unions are, if anything, more lovely than either parent, and blessed with the gift of flight! Sprites are not so common as orcs, and nowhere near as coarse, but they are well known in our towns. They have settlements of their own and, in accord with nature, sprites who marry sprites have sprite children.

The other race of Ardwin is the goblins, who are pestilent water-thieves. The only real war the gnomes of Ardwin launched was to tear down the Great Goblin Dam ninety and nine years ago, for with it they’d have drained all our fields dry and killed us without raising a hand. They’re shifty little bastards. I don’t even like eating fish because they remind me of the gobbos.

This is the story the sprites of Ardwin tell:

Did you hear? Lady Alulliel of the Forest High is to wed a goblin! His name is Murdkark and he made a fortune in river trade, and Alulliel’s father Udrian owed a tithe to the dwarven lords, an ancient debt from the siege of Downmountain. The dwarf lords were to claim Udrian’s life, and Alulliel told Murdkark she would marry him if he paid the debt, armed a hundred elves with dwarf blades, and drove the Frostneedle elves from Worldmarrow hill.

Murdkark asked if he had to do it in that order and she said no, so he bought a hundred count of axes, helms and shields from the Lowmountain dwarves, equipped an army of goblins and orcs with them in secret, and attacked Worldmarrow by night! All within were routed or slain, and the treasure he seized and raised by ransoming a captured Frostneedle prince was sufficient to pay down Alluliel’s father’s debt. Murdkark presented the hundred weapons and shields still stained with the blood of the Frostneedles and claimed his bride-prize.

When Udrian found out, he went nigh mad with rage! He swore he’d rather die at dwarf hands than see his daughter wed to ‘a common river mud-grubber’—his words, not mine Warrowbog! Now the elves of Forest High are refusing the gift of weapons, crying that they’re sullied by use from orcs and goblins! And the dwarves are taking insult from it! Now they’re offering to kill Urdrian and keep Murdkark’s gold and thereby quit all debts, but! Wait, no, but it gets better! Alulliel has fled her bower by night and flown to Murdkark’s side, now enamored of his courage and cunning! So if she elopes, as she plans, and Udrian gives his life to the dwarves, a goblin could become Lord of Forest High!

Isn’t it delicious?
The land of Ardwin is a hospitable and flourishing place, inhabited by six peoples. Or perhaps three. Or really, maybe just one?

It's all very complicated.

There are the three old races: Elves, dwarves and gnomes. Descended from them are the three young races (or, as some among them call themselves, “the pure races”): Orcs, sprites and goblins. These six groups vary widely in appearance, culture and outlook, but there is one point of commonality and, not to put too fine a point on it, it usually takes place in privacy, often in a bed but not always.

That is to say: The groups crossbreed. Not a lot, but enough. Enough that where there were once three, there are now six. Each of those six has a homeland, a culture and an attitude. It’s dissected in depth in the article “Races of Ardwin.”

But complicated as six intergenerated ethnic groups are, it actually gets more complex still. If a gnome and a dwarf have a child, that child is going to be an orc. Now where, exactly, does that child belong? The gnomish plains? The dwarven tunnels? Off in the orc hills where it has no relatives? The answer is, of course, that it varies heavily from family to family. If a gnome woman moves under the mountain with her dwarf husband, then they probably raise their child as a dwarf. He grows up speaking with an undermountain accent, wears a lot of metal and has a strong sense of community duty. At least, that’s the ideal for the dwarven papa. Maybe the child grows up and, in adolescence, leaves to “find himself” and winds up trying to connect to orcish culture. Or maybe he goes to visit his gnomish cousins, which could be uncomfortable or perfectly normal, depending on how cosmopolitan they are.

Thus, one gets sprites working on gnomish farms, goblins living in dwarf mines, and even some elves who move out of the forest and run wild with the orcs. It’s rare, vanishingly rare, but not impossible.

The Old Races

According to the elves (and they’ve studied nature in the abstract as much as anybody) there are three essential elements in the world, and each of the old races favors two of the three. Dwarves (they say) are composed of earth and water. Elves (the oldest and purest) are made of light and water. Gnomes are light and earth.

Whether this is literally true or just a highly nuanced metaphor, it does seem to explain a lot.

Dwarves

Dwarves are stocky and heavyset, compact without actually seeming small. Heavily muscled, the typical dwarf lives underground, in a town that bleeds into a mine that runs into a series of vast subterranean highways that link their homesteads. It’s possible to travel from one end of dwarf territory to the other without bothering with the sky.

The linguistic question of whether the plural of “dwarf” is “dwarves” or “dwarfs” is lengthy and dull. People use both, interchangeably. “Elfin” is less common than “elven,” but again, both see use.
It’s also said that dwarves love metal, and certainly their skill with working it far outstrips the other races of Ardwin. A dwarven pick is as tough and sturdy as a dwarf axe is sharp and deadly. Their love of iron only barely surpasses their affection for gold, though neither feeling keeps them from trading the ores they mine with their neighbors. It just inclines them to keep their best work for themselves.

**Elves**

The tallest of the six peoples, the elves look down on their neighbors, both literally and figuratively. Dwelling up high in the trees of the vast Elfwood forest, their homes are light and airy arbors, dozens of feet above the forest floor.

Just as dwarves have a special affinity for iron, elves have an attachment to wood. There are dozens of different woods in their forest, and thousands of herbs and shrubs. The elves know the uses of all of them. Their bows are unmatched for craftsmanship, as is everything else they produce from timber.

The elves hold themselves aloof from the other races, as much as they’re able, but that’s less and less in recent times. Their own internal political conflicts spilled into the open when one tribe began making extensive overtures to the sprite villages, and another began involving the dwarves to counteract any advantage. Now most elf **aeries** (as a collection of elfin homes is called) have an underworld where other races dwell. These people are, again, both literally and metaphorically an underclass. They’re second class citizens, and that’s why their houses are built on the ground, if not under it.

**Gnomes**

Gnomes are short, round, ruddy people whose blunt fingers lack the delicacy of elf hands or the raw power of a dwarf’s wide mitts. But the gnomes excel above all others at the tilling and ordering of the soil, and the tending and raising of beasts. According to the three element theory, gnomes are wrought of earth and light, so their attachment to the soil and its products follows as a matter of course. The gnomes are the most fecund and most numerous of the peoples in Ardwin, and their lands stretch farther than either elf glades or dwarf pits (as long as you don’t count vertical space). Without gnomes, the dwarves and goblins would both face famine. The dwarves and goblins never refer to this fact, while the gnomes are too polite to bring it up. But everyone with any understanding of commerce, cuisine or agriculture knows it.
Goblins, orcs and sprites all have ancestors from two of the old races in their family trees (and may, if they marry outside the fold, have old race children). Many in the old races regard the young races as debased, degenerates or just flat out bastards. But the lure of the erotic foreigner ensures that there are always more being born. When they’re not reproducing themselves, of course.

**Goblins**

When a compact, muscular dwarf lies in passion with a slender elf, the issue of the union has the stature of a dwarf and the frame of the elf… only not quite as good. Goblins are *runty* where dwarves are short, and no one describes them as ‘willowy.’ No, they’re ‘scrawny’ or, at best, ‘lean.’ Instead of elfin pallor or the stony skin tones of the dwarves, goblins tend to have a fishbelly sheen to their skin. Also, they breathe water.

If elves are made of water and light, and dwarves are made of water and soil, it only makes sense that their byblows would have a stronger liking for water than either parent, and goblins bear this out. They dwell in bogs, streams and river valleys, sometimes in shacks along the shore, sometimes in fully submerged dwellings, most often in constructions that straddle the elements, with some rooms (for hosting visitors of impure lineage) above the surface, and more intimate quarters for the family under the water where privacy is assured.

While they excel at fishing and are able to raise some of their own food in the marshes, it’s less productive for them than one might expect. Some claim that the goblins bear an ancient curse from the gnomes, that any plant they raise is doomed to wither and shrink, winding up as ill-figured as the goblins themselves. But the less romantic racists of Ardwin say that’s ridiculous: Goblins are lousy farmers because they’re impatient and lazy, not because they’re cursed.

**“Melon Farmer!”**

No one can say for certain how “melon farmer” became an expression of anger and disdain, though it presumably started with the gnomes who started growing large fields of watermelon along the country’s riverbeds. Goblins, never shy with an insult, came into contact (and probably conflict) with these fruit-raisers early and often. That may have made the phrase a short hand for someone stubborn and stupid—someone who gets in your way. Once the gnomes trading with the goblins heard it, they may have adopted it because (after all) trading with goblins is one thing. Being dumb enough to compete with them for water is quite another.

Once established in the gnomish and goblin merchant circles, it was only a matter of time before it spread to the sprites (who tend to be nosy) and elves (always in the market for new expressions of contempt). Both dwarves and orcs are less likely to use the insult, tending to prefer their own culturally-rich invective.

Strangely, except for elves and orcs, all the peoples of Ardwin tend to *love* the melons themselves. It’s just the people who raise them who become the butts of jokes. That said, the gnomes also have a saying that “No one goes broke raising melons.”

But whatever the reasons for their crop failures, the goblins make up for it with successes as merchants. Someone who doesn’t have to fear drowning can make an excellent sailor, and their grip on the river leaves them with a monopoly on the fastest way to trade with lands to the far west.
Orcs

The orcish religion is a refinement of elvish philosophy (or, if you’re an elf, it’s a mad case of intellectual thievery). It holds that while the old races are compounds, the young races are each purified, a cleaner and more complete thing than their ancestors. In the case of the orcs, they are the people of stone, and they act like it. Inflexible, humorless and stern, they’re also incredibly tough. Despite their gnomish and dwarvish heritage, orcs tend to be taller than either. (The orcish myth says this is because they hold themselves upright instead of hunching over a mining hammer or slouching behind a plow.)

Like the dwarves before them, orcs prefer to dwell underground and, though the dwarves would never admit it, when it comes to stonework engineering, the orcs are their equals. None of the other races can see this, however, because of the orcish disdain for decoration. Orc aesthetics hold that nature has the greatest purity, and that to carve wood (for example) is to debase its nature. They work stone and smelt iron when it’s necessary for function, but decoration has no real point in orcish eyes. If a wall has to be smooth to prevent enemies from scaling it, the orcs smooth it, but otherwise, they don’t bother. Much of their construction, therefore, looks clumsy and amateur but is still strong and solid.

Sprites

The smallest and least common of the Ardwin races are seen by many as the most favored. Even the elves and the orcs agree that sprites are creatures of light and, like light, they are unbound by the draw of earth. (At least, some of the time.)

Sprites fly. They bend the light itself to their will. They have the beauty of their elfish parents (at least!) tied to a gnomish love of good food and wine and well-cured smokables. They’re known for cleverness and wit and all manner of delightfulness.

They are not, however, known for hard work, productivity or fierceness in war.

Values

As one might expect, the values of Ardwin vary from faction to faction. However, no matter how much it might seem to be inborn, and no matter how much the groups believe it to be so, culture is a far more reliable indicator of how an Ardwinian believes and acts. A sprite raised in a dwarven mine (if such a thing ever happened) would internalize dwarven values of self-sacrifice and toil.

Of course, people in Ardwin play down to expectations, whatever their heritage. If you’re a goblin and everyone expects you to be a sharp operator, everything you do (no matter how honest or naïve) is going to be seen through the lens ‘goblin cunning.’ It’s the same with elfin arrogance, dwarven intransigence, orcish cruelty, spritely flightiness or gnomish self-satisfaction.

Here, then, are the values to which the groups generally conform.
Dwarves believe the group is everything and the individual is almost nothing. Dying to defend the cave isn’t exceptional heroism: It’s just fair. But individual dwarves see one another as a part of the overall dwarf culture, so there’s a fair degree of solidarity. Every dwarf is expected to pull his weight, but those who can’t are tended to until such time as they can make themselves useful. Infants, elderly, the injured and the ill are made comfortable, though not coddled. Similarly, criminals are most often punished with work terms instead of maiming or execution. As dwarves see it, when a tool breaks, you fix it: You don’t break it further.

Elves, on the other hand, believe the individual’s value is to be determined by the individual and if you’re not happy with him, that’s as likely your problem as his. If he can’t tend to himself, he has no reason to expect better than death. That’s nature’s way. If someone else chooses to pull another’s dead weight, that’s the puller’s business. Indeed, being able to support children, elderly relatives, entertainers and other non-producers is a status symbol among the more garish and gauche of the elf lords. The conservative ones, of course, regard it all as foolishness. Taking care of your children is one thing. Willfully hosting parasites is quite another.

Then again, survival is much easier for elves than it is for any other race. They don’t have to eat. With no need to hunt or till the soil, the elves are freed for philosophical contemplation, the creation of magnificent art, and the cultivation of wisdom. Or to become obsessive politicians, constantly meddling with their fellow Ardwinians. All these play into the great elfin value: Renown. Where a gnomish farmer exerts pressure by giving or withholding food, elves are immune to such coercion. Therefore, elves seek the means they can achieve to influence their fellows, reputation. Elves make much of choosing who they help, follow, or believe. It’s for the lesser races to be compelled.

Gnomes prize comfort, stability and routine. They don’t insist on everything being straitened and contained, but important things should be minded closely. As a community of farmers, this orientation is perfectly sensible. Even for skilled cultivators like the gnomes, a bad year means shortages, and shortages mean a lot of unhappy dwarves and goblins casting covetous glances on gnomish silos.

On top of a practical fondness for order, gnome culture emphasizes hospitality and friendliness. Gnomes are great dancers, entertainers and audiences for all kinds of music and theater. They’re also known for a friendly curiosity. Sometimes too friendly, as marital infidelity among gnomes is reputedly rampant. Where a dwarf or orc might murder an unfaithful spouse (or at least move out), gnomes tend to shrug and mumble something about “It’s only natural to wonder how the apples taste in your neighbor’s orchard.” Then they change the subject.

This indicates their final great value: Manners. They don’t have an elaborate set of social rules that permit them to play ‘gotcha!’ with outsiders. Instead, they expect a basic level of courtesy and discretion, and when they don’t receive it, they become embarrassed. If it continues, they get huffy. Then they get angry. So in some ways, a discrete adulterer is more acceptable to gnomes than a cuckold who creates a public spectacle by screaming at his wife during the harvest dance. Keeping up appearances is critical to gnomes. Genuine feelings are private.

Goblins live lives of hustle and innovation. They’re deal-makers, deal-breakers and willing to go to any lengths, bear any hardship and strive without ceasing to avoid honest work. It’s a little paradoxical if you think about it.

Goblins tend to be nervous, tense and impatient. While they push themselves ruthlessly, like their elven ancestors they resent obligation and hierarchy. It’s every goblin for himself, a civilization of lone wolves, proud eagles and self-sufficient angry loners.
That’s the theory, anyhow. Goblins romanticize the self-made business entrepreneur, but the fact is you can’t get much done if it’s all bosses and no workers. (That, and dwarf labor is prohibitively expensive.) They cooperate on various efforts and endeavors, and they work together well if there’s an outside organization as competition. Being someone else’s employee is embarrassing, so goblins tend to make everyone involved a stakeholder or associate. The goblin who scrubs out the bilge on that river freighter gets a cut of the take when they deliver their load. Often there’s no salary at all, just a percentage. He’s a full member of the business consortium, no matter how bad he smells.

Orcs, on the other hand, value work for work’s sake. If a goblin found a tricky way to succeed at a hard task while a dwarf labored in vain, the orcs might not admire the dwarf, but they’d respect and understand him. The goblin would always be regarded as a cheater. On the other hand, orcs honor success almost as much as they honor effort, so that leavens some suspicion. But the fundamental orc formula is that success arises from the sweat of toil.

There’s a simplicity to orkish values. They’re for achievement, but even someone who fails is respectable if he put his back into the effort. (In orc games, a high scoring loser feels better about himself than someone who won with few points.) They disdain decoration and frippery. Things are as they are, and anyone who tries to dress that up is hiding something.

This leads to a cultural obsession with honesty. There are orcs who lie and deceive—indeed, in war they disinform wantonly—but in their personal and professional lives, a strict degree of truthfulness is expected. If you say you’re going to do something, you do it. Your word is your bond. If you fail, you don’t hide it or whitewash it or offer excuses. You take your lumps and try harder next time.

Sprites have a far more… plastic view of truth. They know how easy it is to deceive the eye, and memories are just sights made of thoughts. They’re exquisitely aware of how a listener might react to their words, and choose their statements carefully. As far as they’re concerned, everyone does this all the time, phrasing things one way to get a better reception, focussing on some facts selectively to present events in a kinder light. They just do it better and more willfully.

That’s not to say all sprites are liars (though most lie about inconsequential matters without even thinking about it), but they expect a certain amount of glad-handing and flattery to grease every social interaction. They expect, and express, what they want to be true, or what they hope their listener accepts as true, while understanding deep down that fundamental truth may not be knowable so there’s no point getting upset if you misunderstood something. Their urge to whitewash anything unpleasant fits very tidily with gnomish appreciation for appearances.

Sprites also have a reputation as being lazy workers, but the other races don’t hold it against them. They’re tiny. They can’t tote bales or heft a smith’s hammer. A sprite who toils feverishly at a farm accomplishes about as much in a day as a gnome who pokes along at a sedate pace. They’re not good at hard labor, so their culture doesn’t value it. There’s not much point.

What they are good at, and what they do value, is being informed. Sprites are fast travelers and instinctively avail themselves of aerial perspectives that others lack. Messengers, newsbearers and diplomats of Ardwin are often sprites and at the very least have some working for them. Similarly, in warfare they may not be able to strike hard, but they’re mobile, tricky, and fast. An army with a collection of sprite spies and saboteurs is going to be know where its enemy is going and what it’s doing. Their enemy, on the other hand, is left trying to set pickets against an enemy that can drop straight down out of the clouds.
Ardwin is not a highly advanced region. Master dwarven smiths forge steel, but it’s rare and ironmongery is the height of metal craft among the others. They distill applejack and similar liquors, they use spoked wheels and weaving looms, but basic chemistry and geometry and are matters for sages and mystics in Ardwin. Literacy is most common among the elves, gnomes and goblins, where almost half the adult population can read and write a bit. Reading effortlessly or fluently is a matter for the most talented ten percent of those races, while orcs are suspicious of the entire phenomenon. (“Trees are not words,” said the great orc priest Naamshak the Uplifted, when confronted with elvish paper scrolls.) The literate races make paper, though most is low quality. Goblins have a method of curing the skins of giant marsh frogs into something like vellum, producing a durable and nearly waterproof medium, but the process is lengthy and difficult.

Pottery is common for everyday utensils, with the goblins acknowledged as the region’s foremost craftsmen. Stonecutting is advanced among the dwarves, while the orcs have greater insights into actual architecture. The tallest structure in Ardwin is a huge orcish ziggurat called “Orcmount” and used as their central temple. Dwellers outside orcish lands rarely see Orcmount, and if they do, it’s because they’re about to be sacrificed.

Glassblowing is unknown in Arwdin, but countries upriver and across the sea practice it. This makes glass goods rare, expensive, and highly valued. Similarly, foreign lands are far more advanced when it comes to dyeing and setting colors, so vivid reds, bright yellows, and any purple whatsoever are alien fabrics to Ardwin.

While their crafts are fairly primitive, their arts are a bit more evolved. This is thanks in no small part to the elves. When one needn’t scratch for provender all day, music and sculpture and poetry can flourish. Naturally, since the elves were proudly displaying the fruits of their culture, the other races felt compelled to keep up,

---

**Goblin Burial Days**

Four times a year, goblins bury their dead in daylong rituals of regret and remembrance. They keep detailed records of who died, when, how, and where the bodies are buried.

This is possible because, unlike every other known animal and plant, a dead goblin remains unmolested by worms, insects and other agents of decay. Even vultures and hyenas look elsewhere for meals. Moreover, dead goblins don’t stink. Oh, they might emit a faint earthy odor like wet, freshly dug soil, but nothing like the reeks that rapidly fly forth from a murdered dwarf or decaying gnome. Thus, every goblin community has a laying-out house where the dead can recline in open-topped coffins, their flesh gently sagging away.

It should be noted in passing that elf corpses seem to rot with undue haste and, moreover, even the wounds on living elves send out a distinctive reek offensive to any non-orcish nose. (Orcs tend to find the aroma appetizing, though most who are raised outside an orc-hult are too well mannered to say so.) This has led some elves to associate foul smells with unnatural events. It is (they say) a crime against nature to injure an elf and therefore the scent indicates the rebellion of the world against a tragic loss. The goblins’ lack of deadly odor indicates (to these elves) that the natural state for a goblin is dead. As for orcs (and other races that befoul the air when slain) these philosophers generally claim that they also smell bad when alive. Therefore, living or dead, they never should have been in the first place.
leading to elaborate dwarf jewelry, sophisticated gnome fabrics, and beautifully decorated goblin vases. The orcs disdain the visual arts but are renowned singers and percussionists. Traditional orcs turn up their noses at the wooden instruments preferred by the elves, but, inevitably, catchy tunes penetrate even their enclaves. The orcish position has softened over the past twenty years or so, and now all but the stodgiest orcs admit that flutes and strings are acceptable for common music. They’d never dream of using such elf trifles for their hymns, however.

Short tales and epic poetry are the preferred forms of literature. With a largely illiterate populace, that’s what people can remember. Ballads of the Orc Wars are popular with both dwarves and orcs (though each has its own version of events, never to be reconciled). Brief tales, fit for a single setting, are most often humorous or romantic, and a common pool of love songs unites the entire nation. The oldest of these ballads is “Erwis and Ollhyim,” a story of star-crossed tragedy that, tellingly, never explains the races of maiden and swain.

**Dress**

Simple garments are the rule in Ardwin. It’s a hot and humid nation in the summer, making the short wrapped skirt or loincloth comfortable and practical for both genders. Women are also found wearing full dresses, or loose blouses (with or without sleeves). Men often go shirtless all summer, and having prominent nipples is considered a mark of great masculine beauty.

Come winter, Ardwinians reluctantly cover up in furs, leather or wool. Some goblin merchants have discovered cotton cloth in markets up the river and make much of wearing it on occasions when they seek to impress, but it’s a luxury. Typically, the winter garb is wool pants, a wool shirt and some sort of hooded cape.

Then there’s the matter of shoes. Most dwellers in Ardwin go without. Sprites don’t walk where they can fly, and elves believe you get a better grip climbing a tree with bare skin. Gnomes walk in the dirt because they love soil, and goblins are so often ankle deep (or deeper) in water or mud that shoes have little chance to survive. Orcs are just tough. The most commonly-shod race is the dwarves, who like their stiff boots to protect their feet from pinches and falling stones, not to mention the occasional dropped hammer. In the winter, the other races accept footwear as a necessity, but these are often just wooden soles attached by thongs over wrapped layers of wool or fur.

**Cuisine**

Elves eat nothing and like it.

Orcs eat only meat, often raw, which leaves them hunting through the mountains year-round. Nothing is too big for an orc hunting party to chase and nothing is small enough to ignore. (Orcs often catch mice and eat them live, coughing out pellets of matted fur and crushed bones a couple hours later, like owls.) While there are orc ranchers, shepherds and pig farmers, their agriculture is rarely as successful as their gnomish cousins. First off, orc soil is lousy. Secondly, without strong cultural tradition or orcish demand, they’re not as skilled at raising plants. Thirdly, some orcs seem to just scare animals, prompting them to flee in panic at the first whiff. This leaves the orcs importing food from the gnome plains to maintain a level of comfort, though they aren’t as full-on dependent as the goblins and dwarves.

Sprites farm a little, hunt a little, and forage in the forest quite a bit. Being tiny omnivores, a small sprite village can eat their fill of a stew made from enough meat to feed a single orc family. Everyone (except the elves) eats beef, mutton and pork. (Chicken is a foreign delicacy, though some gnomes along the seashore are experimenting with domesticating them.) Wheat and corn are staple grains, and eggplant, tomatoes and avocados are thickly farmed in the gnome plains.
There’s also a fast-growing tree called the urshwam which, if cut down, skinned of bark, boiled, skinned, pulped, dried, boiled again, strained and then crumbled, produces a hearty and filling flour that can last for years if you keep it dry. It’s a lot more work than wheat, though.

One major factor to consider is that Ardwin has no domesticated horses. They have oxen to pull plows, but they can’t get food to market as quickly as nations with such beasts of burden. This leaves them moving animals on the hoof, transporting vegetables that could spoil along waterways to get them to the fringes of the nation, and relying heavily on food that can be preserved for travel.

The Political Situation

Ardwin has no central government, no High King, no council of judges and no governing body with sweeping authority. The six racial enclaves are essentially independent nations with varying degrees of organization and cohesion. The uniting principle of “Ardwin” is a matter of language, tradition and shared history, not law or bureaucracy. Often, the history is as likely to drive the groups apart as it is to unite them. But at least they understand the insults hurled from the other side of the battle lines. The common pool of ideas also serves to encourage negotiation. Thus, while skirmishes are common, wars are rare. But tension is constant.

Dwarf Politics

The base unit of dwarven organization is the hult, which implies a mine and its surrounding residences. Hults are almost entirely subterranean, though there’s often a trade station aboveground for other races to use. A lord of a hult is considered the owner of the land and parent of the people, but dwarves have no patience whatsoever with a weak hult-lord. If he can’t be persuaded to step down for a stronger sibling or a more fit offspring, overthrow is likely. There’s often a pretense of peaceful transition, with the old lord departing for a luxurious, but mandatory, retirement of seclusion. When power is handed off more openly, retired lords are far more accessible and often serve as advisors or ambassadors.

The dwarves trade extensively with the gnomes and feel that the prices they’re charged for food (which, after all, can just pop out of the ground) are unfairly high. There are growing rumbles that it wouldn’t be all that hard to bore some tunnels under the fertile river valley farms of the gnomes, boil up one night and establish a protectorate. Only a few of the most radical hult-lords endorse this idea and, of course, they’re the ones farthest from the gnome lands, so their territory would be at the least risk.

One impediment to sweeping out and enslaving a swath of gnomes (other than the threat of gnomish reprisal by day, and the whole “that is evil and treacherous” idea) is steady, subterranean orc struggles. Both races dig deep, though ancestral dwarf tunnels are the deepest and, in fact, run under orc territory. This is where the trouble arises. As the orc population grows and they dig for more living space, they run into similar dwarven expansion. Competition for seams of gold and iron only serve to exacerbate the problem, leading to many brutal skirmishes in the darkness, with the losers ceding territory, setting up fortifications at their new frontier, and paying ransom for captives.
Elf Politics

To an elf, the struggles and rivalries between aeries are nobody’s business but the elf-lords. The political issues of the other races, however, are matters of intense concerns to the elves, who consider themselves the eldest and wisest of Ardwin’s peoples.

There are three great elvish bloodlines who span multiple aeries: The Frostneedle, Longstrider and Harper clans. They lead their holdings with familial cooperation, but their total numbers only account for half the elfin population. The other aeries are independent the only way elves know how to be independent: Fiercely.

Enamored of their own diplomatic skills and considering themselves Nature’s gift to the lesser peoples, elvish envoys are present at each of the other races’ major settlements. Interfering with dwarven, gnomish or even orcish events is considered the highest art, so the quickest way to gain renown and authority is by tailoring events among one of the other races to the benefit of your own aerie or family. (It’s an unexamined assumption that elf-guided events turn out better for all the gnomes or goblins or whoever than if they were left to their own clumsy devices.) The most common struggles between elf groups are therefore played out through proxies of other races. Investments of blood and treasure in these outside conflicts can drag elf groups into direct conflict within one another. Even worse, the non-elves involved may become angry enough to launch military or economic reprisals against their mentors. Such ingratitude!

Gnome Politics

Gnomes have no taste for deep hults or lofty aeries. Gnome life centers around the family farm, with a village or town at a crossroads connecting the homesteads and supporting a small number of non-farmers. A typical village has a talebearer (often a sprite of gnomish descent) who can be hired to carry messages, perhaps a gnome-and-animal doctor (orcs treated by appointment only), usually a general store and always a tavern.

Without a tavern, where would the local gnomes drink, dance, relate the amusing events of their daily lives, and flirt with each other’s (or even their own) spouses?

Most villages elect a hammel-terp yearly at a harvest festival. In villages that are little more than a merchant shop and a bar, the trader and the publican may trade the job back and forth genially. Or they may bitterly campaign with slander, scheme and shameless pandering. However it’s handled, the hammel-terp mediates disputes, negotiates with other villages, and takes a leadership role in any emergency.

Will the Real Lords and Ladies Please Stand Up?

Complicating matters for all Ardwin politics is the question of just exactly who the nobles are. The leaders of some families that span and govern several aeries or hults or villages clearly qualify. But other upstarts who amass great wealth in trade, or achieve great military success claim title as well, and unless they’re laughed out of their communities, they gradually earn the respect. As for families that were once lauded but which lose their respect, they’re worse off than common folks with no great heritage. They’re still called ‘lord’ or ‘lady,’ but always with a sneer or a smirk.

Leadership is often hereditary, but not only hereditary. Call yourself lord and destroy anyone who denies you a lord’s prerogatives, you’re a lord (though probably a hated one). A child of noble blood can lose his family’s protection if he humiliates them enough to earn disowning… or if he’s of a different race. No elf is going to accept a sprite or a goblin as an elf lord, no matter who one of his parents was. They can be accepted in elf community, but they can’t lead it.
Outside the authority of the hammel-terps are freeholders: Land-owners whose collective lands (usually adjoining and possessed by one huge and fecund country family) are large enough to privately support the services of a village. Freeholders are famously stubborn and independent, and it doesn’t help that a disproportionate number of them aren’t gnomes at all. But they are wealthy and successful, and they can do their drinking and messaging and curing from their own sprawling family ranch, so there isn’t much the neighbors can do, short of picking up torches and forming an angry mob.

Some settlements grow (usually through access to water trade and consequent goblin development) to the point where they have at least one of everything you might find in a village—indeed, two of some establishments (particularly pubs). Once there’s economic competition, the elected official who runs everything might actually have five to ten people who run about on ‘town business’ including a sheriff, a tax collector, and a others with ill-defined purview who just generally butt in. Once you have a staff of flunkies, you’re officially a mayor.

There are really only two gnomish cities (which is one more than anyone else has) and they’re a study in contrasts. Castle Blackflag is on the triple border between the goblins’ valley and the orcish hills, so it is Ardwin’s most heavily fortified piece of terrain outside the heart of a mountain. Ninety-nine years ago, it was the city of Tradeport, but as the goblins neared completion of a dam on the river, the council of Tradeport waffled while the farmers became more and more alarmed. Eventually a freeholder named Klogue rallied a gnomish army from the towns and villages to lay the dam waste.

Klogue could have pressed on into the swamps, but with the dam threat removed his greatest ire was for the decadent layabouts of Tradeport. Before his army could fall apart he drove them in one last campaign against the gnome city, permitting them to plunder its wealth in return for recognition as ‘Lord Klogue of the Black Flag.’

His family has spent the decades since then fortifying against a goblin invasion that never came. (One very large orc raid was handily flung back, to the great acclaim of the rest of gnome country. An elfin raid had better luck, but its goals were rather more manageable than “lay waste the city.” It’s described on page 98.) Blackflag is essentially a tyranny, with the arrogant and brooding Klogues marching troops through the streets, taxing everyone heavily, and invoking the orc, elf and goblin threat whenever they want to shut someone up.

The other city, Bountiful, is huge and sprawling. It lies in a river delta and commands an expansive dock for international sailing vessels. With rich soil, heavy population, river and ocean trade, and vast stretches of land between it and any goblin, orcish or elfin invasion (no horses, remember), it has prospered. The elected Council of Seven has one of its members elected every year, and while the competition for Council seats is fierce, it’s also fair-spirited. Bountiful is friendly, open, wealthy and tremendously cosmopolitan. If the gnomes had a capital city, it would be Bountiful. Indeed, since the racial breakdown is closer to a six-way tie than anywhere else (30% gnome, 10% elf, 15% sprite, 10% orc, 25% goblin and 10% dwarf) it would be the ideal candidate for the center of a true Ardwin nation. Except that it’s wide open to the sea and, while the goblin fleet there is sufficient to handle pirates, it would be helpless before any kind of concerted sea invasion.

Goblin Politics

Goblin politics are founded on five great ancestral goblin families. Those who can claim descent from the Bogsend, Tallow, Green, Marshway or Breakwine lines are entitled to family courtesy from any of similar lineage. Two-thirds of the goblins in the swamp valley have at least a tenuous connection to one of the great names, and they all agree that they’re superior to the rest whose non-goblin ancestors are (presumably) much too recent for comfort.
Those with multiple ancestors insist that their blood is more pure, and the most insufferable are those who are heavily inbred with (say) Tallows on each side going back three generations. These folks have been known to style themselves the “goblin lords,” much to the derision of other races and of goblins without such pretensions.

All five families are everywhere through goblin lands, and their constantly shifting alliances, rivalries, marriages of advantage and business entanglements are impenetrably complex. Even the smartest goblins can’t keep track of it all, even with careful waterproof relationship maps.

(A quick note about those marriages. A goblin who has claim to two names has to pick one. It could be that his mother is a Green and his father a Bogsend, or he could be a Tallow who married a Breakwine. However he comes to his claim, at some point he has to choose a side, and in public. That won’t necessarily prevent him from having good ties with his rejected kin, but there’s likely to be some resentment or, at the very least, disappointment.)

For all the goblin talk of family, it only goes so far. You can’t sponge off your family forever, and the goblins of quality are usually those rich enough to hire people for whatever diplomatic, military or cultural endeavors they support. Sure, saying you’re all in favor of building a wall to keep the orcs out is a step in support, but hiring masons is a much more concrete step. Heh.

Each of the five families has its connections to other races and cultures. The Tallows are the closest to, but most conflicted with the gnomes. They were the ones who tried to build that dam ninety-nine years ago, and they still hate Blackflag and all it stands for. But they’re also physically and culturally closest to the gnomes and do much of their trading with gnomes. Indeed, one branch of the Tallows has become so comfortable near Bountiful, running the gnome city’s navy, that even their cousins begin to suspect them of ‘going native.’ The Greens are more populous on the south side of the river and dominate the trade with the elves, while the northern Breakwines share similar favors with nearby dwarf lords. The Marshway and Bogsend families are less settled and somewhat smaller, but tend to be more daring. They’re the most established upriver traders with the western lands.

Orc Politics

When orcs are injured together in battle (or on a particularly nasty hunt) they press their wounds together to mingle the blood. Once you’ve shared battle blood with someone, you become scar-kin and your duty to him surpasses your obligations to parents, children or mate. (You also have a duty to those who are scar-kin to your scar-kin, but that’s less serious.)

This custom has several long-reaching effects on orc culture, not the least being that people only hunt or fight beside those they really like and/or really trust. Less obviously, these incidents can create entire networks of scar-kin. When you get a group of these together, it’s called a warclan. Warclans are led by those whose scars place them at the center, by virtue of having the most connections to others in the group. Typically, these are the toughest and most experienced orcs. But they’re also those whose choices get them and those around them scarred, so warclan tactics tend to be extremely gutsy.

Warclans large and small roam the orcish hills, hunting for the steady diet of meat that the hults underground require. Orc hults are the same idea as dwarf hults, but less decorated and without a single authority figure at the center. Instead, orc leadership tends to emerge based on who has provided the most meat, whose warclan is biggest and who has the most scar-kin willing to back him up.

(Many heart-wrenching orc ballads are written about romantic conflicts between or among scar-kin. If you’re wondering how you’re supposed to choose between two people in your warclan when
they have opposite interests, proper orc society would place you with the one you either have the closest tie or, if they’re both your direct scar-kin, the one with whom you’ve shared a larger number of scars. If that’s a tie, you’re just in the hot seat.)

While orc hults and their warclans raid one another as often as they raid dwarf tunnels, or charge down out of the hills to pillage gnomish farms, or rob goblin ferries, there is a separate and competing claim of authority: The church. Orcs worship personified nature, in all its red-clawed glory. Their faith is directed by priests who have each gone into the woods for a year on their own, pursuing a vision quest and getting in touch with the spirit of the wild. These priests agree that orcs have the closest tie to earth of any race and, as such, are destined to be the foundation on which all the others can build. Very few of the priests preach genocide (and they aren’t very popular, especially since some of those gnome lasses are good looking and you could do worse than a dwarf wife who can stand at your back and not crumple after one arrow). But they do suggest that the other races are out of touch with nature and that if they’re surprised by brute conflict jumping up and dragging them down, they shouldn’t be. Really, it’s a form of tough love.

**Sprite Politics**

If everything is a chess match of manipulation to sprites, doesn’t that mean everything is politics? And if everything is politics, doesn’t that mean that (really) nothing is? Sprites live in a village model like the gnomes, though their elections are usually only held after some kind of no-confidence vote (often carefully staged). Their population is smaller than any other group in Ardwin, so they lack cities and have few towns. Being more prone to forage or trade than farm, they’re decentralized along the border where forest meets plains. Most of their conflicts occur on the personal level, with hunting or gathering sites being struggled over verbally or sometimes with the clash of daggers.

When sprites get involved with the “grossnards” (as they call the taller races) it’s often in the form of meddling. Sprites are rarely in positions of official authority, when such things are even recognized in Ardwin. But many are trusted messengers, confidential investigators, discrete agents and treaty-bearing negotiators. Like the elves, they like to stick their oar in when and where they can. Unlike the elves, they don’t do it to aggrandize themselves but because it’s profitable and fun. So they try to make the people they help happy and grateful, instead of just making them useful. (Again, unlike the elves.)
Ardwin has faced many internal conflicts, each worthy of consideration. The battles of one side against another (or several in alliance) merit examination because they’re common. The fight Ardwin might up against an invader is a matter of conjecture because it hasn’t happened yet.

**Ardwin Vs. Ardwin**

Without horses, infantry dominates battle in Ardwin by necessity. There are missile troops, notably elfin archers and orcish bolateers, but lacking the cavalry charge you get phalanx tactics in the field, if the battle is big enough to merit the name.

**Dwarf Against Elf**

Though allies now, the elves and dwarves of ancient history engaged in fierce battles, despite having little (if any) conflict over resources. The old war began with dwarf mines extending under elfin lands. As dwarves came up by night to hunt game, the elves began pursuing them as trespassers. Invading the growing dwarf-hulta proved difficult, as the winding tunnels took away the elves’ advantages in mobility, range and perception. (Also, they were soon heavily trapped and fortified.)

The elves withdrew after their disastrous incursions and settled into a siege, which worked better. Elfin patience and perspicacity served well to isolate the hults from supplies. The underground roadways were able to supply some of the dwarves’ needs, but rations were thin. When the elves flooded one of the deep corridors, hunger forced the dwarves onto the offensive.

Tunneling up under the aeries of the Fastarrow clan, the dwarves invaded with heavy losses. Again, the close-fighting of the dwarves overmatched the elves, though in the treetops the elves were far better able to seek distance, fire, and move. But while the elves took far fewer casualties than the dwarves, their mobile combat style necessitated abandoning the aerie, which the much-bloodied dwarves destroyed. The Fastarrow were forced to plead for aid from other clans, and had the dwarves simply held the tree-town they’d seized, the pleas might well have been in vain. But with the burning of Fastarrow aerie (immortalized in elfin opera), the other clans bound together to intensify the hulta siege. The dwarves destroyed a second aerie before suing for peace, this time simply burning it from the ground up. The Frostneedle and Longstrider clans were unwilling to negotiate, being the farthest from the dwarven tunnels, but the Harpers came to terms. Without the Harpers’ numbers and proximity, the siege of the hults failed, so the Frostneedles and Longstriders eventually signed a peace treaty with a well-fed foe. In time the Harper alliance with the dwarves elevated them to the status of a major family, just as the other two’s leadership in the war elevated them. As for the Fastarrows, they were subsumed into the other three families, their power broken forever.

**Dwarf Against Gnome**

The most recent struggle between dwarves and gnomes was not a matter of land or money, but an issue of love and honor. Just thirty years ago, the hulta-lord Darholf fell in love with a gnome, the daughter of a prosperous farmer near the gnome town of Timble-Hammel. When she rejected his suit, he kidnapped her and dragged her back to Ghrumhult, his domain.

At first, the people of Timble-Hammel tried to convince other local hults to bring Darholf to his senses. Some flat-out refused to get involved. Others were willing to send ambassadors, but when diplomacy failed they offered no soldiers to the gnomes. When Ghrumhult refused to permit gnomish emissaries to see the girl and ensure her welfare, Timble-Hammel surrounded the hulta and besieged it. As with the elvish war, this was only partially effective, since the dwarves still had underground roads to other hults, but those hults in turn found more gnomes unwilling to trade with them. Their pressure on Ghrumhult
increased, but Darholf remained stubborn. Meanwhile, more and more gnomish towns sent soldiers to Timble-Hammel. The dwarves’ attempts to break the siege were roundly repulsed. Ultimately, the other regional hults agreed to let the gnomes use their tunnels to assault Ghrumhult, though they still would not lift arms against their fellow dwarves.

The siege tightened its grip and began the laborious process of attempting to break in through the hult’s main entrance. This drew most of the defenders upward, so when gnomes attacked from three directions along passages to other hults, they overwhelmed the rear guard and gutted the hult from the basement upwards. According to legend, when the gnomes were finished, the basements of Ghrumhult were ankle deep in blood.

The girl was rescued, pregnant with Darholf’s orcish child. The hults who’d permitted access were allowed to divide up Ghrumhult’s mines. Eventually, they made it the fallen hult a de-facto prison by exiling their criminals and troublemakers there. A main seam mine collapse five years after the division cemented Ghrumhult’s reputation a cursed place. As for Timble-Hammel, the dwarf war grew it into Timbletown. The gnomish villages in the region made it the headquarters of a standing military force, the Timble Regulars. Their formal uniform includes red shoes, to recall the victory over Ghrumhult.

---

Dwarf Against Orc

The Orc Wars are the longest, fiercest and perhaps deadliest conflicts Ardwin has known. The first known orcish settlement was set upon by dwarves who mined their way from beneath, expecting their dark-adapted eyes and tunnel-fighting skills to provide an easy victory.

They were wrong.

For the first time, the dwarves fought against a foe just as comfortable in the dark, and for the first time they weren’t the toughest ones in the fight. Though the orcs were outnumbered, their ferocity, reach advantage and appetite for dwarf-flesh drove back the initial assault. The defenders seamlessly counterattacked, harrowing the invaders all the way back to their home hult before sealing the passage.

The chastened attackers kept their defeat secret, worried that the perception of weakness would lead other hults to attack them. Instead, they simply fortified themselves against an orc counterattack that was three years in coming, but successfully fought off.

Had the dwarves continued to press their initial attack, they might have wiped out Redhill, now the sacred central hult of orcish territory. Instead, Redhill was able to strike out against several goblin villages, extorting animals and tools from them while the orcs rebuilt their strength and increased their numbers. The next dwarf-hult, they fought as invaders, boring into the mines and striking by surprise. The conflict stretched on for close to a decade, with the under-tunnels of Ardwin forming a spiderweb of traps, battles, choke points and surprise assaults.

Today, the orc territory sits atop dwarven highways, occasionally collapsing one or digging into another just to make sure the dwarves aren’t preparing another up-from-beneath incursion. No other race even comes close to dwarven and orcish skill at “under-war” (as it’s known), and their conflicts sometimes rage for months before those on the surface even learn there’s a war on.
Elf Against Gnome

The most violent conflict between elves and gnomes occurred at Castle Blackflag after Lady Jiihis of the Frostneedle elves was granted an audience with then-Lord Klogue and made to wait for five hours before being sent away with brusque apologies. “Perhaps tomorrow,” she was told.

She chose not to wait. Lord Kilogue woke that night with the black-clad Jiihis sitting at his bedside, toying with a smoke-darkened dagger and nattering vaguely about respect and dignity and setting appropriate priorities. Behind her, one elf was watching the window and another guarding the door.

While a sensible man might have listened or apologized, Klogue was made of sterner (or perhaps stupider) stuff. He howled for his guards and, after a tense hostage standoff, safe conduct was guaranteed for Jiihis in return for Klogue’s release. As soon as he was safe, of course, Klogue broke his word and threw her into prison.

The next day, an elfin envoy presented himself and asked where Lady Jiihis was. He was made to wait eight hours before being sent away. “Perhaps tomorrow.”

That night, eighty percent of the city’s elves packed up their goods and were gone by morning. Klogue and the Blackflag troops went on high alert and sealed the city, leaving the citizens wondering what the hell had happened. There were all kinds of conflicting stories, all agreeing that the elves had done something unforgivable.

Within a week, an elfin host had surrounded the city. When the city’s troops sallied out to engage them, the elves retreated at speed, wheeling around the gnomish phalanxes and feathering them with arrows before they could get within striking range. Like a cloud of mosquitoes, the elves were unable to seriously cripple the gnomes, but neither were the gnomes able to close and dispatch enough elves to make it worth the effort. It was a stalemate.

What wasn’t stalemated was the elvish blockade of road and river traffic to the city. Food was getting short and Blackflag’s tradition of arrogance and heavy-handedness paid out when exactly no one was eager to help them in their duress. Their walls were impregnable, but began to seem more like a prison than a fortress.

With starvation, the people of Blackflag became restive, and the usual brute repression wasn’t possible with the troops devoted to patrolling the walls. After two riots, the Klogues were essentially fighting two battles—one within their boundaries and one without.

When the civil disorder was at its greatest, the elves struck by night, attempting to break down the city gates. (Some claim the besiegers were alerted by spies within the city, but it’s possible they just saw the lights of the fires inside and decided it was a good time.) With elves battering the gates and rioters attacking the Klogue granary, there simply weren’t enough troops to defend the palace as well. A strike force of forty elves who had concealed themselves in the city since before the siege launched themselves at the Klogue Lord’s residence, fought their way inside and liberated Jiihis and her one surviving bodyguard. After half their number were lost in close combat attempting to reach Klogue himself, they retreated, dispersed into the city, and managed to redirect a rioting mob against the inside of the city gates. Pinned between rioters and elves, the gate guards abandoned their posts and Lady Jiihis escaped. The elves immediately withdrew. The crackdown on the rioters was brutal and intense.

Since that day, there has been a small but persistent underground movement in Blackflag, preaching revolution and plotting against the Klogues. They call themselves the Redflags and they are biding their time.
Elf Against Goblin

Goblins and elves struggle against one another as a matter of course, and should an elf and a goblin meet alone on a road it’s most likely that they warily speak and pass on alert. But it could as easily come to blows and blood without a word spoken.

It wasn’t always thus. Elves saw the goblins as their children, metaphorically as well as lineally, and shared many of their craft secrets and philosophies with them. But when as the goblin population rose, they eventually ran out of low-lying riverbed territory and needed to expand. Their attempt to dam the river ended disastrously with the War of Gnomish Aggression, and an alliance with orcs to seize dwarven hults ended badly as well. The last neighbor to feel the jab of goblin expansion was the elves, only ten years ago.

A goblin-lord named Uldurd the Canny had taken generations of his family’s river-trade profits and commissioned a dwarf-wrought crown of unsurpassed glory. But rather than crown himself, he invited the local elf-lords to behold it. Immediately, each was struck with the desire to possess it, and Uldurd most craftily played them against one another until the offers began to approach his liking. Then he invited the snared elf-lords to gamble in a great tournament of chance. He would stake the crown and they would stake parts of their land. Winner take all.

The children of Uldurd insist that he won fair and square, while the Eyereach elf family claims to still possess the loaded dice with which he cheated. However it happened, Uldurd claimed the lands and the elves refused to go peacefully, insisting that he instead surrender the crown to cleanse the stain of his treachery.

Uldurd sold the crown to a different dwarf-hult in return for arms and armor with which to equip his people. (The speed with which the goblin-sized gear was delivered suggests that he had this in mind all along, and neither goblin nor elf takes issue with that idea.) Clad in dwarf-iron, the goblins advanced into the forest, matching their silent steps and numbers against the elves’ keen eyes and deadly longbows. It was a bitter and bloody struggle of ambush and counterstrike, but the goblins began felling trees to build fortifications deeper and deeper into the woods. Their final assault against Eyereach aerie wound up costing two goblin lives for every slain elf, but at the day’s end the goblins were willing to keep pressing on while the elves fled.

Uldurd’s family holds the aerie to this day, though many of its higher dwellings remain empty and are drooping with neglect.

Unhappy with the fall of Eyereach aerie, the other elf clans were unwilling to put their own homes at similar risk and, when Uldurd sued for peace (offering the return of many captives) they accepted on behalf of the elves as a people. The Eyereaches were the only to dissent and to this day they speak naught but ill of goblins.

Goblin Against Dwarf

The war between the goblins and dwarves began with confusion and ended in tragedy. Many years ago, an event breached the soil between a riverbed and a road between two dwarf-hults. The dwarves claim the goblins dug down in order to flood them and invade. The goblins claim the dwarves dug up to drain goblin swampland and simply underestimated the volume of water they’d get. A few conciliatory voices on both sides suggest it may have been an entirely natural event, but it’s not a popular theory.

However it happened, many goblins took advantage of the newly-submerged habitat to move in. As the dwarves began draining the tunnel, they also started to evict the goblins. The goblins resisted and soon the formal militaries of both races were involved, with leaders on each side claiming insult and injury.
The battle turned stalemate until the goblins made common cause with an orc-hult to attack the southernmost of the two dwarf-hults from above while they besieged it from below. The defense was brutal, as invasions of hults oft are. Every trapped inch was fought for, and the dwarves were fortified above and below. They held off the goblins and orcs at great cost, until other dwarf-hults could send reinforcements.

The orcs withdrew in disgust, insisting that the goblins had tried to use them as blade-fodder while they made a weak attack underneath. The goblins accused the orcs of the same thing, and it’s possibly only the presence of hostile dwarves between them that kept the orcs and goblins from opening fronts with one another. But ultimately, dwarven unity was strong enough to force a peace settlement (with damages and indemnities) against the goblins who invaded. In order to achieve this, the dwarves had to set other goblin settlements against the ‘invaders’ and this would prove to be economically costly for generations, but the goblins who had moved underground were disowned and, finding themselves facing a much larger combined force, they withdrew. This was scant comfort to the devastated southern hult, which was itself conquered by another dwarven settlement only six years later.

**Goblin Against Orc**

Without extensive borders, there are few opportunities for goblins to clash with orcs, but that doesn’t stop them. Orc hults tunnel towards goblin river-towns like the reaching roots of marsh trees and, while they can’t bring out enough forces to occupy or invade, they can certainly spew out war bands to rob, pillage and threaten. The few times the hults have made serious attempts to grab and hold land, the goblins have united in defense and, a few times, turn the tables by flooding the orc tunnels. So the status quo is constant, low-grade banditry with the goblins occasionally assembling a large police force. The orcs, of course, lay low until the squad gets disbanded, then gradually they start it all over again.

**Goblin Against Gnome**

The most important gnome/goblin conflict is undoubtedly the War of Gnomish Aggression (what the gnomes call “Blackflag’s War”). The gnomes of a great trade city politely asked the goblins to stop building a dam, as it would have a dire effect on farms reaching all the way to the sea. The goblins politely ignored them and kept building until a gnome farmer named Klogue raised a mob, struck without warning, tore down the dam and (for good measure) took over the city that had incensed the warriors with its dithering. That city is now known as Castle Blackflag and is still ruled by Klogue’s children.

**Goblin Against Sprite**

The only notable conflict between sprites and goblins was so harrowing for both that they’ve stayed peaceful ever since. It took place almost a hundred and fifty years ago during an unusual period of high sprite population. This coincided with the ascension of a goblin-raised sprite who won some battles against orc bandits and earned the nickname “Conqueror of the Lowlands.” As the traditional sprite communities suffered from growing pains, the Conqueror took a tour of their lands on the forest’s edge and encouraged the sprites there to abandon their ‘failed traditions’ and emigrate to goblin territory. His natural charisma and true belief led to a great movement of young sprites towards goblin territory, which was not nearly as welcoming as the Conqueror had expected. The sprites found themselves paid less, rejected as empty-headed adornments, often leered at and forced into undesirable treetop dwellings where the mosquitoes ate them alive, while the goblins conducted the most serious and profitable business underwater, where sprite entrepreneurs were shut out.

Many sprites went home, disillusioned, where they were chided and mocked for deserting their traditions. Meanwhile, the shrinking sprite population in goblin territory felt itself increasingly endangered and oppressed. It all
came to a head one night after a goblin lad assaulted a sprite maid and then fled underwater, with the goblins refusing to even look for him. Or at least that’s the sprites’ story. The goblins today cuttingly point out that after the dust settled, no one could come forward with either the cruel boy or the disgraced girl. But whether it was true or false, the story was strong. Before midnight a mob of sprites had formed and by one in the morning, some spots along the river were bright as day with sprite mobs rioting and attacking goblins’ aboveground homes and businesses.

The goblin reprisals were swift, brutal and indiscriminate. The sprites were already concentrated into treetop ghettos. It was a simple matter to set them alight. More complicated was the question of keeping the sprites in them. How do you imprison a flying creature atop a tree?

The answer is, you don’t, and the sprites who fled were back from sprite country within the month, leading an enraged army of brothers and cousins and other kinfolk. The goblin forces were led by none other than the Conquerer of the Lowlands, who considered his onetime followers to be traitors who’d disgraced themselves and proven they were unwilling to be part of modern goblin civilization.

The battles were ill-disciplined skirmishes and lasted until the elves, dwarves and gnomes stepped in to separate the combatants. The orcs stayed out of it and (consequently) got to spend a year and a half conserving their strength. The interlopers didn’t come under the sort of withering assault the goblins and sprites reserved for each other, but there were casualties. Those led to trade embargoes, and that was what brought the war to a slow, smoldering end. The sprites simply could not feed themselves without gnome trade, and the goblins’ culture of avarice made it painful to be cut off from dwarven and elfin crafts.

The one concession the sprites wouldn’t budge on was their insistence that the Conquerer be given over to them. They needed a scapegoat and the goblins were willing to hand over someone winged. He was executed by beheading, but not before giving such a stirring speech to the thousands gathered to watch that sprite culture has not employed capital punishment since.

Gnome Against Orc

Gnomes aren’t well favored in a conflict with the flint-hearted orcs. Their wealth lies arises from their crops, and you can’t farm from inside a fortress. Orcish raiders are just a fact of life. Some gnomes prepare hiding holes and flee to them when the warning tocsin rings. Others arm themselves and swear that the orcs will get their sheep when they pry them from the shepherd’s cold hands.

If you hide from orcs, they probably don’t search you out. (Unlikely, but it happens.) They just take all your livestock and any durable goods that strike their fancy. They usually don’t disturb crops. Why would they? To them, grains and vegetables are what food eats. If they starve the gnomes, the gnomes won’t raise pigs for orcs to steal.

Fighting prairie pirates is a gamble, but a fair number of farmers are willing to take a few risks to save their animals. The outcome depends largely on the disposition of the orcs. Some are thieves who just happen to be violent. Others are violent and just happen to be thieves.

The orcs motivated mostly by greed or hunger (the thieves) aren’t looking for a challenge, they’re looking for a pig. Stiff resistance may earn their respect or, at the least, convince them that your farm is more trouble than it’s worth. Either way, you’ve probably bought yourself a few years without orcish thuggery.

On the other hand, some war bands turn to banditry out of desperation more than laziness and greed. If there isn’t a conflict going on between the hults, a band of scar-kin may raid farms just for something to do, or because the hunting in the mountains is really thin that year.
Fighting a group like that is far more likely to end in massacre, one way or the other. Orc bands that kill entire families get labelled ‘razers’ and are a problem of a different order than your typical bandits who steal stuff and give you a gruff beating. Wealthy freeholders and mayors with razers in the area have no trouble finding money and volunteers for a policing expedition.

For all the banditry, there aren’t many castles or forts along the orc/gnome border. For a while they were, but they really just served as magnets for aggressive orc hults. When they learned that there were concentrations of gnomes behind stone walls, and all the hult had to do to claim a large section of land was seize the castle, a few put it into practice. They technically enslaved the gnomes around them and it wasn’t the best of times to be a gnomes in what came to be called the Orc Fiefs, but as long as the gnomes kept them in fresh meat, the orc conquerers had little interest in running things. Within a few generations, the orcs invaders had so seamlessly intermarried that there were no blood-orcs left in charge.

(Remember, when an orc and a gnome have a baby, it’s born gnomish.) A few generations more and people were wondering why they’d ever built the castles in the first place. Today, they’re ruins.

**Gnome Against Sprite**

The decorous gnomes rarely come to blows with the charming sprites, but that’s not to say there isn’t friction. Sprites have as many thieves, crooks and ne’erdowells as any other race (well… maybe not as many as the goblins) and if you’re a flying thief you probably want to leverage your advantage by stealing from ground-bound targets. So many gnomes within sight distance of the forest’s edge entertain the prejudice that sprites are cunning, sticky-fingered little swindlers.

Sometimes, however, the sprites go to far. If too many get the idea that they can burgle the local gnomes without repercussions, the gnomes rouse themselves to demand policing by the sprites authorities. If the sprites refuse to police their own, that’s when you get a gnomish mob marching into a sprite town with pitchforks and axes and mauls.

Sprites aren’t built for siege, they’re far better suited to guerrilla fighting, so a gnome mob can usually wreck a sprite village in an afternoon if they’re angry enough and had the foresight to bring plenty of liquor. These undisciplined riots rarely do deep and permanent damage, but they’re bad enough. It takes a month or two of carpentry and cleaning before the town’s good as new, and after that there usually isn’t a problem with spritely thievery.

What might happen is a problem with spritely sneak attacks. That gets you gnomes afraid to go in the woods or to travel alone after dark, and if the wrong people get hurt (beloved elders, children, people who were uninvolved with the riot) you get more torch-wielding crowds. Sometimes, especially when summer’s hot, this cycle can go on for years until the sprites knuckle under (or leave), or the gnomes get tired, or a final scapegoat can be found to satisfy both sides.

**Orc Against Elf**

There is exactly one orcish settlement in the forest, and its name is Treehult. Years ago, the orcs briefly took control of the deepest dwarven tunnels, the ones that pass under the river. From this position, the orcs seized a dwarven trading post from beneath, a post a few miles into the woods.

The elves were dismayed, since the orcs had disrupted their trade with the dwarves, and they attempted to drive the orcs out. That was how the elves learned a valuable lesson about why you don’t follow the orc down the hole.

Rather than repeat a failed tactic, they set up a siege and attempted to keep the captured outpost contained. That worked up to a point, but the orcs feverishly moved food, material and personnel into the captured tunnels, frantically expanding...
them as a stronghold to anchor their hold on the deepest tunnel. But when the dwarves retook the under-road, the orcs were stuck. They had an underground lair and a lot of seasoned warriors, but their supplies were getting low.

There are few things less pleasant than a hungry orc, and one of them is a whole group of armed, hungry orcs. Even less pleasant than that is the experience of being a hungry orc in the middle of an army of hungry orcs. Rather than passively die (like gnomes) or turn on one another (like elves) they lashed out. Since the dwarves had neglected to tell the elves about retaking the deep tunnel (and in their defense, it wouldn’t have been easy since their trading post was occupied), the elves weren’t expecting a sudden and massive orcish outbreak.

Fighting entrenched elves in familiar woods is about as much fun as going into an orc’s hole when he doesn’t want you there, so the orcs took heavy casualties. But having the tunnels at their back kept the orcs from getting surrounded and eliminated. Ultimately, like other races who fight elves in the woods, they had to cut down the woods.

They spread out from the tunnels gradually, and many elfish counterattacks forced them to flee, but the fact is it only takes an hour to fell a tree and it takes decades to grow one. The more clear ground they had, the more they could build without elvish harassment. But it only went so far, because their population was ultimately quite small. The elves, in time, just gave up. There was never a formal treaty, but some goblins living in the shadows of the local aeries started trading with the orcs and the situation settled into stability, if not true peace or real acceptance.

**Orc Against Sprite**

The only real ‘war’ between orcs and sprites took place over a hundred years ago and the outcome surprised everybody, with the possible exception of Gerril Glitterwing, the sprite who led the attack. Gerril Glitterwing is a culture hero to the sprites of today, celebrated in story and song, even though they acknowledge that he was a criminal and nobody you wanted to stand beside.

Gerril Glitterwing was exceptionally personable, even for a sprite, and what started as a band of sprite bandits soon attracted some disaffected elves and gnomes as well. But past a certain point, banditry has diminishing returns and Gerril found himself having to steal more, with greater frequency, just to keep his followers’ bellies full.

That was when Gerril the bandit decided to become Gerril the crusader. The current opinion is that he made up his religion whole cloth and that his followers swallowed it from force of habit. Others think he was sincere—just crazy. Only a few followers of Gerril the Prophet still walk the lands of Ardwin today, and they’re either feared or jeered, depending on their behavior.

But in his day Gerril announced a vision of a promised land far away to the northeast, and that it would be a grand new day for the people who walked with him to found a new way of life.

Gerril’s trek through gnome territory is worthy of a couple epic ballads all on its own. It’s possible that the people were entranced by his religious rhetoric and offered his people food and shelter out of glassy-eyed belief. It’s also possible that as he traveled, Gerril pointed out to assorted gnomes what a good idea it would be to have this armed gang of zealots in orc domains instead of gnome lands, but ooh, travel’s expensive and it would be a shame if they had to give up the quest and just settle down wherever the money ran out…

Most likely, the reactions were mixed, but the outcome was that Gerril arrived in orc territory with a large, undisciplined and fanatical mixed-race force. The hults hunkered down in their stone wells and waited. It wasn’t a long wait.

In their battles against dwarves and gnomes, the orcs had learned some valuable lessons about defensive traps and the Glitterwing Army faced
masses of pit traps, crush-blocks and hidden blades. But almost all these traps relied on tripwires or pressure plates, and against a light foe that normally flies, they were less successful. The sprites’ maneuverability and small size offset the orcs’ home-turf advantage, along with their habit of sending in small groups of assassins, scouts and saboteurs through forgotten air vents.

Thus Gerril Glitterwing conquered the small orkish settlement of Blackhult. The orcs struck back through the under-roads that tied Blackhult (now renamed Glitterhult) to different orc settlements, but soon those passageways were thoroughly blocked and the Glitterwing church lived half in the hult’s tunnels and half on the surface, busily preparing the soil for tilling while Gerril’s elves started hunting the land bare to feed the church until the first harvest.

The other hults weren’t having it, but their first attack on Glitterhult was foreseen and everything of value was withdrawn into the stones before they arrived. That was fine with the invaders. They piled everything they could find on Glitterhult’s main exit while they awaited the arrival of a group of specialists: Gnomish farmers.

“We have this land for perhaps a month,” the orcs told their hirelings. “Ruin it.”

Well-paid (and none too fond of Gerril) the gnomes meticulously planted the hardiest, most noxious weeds they knew and released carefully-stored specimens of wicked pests as well. By the time Glitterhult’s residents had dug themselves free, they were running low on supplies and had little choice but counter-attack. Their first scouts, however, found the orc invaders decamping.

Glitterhult’s neighbors took advantage of its next few years of hunger and deprivation to build forts along its outskirts. They made some attempts to attack, but an outside enemy only made Gerril’s cult more dedicated. When they did nothing but wait, Glitterhult faltered on its own flaws. In time, Gerril sued for peace, paid a restitution-price to the survivors of Blackhult and began trading (at ruinous rates) with the same neighbors who had spoiled his fields. Gerril the prophet died without heir before the fields could finally overcome the gnomes’ abuse, and without him the cult dissolved. Within a generation, Glitterhult was mostly orkish again, and within three its name was changed back to Blackhult.

**Sprite Against Dwarf**

There has never been a major conflict between organized groups of sprites and dwarves.

**Sprite Against Elf**

The border war between the elves and the sprites took place fifty years ago, and the two sides are closer than ever now. Throughout the conflict, the majorities on both sides clamored for peace, and once enough fighters got tired or died, their views prevailed. But although there was a formal peace (a treaty signed in a massive ceremony with both sides exchanging lavish gifts, embracing, weeping in grief and gratitude) the border war had no particular start.

Growing sprite populations pushed deeper into the forest, clearing land for villages, felling trees for fuel and hunting. The Cloudfall clan, at that time an equal to the Harpers or Longstriders, took offense and, rather than register a formal complaint, simply started snatching up hunters and imprisoning them.

The sprites, however, proved harder to capture and hold than expected. Once the stories of elfin kidnapping reached the sprite community, it spread and grew with the speed of spritely gossip. Soon the stories were outrageous, describing elfin sex crimes, black magic, and murderous fertility rites. Most sprites didn’t believe, but those who did began harassing the elves in the forest.

Sprites living in the shadows of the aerie knew the tales were grossly overstated, and elves who had social or commercial ties to the sprite towns continued to receive a polite welcome, but in the
trees the rules were completely different. It was never more than a small group from each population, but there were angry elves and malicious sprites combing the forest looking to murder one another. It didn’t take many clashes before any elf and every sprite began to worry in the woods. They traveled in armed groups where they’d comfortably walked or flown alone. With armed and suspicious knots of people wandering around a complex terrain, violent misunderstandings were inevitable, and that only fed the cycle of suspicion and fear.

The simmering guerilla warfare infected the groves like a rash, but nothing came to a head until a sprite born into elfin society discovered the Cloudfall prisoners, solely through happenstance. She took her knowledge to her fellow elves, and when Longstriders visiting the area (to meddle in the conflict) learned of it, they demanded the release of the prisoners. With the kidnappings substantiated, many sprites who’d disbelieved took up arms and took up formation against Cloudfall aerie. Their attack was brief, as the news had shocked the elves as well and many were unwilling to stand and be counted as defenders of the Cloudfalls.

The sprite conquerers demanded that a Cloudfall lord be delivered into the durance for each sprite taken, but rather than submit to the indignity of captivity, the Cloudfalls surrendered to the Longstriders instead, with the understanding that they would be executed for their crimes.

Ardwin Vs. The Invader

How would Ardwin respond to an attack by foreign forces? Would the races hang together, or hang separately?

In all likelihood, it would depend a great deal on who was getting assaulted. If it was the dwarves, the elves might come to their aid in time, but the dwarves might be too proud to ask until circumstances were desperate. If the orcs were beset, the other groups would be loath to interfere, but might make good use of the time it would take a foe to break through the orcs’ hills to fortify the plains.

An attack on the elves’ wood would be a different matter. While elves are proud and individualistic, a massed assault would be something new and they would certainly enlist the aid of the sprites at least. Once the sprites were involved, it would only be a matter of time before the other people of Ardwin knew. The dwarves would step up, if for no other reason than to have something to lord over the elves. (Also out of friendship.) The goblins would aid the elves as well, astutely calculating the odds that their territory would be the next. The gnomes might not immediately charge for the front, but if they were certain the threat was serious their support in the form of food and supplies might be worth more in the long run than their fighters. Especially if some of those supplies freed up cash to hire the orcs as mercenaries.

Getting the orcs on board would be the big challenge, but were it accomplished it would be a double victory. It would not only add stone-hearted carnivores to the front lines, it would free up the elves and goblins who would otherwise be posted as a rear guard to ensure against the orcs attacking. That said, it would take tremendous incentives for a majority of orc hults to march to war on behalf of the elves.

The same cannot be said, however, about an attack on the gnomish plains. Any attack on the gnomes would immediately bring sprites, goblins, dwarves and orcs charging to the defense because that’s where the food comes from. The elves would come along simply because they wouldn’t be able to tolerate any important event occurring outside their influence.

Against a traditional human force, Ardwin would be a tricky conundrum. The absence of cavalry is a clear weakness, one that the speedy travel of elves and sprites only partially offsets. But much of the Ardwin population is comfortable in heavy forest, underground, or underwater—all
battlefields where horses are, at best, less useful and at worst are worse than useless.

Magic, too, would be an area where Ardwin might find itself overmatched. Their racial enchantments include some with military application, but it’s scattershot and difficult to plan for. Dwarven and elfin weapons might go a long way towards evening the odds, but the fact is, no one in Ardwin is casting fireballs or shaking the earth.

The bulk field soldiers of Ardwin would be pretty high quality, however. Honed by fighting one another and blessed with abilities outside human norms, their stock infantry would be versatile and hardy. As for elite units, the people of Ardwin have always valued self-sufficiency, even the communal dwarf-hults and flighty sprite towns. Ardwin would have no lack of heroes.

In the end, terrain might decide the issue, for good or ill. The gnome plains are a dream for a cavalry-heavy force—wide open places where speedy horses can outmaneuver infantry. But once one reaches the forests or, especially, the mountains, Ardwin gets much, much tougher. Unless they’re attacked by another subterranean race, the tactics of invading a hult may be something their enemies have to make up as they go along, and fighting underground is not a skill you want to improvise. The orcs and dwarves don’t have to.
Ardwinian Character Concepts

…sprite-raised orc, returned from the hults to find his childhood home in ruins…

…former goblin courtesan entering a second career in blackmail…

…dashing gnomish bandit of the underways…

…orc-raised elf sent to the aeries as an ambassador…

…dwarf noble cheated of his position in the hult…

Ardwinian Company Concepts

…experimental community fusing hult and gnome village…

…elves setting out to explore the ocean, unhindered by the need for food stores.…

…itinerant goblin trade fair…

…orcish warband plotting revenge on a prominent dwarf-hult…

…Redflag splinter-sect led by the reincarnation of Gerril Glitterwing…

Ardwinian Plot Complications

…a new intoxicant is turning normally staid gnome farmers into raving addicts. Its active ingredient? Sprite blood…

…goblin spies swear that a mighty army is gathering to the north. They plan to invade Ardwin and one of the native cultures is in league with them…

…a crop blight strikes the gnomes and ripples outward in waves of panic…

…something ancient and hungry awakens in the forest, destroying dozens of aeries and putting their inhabitants to flight…

…strange relics from unknown beings are found on the mountaintops. Sages say they were called ‘men’…
The Races of Ardwin

For all their commonalities—language, culture and, not least, sexual entanglements—the races of Ardwin live apart, pursue different goals and see themselves as very distinct. The undeniable physical differences between them serve only to reinforce this separation. But for all that, it's far more common to meet someone with friends of all race than it is to meet an Ardwinian so bigoted he has no friends outside his own group.

The Dwarves

The typical dwarf is about four and a half feet tall, with six inches more or less being common enough to avoid comment. Their skin tends to be smooth, solid and cool to the touch, ranging in tone from dull brown to a buttery tan. They are blocky, solid, and heavy-boned. A common dwarf weighs between 120 and 160 pounds. Their hair is usually blonde and wavy, turning silver or iron-gray starting in their twenties. Those who have red hair or darker often start turning gray in their teens. Male dwarves have beards. Females who develop facial hair avail themselves of splendid dwarven razors for a close shave.

The most common dwarf occupations are miner, smith, or a merchant overseeing trade in objects made by smiths from the miners' ore. There are few professional functionaries in dwarven society, so even the hult-lord can most often be found evaluating a seam or demonstrating how to get an even even airflow for a forge.

Outside the molten core of dwarvish society one finds service providers common to all societies—dressmakers, doctors, dog breeders and so on. Among those specialized professions one finds professional warriors. While every adult dwarf is expected to be a competent hand with an axe or a war-pick, this is often because the hult’s masters-at-arms have trained them and shown them the finer points of fighting in armor.

Racial Characteristics

Dwarves are tough. Every dwarf character gets the Leather Hard Advantage (an extra wound box at each location) for free.

Dwarves are dark-adapted. When they’re in dim light or even complete darkness, they can still roll Scrutinize, Sight or Direction without penalty or Difficulty.

On the downside, however, Dwarves are light-sensitive. In full daylight, they take a -2d penalty to Scrutinize, Sight and Direction. Moreover, in sunshine they can’t aim at individuals out beyond sixty feet with hand-held missile weapons. (They are not penalized for aiming at a distant crowd with a longbow or aiming a catapult. They’re not blind.)

Like every race, the dwarves possess secrets that are theirs alone, either due to cultural snobbery or a plain inability for other races to perform the tasks.

Metal Heart

Only those who are racially dwarves can learn the magical secrets of Metal Heart, and not all of them. Any race can learn to forge iron (well... maybe not sprites) but only the dwarves can reach out to it on a spiritual level, putting something of their souls into the tools they’ve made. Or reaching out to influence a tool someone else has made, for that matter.
Metal Heart is an Esoteric Discipline, but instead of limited to a single Skill, it is bound instead to the dwarven race itself.

**Weapon Adoration** (1 point): In addition to the normal toil with a whetstone, this is a method of sharpening a blade that seems to give the weapon a mind of its own. The next time a success is rolled when striking with the adored weapon, it gains a +1 Width bonus. Performing the Weapon Adoration takes about twenty minutes and only works on swords, knives and axes—anything that cuts or chops. Weapons that pierce or bludgeon don’t benefit from it.

**The Covetous Twist** (2 points): This is one key to the dwarven dominance of the jewelry market. When a goldsmith who knows the Covetous Twist incorporates it into a piece of worked gold, the item becomes preternaturally compelling. (In game terms, the maker has to roll a success on a smithing set to create it.) When selling an item made with Covetous Twist, or offering it for trade, it adds a +MD to one’s Haggle pool.

**Love Iron Without Fear** (3 points): The dwarven passion for metal begins to get reciprocated at this point. When struck by any weapon made of metal, the character who knows this discipline takes 1SK less damage automatically.

**Fulfillment of Form** (4 points): If a character has a quantity of unworked mineral wealth, he can take a number of days equal to its Wealth rating and make a smithing roll of some type to begin forging it into items of value. (Finishing work can be done by less accomplished smiths and apprentices.) If his smithing roll is a success, the finished goods are worth 1 Wealth more than the raw metal.

This can also be applied to a Company. Spend a month applying Fulfillment of Form on Treasure that’s based largely on raw ore to end that month with a permanent +1 Treasure increase.

**Master Forge** (5 points): Working off and on for about a month, the character can (with a successful blacksmithing roll) create a masterpiece weapon exquisitely balanced and tailor-made for one person. If the designated owner is using it, the weapon gives a +2d bonus to all attacks, or offsets two dice of penalties. If anyone else wields it, the bonus drops to +1d. In dwarf culture, if a weapon is recognized as a masterpiece by two smiths of other hults, it is formally named and put on a registry of dwarven cultural treasures. Currently the list numbers 85, and a good half of them have been lost or buried with their rightful possessors.

**The Dwarven Way**

This esoteric path is available to anyone culturally dwarfish. That is, an orc can learn it, but only if he’s lived among dwarves as a dwarf for at least ten years. People like this—gnomes or elves who live as dwarves and are dwarven in all but biology—are known as kurkas. Depending on subtleties of pronunciation and emphasis, this word can be a mark of respect or a deadly insult.

**Tend Your Tools** (1 point): Dwarves know how metal bends, how it breaks and how it can be repaired. Sharpening a knife isn’t a chore to someone who tends his tools; it’s a pleasure.

When a character has this discipline, any metal tool owned for more than a week is in excellent condition. When making any sort of Expert: Craftsman roll for a tool-focussed action, he can add a +1d bonus or ignore a single die’s worth of penalties. If he owns a dwarf-forged weapon that relies on cutting or slicing, its attacks do an extra point of Shock damage, thanks to excruciating keenness.

**Tunnel Stuffing** (2 points): When a hult is under attack, everyone who can lift a hammer is expected to partake in the defense. It’s part of what makes hult invasion so bloody. Another factor is the dwarvish tactic of crowding their tunnels, dousing torches, and fighting in tightly coordinated groups.
As long as a character with Tunnel Stuffing has a dwarf or a wall to either side, he can put a hit location of his choice under cover. For the purposes of this technique, ‘dwarf’ means either a biological or cultural dwarf.

Our Foes Bury Themselves (3 points): If someone with this technique sets strategy for an underground hult, the hult Company does not tire out its Territory with defense rolls. This requires no roll, but needs a month at least to set traps, plan contingencies and practice holding choke points.

Hult Industry (4 points): Dwarves are at their best when times are at their worst. If a leader makes an impassioned plea to an Company where Dwarves are at least a 60% majority, the people buckle down. This does not require a roll, but only works if the Company initiates no actions for a month. (That is, it can make rolls in response to other companies’ actions, but can’t try anything on its own.) If it does so, the Company permanently gains a point of Treasure at month’s end.

Gruff Speech of the Hult Lords (5 points): Dwarven lords aren’t known for eloquence, but their followers usually hold them in such high regard that they perceive honesty and virtue in their leaders’ words, even if they hold only stammers and vagueness. If you know this technique and fail a roll to give your followers a Morale bonus with an Inspire roll, they still get the Morale bonus for the first round of a combat. (Stammers only go so far.)

Racial Characteristics

Inedia. Elves do not require food to live (which means they’re also spared toileting, another factor they lord over the others when they can do so subtly).

Elves are beautiful. Every elf gets the 1-point Beauty advantage for free, and can buy it higher if desired. Elves rarely start pay with the Grotesque flaw, and should they acquire it in the course of their adventures, it’s effectively a sentence of exile. They aren’t forced out of aeries, but other elves become distinctly unfriendly. Judicial disfigurement is the strictest punishment elves practice short of death.

Long Stride. Elves have a base combat movement rate of twenty feet per round instead of fifteen.

Elves are graceful. Elves get a free point of Coordination.
Keen elfin eyes. Any time an elf rolls a Sight set with Height of x3 or less, its Height gets promoted to x3.

Elves are frail. Every elf has one less wound box at every location.

Elves are slender. No elf can raise his or her Body score above two under any circumstances.

Claustrophobia. Any time an elf is in an enclosed place, unable to see the sky for more than an hour, all his actions are at Difficulty 3.

Woodwise

Others live in the woods: Elves live the woods. Their tie to the trees extends to a breadth and depth that others simply can’t match. Perhaps it’s because, like the groves in which they live, elves take their sustenance without consumption. Perhaps it’s because (as they privately opine among one another) they’re just better than the others.

Craft Birch Torch (1 point): Elfin birch torches are a common trade item because, when made properly, they burn twice as long as an unenchanted torch and produce only the smoke of a candle to boot. Carving one with the elaborate and sinuous patterns that evoke its magic takes most of a day, and three of them can be sold for Wealth 1. (Or for a beating if one sells counterfeits.) This requires no roll. Used as a weapon, it does Width+1 Shock damage, whether it’s lit or not.

In the hands of an elf who knows their secrets, birch torches can be given an added ability. By taking a minute to carve one additional rune into the base, the nature of the enchantment changes. Instead of producing torchlight for hours, it burns in mere minutes, producing a bright flare equivalent to daylight, along with heat to match a silversmith’s forge. In this form, the birch torch does Width Killing damage when lit and permits its wielder to make Intimidate actions without any penalty or Difficulty.

Craft Yew Bow (2 points): The elvish yew bow is a rightly feared weapon, dangerous in anyone’s hands but never moreso than when held by elves-by-blood. A gnome raised elfin is dangerous with an elfbow, but has not the magic parity with it that an elf raised gnomish would.

No matter who holds it, such a bow does Width in Killing and ignores a point of armor. In the hands of someone born elvish, its sets aren’t disrupted by attacks.

Craft Oaken Bridge (3 points): The lightweight bridges that span homes and platforms in elf-aeries are as delicate and intricate as a necklace of woven flowers. They look like they shouldn’t be able to support their own weight, let alone the weight of a dozen adult elves. Indeed, they can’t… without magic. But with magic the bridges bend and sway in high wind, but do not break unless burned or until the serpentine designs upon it are marred. Making one requires a successful Coordination+Expert Woodworking roll.

Making an oaken bridge takes three weeks, from felling to installation. Those who need a span bridged typically pay Wealth 3-4 for an oaken bridge—more if the span is particularly wide (a challenge that would require an extra week of build time). Communities typically pay Treasure 1 for such a bridge.

Oaken bridges are economic boons, since they’re usually wide, comfortable, sturdy and easy to get animals to walk across. Putting in a bridge (or multiple bridges) can give a Company a temporary boost to its Territory or Treasure (installer’s choice). However, the bigger a company is, the more bridges it needs to get any benefit. Specifically, the advantage accrues after a number of bridges equal to its current Territory are installed. (Particularly long bridges may count double, but give a Difficulty 5 on the Woodworking roll.)
Craft Hickory Shield (4 points): The elfin hickory shield is carved with a grotesque face on its front, twisting runes of power on its back, and meticulously shaped channels through its center. The channels exit through the nose or mouth of the face, with their other end terminating in a mouthpiece near the top, on the defender’s side. This allows the shield bearer to blow through it and cause the shield to resound with a horrible, dissonant howl. Even orcs who pride themselves on recklessness pause at that cry.

A hickory shield takes two weeks and an Expert: Woodworking roll at Difficulty 3 to create, if that’s all the craftsman does during that time. Far more typically, the process is stretched out over a few months.

The end product is a large wooden shield that has AR2. Someone bearing one can perform the Display Kill maneuver without penalty. Sounding the horn within it takes an action and no roll, and gives a +1d bonus to any Intimidate roll the round after.

Elves do not sell these to outsiders, and doing so is a transgression of elf-law warranting exile from the entire forest. Sold between elves (an act that would raise eyebrows for its crassness) such a shield can bring Wealth 4 or 5. The dozen such shields in the hands of non-elves were either gifts to demonstrate a breathtaking degree of trust or gratitude, or they were spoils of war that can provoke elfin resentment even decades afterwards.

Craft Cedar Flute (5 points): The cedar flute is the apex of the mystic woodworker’s art, requiring six months of part-time labor (or two months of intense obsession) and an Expert: Woodworking roll at Difficulty 5 to create. But their power is great.

Someone who bears an elf’s cedar flute can sway crowds with music. Whenever the flute’s music has been used in a concerted attempt at persuasion, it gives a minimum +1d temporary bonus to Sovereignty or Territory, provided its user made enough successful Perform checks. If the use was particularly subtle or inspired, the bonuses should go higher.

Where the other works of elvish magic are famed for their power, the few elves with the skill to craft these flutes rarely describe them. Trusting few with the power they represent, cedar flutes are almost always found in the hands of their maker or his heir.

Forest Wisdom

Unlike the magic of elven woodworking, anyone who spends ten years living with elves in an aerie can learn Forest Wisdom. It’s not really a formal body of knowledge. Instead, it’s just a set of practical lessons that one either learns or fails to learn when hunting in the forests, or when fighting in the bitter tree-top philosophical conflicts.

Wide-Stride Kick (1 point): Elves have a game called pulara which involves three poles with loops at their tops and a cork-stuffed leather ball about the size of a fist. The ball can only be kicked, and touching it with any other part of the body is a violation. Most who grow up playing...
The Elves

- Populara learn how to kick high and fast, a habit that many elves continue when dealing with goblins and orcs.

- Any time a character uses Wide-Stride Kick with Body+Fight or Coordination+Unarmed Strike to kick someone, the attack gets a +1 Height bonus (maximum 10).

- Elflore (2 points): Full elves are freed for study by biology, and even those who need to eat often learn a lot simply by being surrounded by people with the time to study their fascinations. Any Lore rolls dealing with herbalism or philosophy have their Difficulty reduced by 3 for someone who knows Elflore, because that’s what they talk about all day.

- To Eye With Arrowhead (3 points): Elvish archers are renowned for marrying their heightened coordination and exquisite senses. When someone with this technique takes at least one round to aim, and then makes a called shot with Coordination+Bow, he can ignore the effects of cover.

- Barefoot Ascent (4 points): Elves climb fast barefoot, simply because they’re used to it. If you climbed trees for a couple hours every day, you’d do it quickly too. Those who possess Barefoot Ascent are the quickest among elves. Their base climbing speed is doubled.

- The Arrogant Feint (5 points): Elvish swordsmanship is less respected than their archery, but that doesn’t mean they don’t have some skill. Their calmness and ability to see everything around them (seemingly without looking) makes their swordsmen uncannily adept at misdirection. If someone who knows the Arrogant Feint gets a second set when making a Coordination+Sword attack, he can use that as a feint maneuver without having to declare it beforehand.

The Gnomes

- Most gnomes are about four feet tall at full growth, with ruddy skin, round features and plump bodies. Farming is the most common occupation among the gnomes, but their open towns and villages, along with their well-built roads, make it easier to go find a farrier or blacksmith or specialized tailor. Where hults and aeries tend to be self-contained, gnomes are more likely to run errands at several different small settlements—this one with a good herbalist, that one with a shoemaker, and especially the one with the full-time distiller.

- Gnomes are very often taken for granted by their larger, fiercer or more glamorous peers. All they seem to do is till the soil, smoke their pipes and endure the disasters and triumphs of the other races. When events impose on them, the gnomes don’t let things get to the point of disaster and, if they triumph, they see no point in making a big to-do about it. Modest, humble and willing to show you the sharp end of a pitchfork if you steal from their melon patch. That’s the gnomish stereotype for those who live beyond their fertile fields.

- If you actually move into a gnome village, town or city, it may take you a while to see beyond the surface of genial politeness, because the gnomes aren’t big on conducting private business in public (unlike, say, sprites). But live there long enough and you get a sense of who the teams are (and every gnome community is fissured with ever-shifting factions) and what the stakes are. Before you quite realize how it happened, you find yourself in the midst of some social strategem, and though it may superficially be about who snubbed whose wedding invitation, or who danced a bit too closely with another’s daughter, or who really smashed that sure-to-be-
prizewinning pumpkin the day before the county fair, gnome politics are, at the bottom, about the same thing as any other politics. It’s about power. And when one of those disasters in the making impends, it’s the gnomes who won the petty power struggles who direct the rest, just as it’s those winners who reap the rewards of opportunity.

Racial Characteristics

Gnomes are small. Any hit to location 7 is a miss on a gnome. They’re small targets. But their base movement is only ten feet per combat round, not fifteen.

Gnomes are excellent farmers. All gnomes get a free MD in Expert: Farmer.

Gnomish digestion. Any poison ingested or otherwise inflicted on a gnome has its Potency diminished by two.

Seasickness. Whenever traveling on water, cut off from the soil, gnomes take a Difficulty of 3 on all Coordination, Command and Body based rolls.

Earth Affinity

Gnomes are creatures of earth and soil, and they draw strength from it even as they serve and renew it. Dwarves and orcs who seek to invade gnomish lands often wind up frustrated by the seemingly endless numbers that the gnomes can field. In actual fact, many of those soldiers are warriors they’ve seen before. They just got better fast and back to the fight faster.

These abilities are available only to those born gnomish.

Draw Upon the Roots of Earth (1 point): Once per day a character can make a Vigor roll to regain hit points after a good night’s rest. If a gnome makes this roll while barefoot on fertile soil, he adds a +2d bonus.

The Courtesy of Accepting Medicine (2 points): Gnomish politeness gives especial honor to physicians, who often love tending gnomes because it makes them feel unusually competent. When a gnome receives the benefit of a Healing roll, he recovers an extra point of Shock or converts an extra point of Killing damage.

Growing Health (3 points): Being honored among their people, gnomish doctors tend to be a content group—some say smug. If a gnome physician makes a Healing roll to help someone recover from injury, the patient gets back an extra point of Shock or converts an extra point of Killing damage.

Root Intransigence (4 points): Even gnomes who don’t get the benefit of a professional are often remarkably stubborn in the face of death and injury. If they roll a Vigor set to regain Shock (using Draw Upon the Roots of the Earth or not), they regain an extra point of Shock. If they repair Killing injuries with time, they change two points of Killing on each limb after a week instead of just one.

Longevity (5 points): Gnomes are no less subject to death by age than anyone else, but they are known to recover from falls, injuries and farm accidents that would have felled a dwarf or even a sturdy orc. If a gnome fails his daily Vigor roll, he still recovers two points of Shock damage.

Gnomish Manners

As mentioned, they’re polite folk. Many think they’re actually ethically superior to other races. (Certainly, many gnomes do.) But those who’ve lived in several cultures over the years opine that this isn’t necessarily so. Stealing, bullying and sexual impropriety happen among gnomes as often as they do with anyone else. They’re just too polite to talk about it in public.

Because these are lessons and not instincts, anyone raised gnome, or who has lived with them for at least a decade, can learn these even if not taught.
The Gnomes

Cheerful Humility (1 point): Gnomes get a +2d bonus to Graces rolls when dealing with elves and orcs, simply because the idea of treating others with respect is somewhat alien to the mainstream of those cultures.

Farmer’s Eye (2 points): If you have Farmer’s Eye and succeed at a Difficulty 3 Scrutiny roll, you get a pretty good idea what the weather’s going to do tomorrow. For each day out you try to predict, the Difficulty rises by 1.

What the Crowd Wants (3 points): Gnomes tend to be affable, they make friends easily, and easily adapt to the group they find themselves with. If a gnome makes an Empathy roll, he can add a number of dice equal to the roll’s Width to a Perform or Inspire roll. To make the Empathy roll, he has to spend at least an hour in the crowd. Interestingly, this technique won’t work on a crowd that’s more than half goblin. Partially, this is because goblins don’t trust gnomes. Partially, it’s because gnomes don’t trust goblins.

Friendly Little Fellow (4 points): When you talk with the nicer gnomes, they can make you feel like you’re the only person in the world who interests them. When using this technique, the gnome can make an Empathy roll and, if it succeeds, add its Width in bonus dice to the next Graces, Lie, Fascinate, Plead or Haggle roll made to influence the person he observed. This requires a minimum of a half hour of chit-chat.

Gossip Hub (5 points): Gnomes gossip almost as much as sprites, and more efficiently. (After all, they have to get their tales borne swiftly—chores are always waiting!) When a Gossip Hub is in his own home region and his Company makes a roll to be informed, it doesn’t tire out his Company’s Sovereignty.

The Goblins

The rudeness of goblins is a subject of much disgusted discussion in those communities that have them as neighbors. (Within goblin communities, it’s just taken for granted.) Goblins are around five feet tall and usually thin, often as little as a hundred pounds in weight. Their brown skin often has sallow or even greenish overtones that would look sickly on the other races. Their webbed hands are cool to the touch. Goblin men start losing their hair at puberty and can almost never grow beards. Goblin women usually keep their hair, but it’s incredibly fine and thin, usually a mousy brown that, in time, fades to pure white. But goblin eyes are usually brightly colored, blue or striking green.

The typical pinched frown of a goblin man or anxious moue of a goblin maid is more a matter of culture than nature. When one can get a goblin to relax, it’s often quite a shock to realize their features tend to be even, well-proportioned, and delicate.

But relaxation is not a goblin value. Hustle, ambition and doing the most with the least—these are the goblin virtues. Goblin towns are generally lengthy things, stretching away on both sides of a river (or even a stream). The businesses front the water and those who don’t live in their places of employment build houses back in swampy or marshy areas. Most bridges over goblin-controlled rivers are toll bridges, since the only people who don’t just swim it (or walk along the bottom, where they often build pleasant foot-paths) are (1) businesspeople who have wares and (2) non-goblins. Both of those classes should (from the goblin perspective) pay for the privilege of crossing their water.
Racial Characteristics

Goblins never drown. They can breathe underwater like a fish. Additionally, they can’t be strangled or choked like normal people. Those maneuvers just don’t work on goblins. They also never take Difficulties or penalties for swimming or sailing in rough water. They don’t have to make Endurance rolls after five rounds of swimming, and for every die in a set rolled to swim, they move ten feet instead of five.

Goblins are small. Any hit to a goblin’s location 7 is a miss. They’re small targets. But their base movement is only ten feet per combat round, not fifteen.

Goblins are sneaky. Any time a goblin rolls a set with a Stealth roll, its Height is increased by a point (maximum 10).

Black Thumb. Any time a goblin tries to grow a plant, it’s at Difficulty 5.

Goblins are coarse. There’s just an unlikeable, unfinished aspect to their appearance. Goblins can never have a Charm score above 3, and any Charm-based roll they make (other than Lie) cannot exceed a Height of 7. They can never get the five point version of the Beauty advantage.

Goblinry

Goblin mystics are more likely to say “The river is my path” than they are to confess to what orcs, dwarves and gnomes more often call “evil goblin spit” or “that vile bog-bottom witchcraft” or most common of all “goblinry.”

While elves and dwarves make much of the items their affinities for wood or metal produce, goblins with spiritual gifts are far more cautious about revealing them. Strangely, among the river-people there’s an inverse relationship between how much occult ability you have and how much you claim. For every goblin who has real magic, there are probably a pair who fake their way along with misdirection, quick thinking, and vague statements that can be retrofitted around anything that really happens. The real goblin enchanters tend to keep silent about it because an advantage is less advantageous when it’s no surprise. Or they fear blame for every flood and thunderstorm that happens along.

One must be a born goblin to learn these abilities, and while some prodigies learn them on their own, it’s far more common to be apprenticed to a more experienced mystic. Often the occultists are referred to as “potters” or “clay spinners,” which causes no small confusion with outsiders because goblins are also known for their ceramics. This is undoubtedly what the goblins had in mind.

Water Wears Down Stone (1 point): Simply by stroking a stone with their pale, webbed fingers, a goblin with this gift can crack it straight in half, as if it had been dropped from a tremendous height. It takes a half hour of effort and a successful Endurance roll, but it can cleave a single rock weighing up to ten times as much as the goblin himself.

Water Rusts Iron (2 points): To use this ability, the goblin spits towards a weapon within ten
paces, but no roll is required. When used on an cutting or cleaving weapon, its attacks are timed as if they had a point less Width until the edge is sharpened. If done in a fight, this happens before anything else.

**Water Warps Wood** (3 points): Again, the goblin has to spit in the direction of an object. He must be able to see it clearly and it must be within a hundred paces. No roll is required. If the item is wooden and weighs less than the goblin, it warps out of shape. Doors crack free of their frames, shields split and bows turn into fragments. If done in combat, this happens last in the round.

**Water Fractures Light** (4 points): Few goblins study their innate esoterica enough to reach this point, because it’s hard to hide what’s happening when you wreath a twenty-pace radius in garish, glinting rainbow trails. When this ability is used, everyone within its area (including the goblin who did it) takes a -1d penalty to all actions, except for dwarves, who take -2d.

**Rain** (5 points): Think of this ability as working along the following continuum: Clear—clouds—overcast—drizzle—downpour. Ten minutes of concentration is enough to shift the conditions one step in either direction for a ten square mile area. The change lasts two hours, and cannot be used repeatedly to cause more changes. (That is, once changed it can’t change again for two hours.) If a character with the Rain gift uses it daily for a month, he can give the area he’s in a +1d bonus to Territory or a -1d Territory penalty.
The Way Goblins Do Things

In the same way that one raised among elves can easily gravitate towards deadly accuracy and philosophical nattering, anyone raised in the soggy mud flats of the river valleys tends to pick up the goblin attitude on everything from the frank, crude, insult-laden way to conduct business to the best way to fight dirty. (Or, as goblins usually call fighting dirty, “fighting.”)

Avarice Unashamed (1 point): When they haggle with others, goblins at least try. They don’t call you a lying, thieving double dealer to your face (completely with unnecessary volume and spittle flecks). They rein in their impatience for the indirect circumlocution of the gnomes, the blasé superiority of the elves, the truculent density of the dwarves, and the inconsequential blabbery of the sprites. (Orcs, whatever their flaws of demeanor or aroma, at least do business by getting down to business, even if they are incredibly oversensitive to insults real or perceived.) But really, there are only two classes of people that goblins enjoy haggling with. One is other goblins, because it’s a fun challenge and they all know the rules. Goblins get a +2d Haggle bonus with other goblins, be they goblins by blood or by upbringing.

The other people they like haggling with? Oh, fools. They love taking a fool for everything but his skin. It’s the goblin way.

Fools Drown (2 points): Speaking of fools, that’s a good title for anyone who fights a goblin in water. As long as the goblin is waist deep or deeper, he gets +2d bonus to Fight, Dodge and Parry rolls, along with any weapon-based attacks, against attackers who weren’t raised half in the water. Surprisingly, their gills aren’t the major element of this superiority. If you’re a gill-less goblin, you still better be a damn good swimmer if you want a social life, and water wrestling is common horseplay on a hot summer day. As many orcs and elves have learned, when tempted to wade in after a gnome or dwarf who went native with his goblin wife, in the water there’s no difference between fighting someone who can hold their breath a minute longer than you and someone who can hold it an hour longer. But few of ever get a chance to pass that lesson on.

Innocuous Alligator Technique (3 points): Cold blooded goblins and those they raise tend to develop a stillness that would be unnatural in others. When they want to remain unobserved, they don’t even seem to breathe or blink. Thus, instead of rolling Coordination + Stealth to remain unfound when hidden and staying silently still, they roll Coordination + Stealth + Endurance.

Mudfoot Step (4 points): Goblins have wide, webbed feet and know how to place them silently. When using Stealth to move silently, their Widest set gets its Height promoted to x10.

Stirring the Mud (5 points): Because they’re rude, crude and uncultured, many people think goblins aren’t manipulative. Unfortunate people think that. A merchant who has perfected the technique of Stirring the Mud has become an expert at playing groups against one another.

This technique influences a Company to which the mud-stirrer doesn’t belong, but to whom he is selling something. If that Company is in conflict with another Company (and again, it can’t be the stirrer’s company), and the goblin rolls a Haggle set, in addition to any other effects of the Haggling he can give the buying Company a +1d bonus or -1d penalty on its next conflict roll.

Example: A goblin learns that an orcish warband is planning an attack on a nearby gnome settlement. He likes the gnomes, but he’s not going to let a business opportunity pass by, so he engages the orcs and offers to sell them a couple head of sheep to sate their hunger, since they don’t want to alert their victims by hunting in the forest near the village. They offer Wealth 1 but they’re no match for his haggling. He pockets Wealth 2 and, in passing, sticks the orcs with a -1d penalty to their attack. How does this happen? Maybe the sheep aren’t terribly wholesome to eat. Maybe they slow the orcs down. Or maybe he just sends a tip to the gnomes.
The tallest orcs reach six feet tall, and the shortest still tower over gnomes. They’re not as stocky as the dwarves, but they’re solid and muscular with mouths full of sharp teeth. Their features tend to be a little flat, except for pronounced jaws and lips. According to the orcs, this is so it’s easier for them to really sink their fangs in and, to those who’ve fought them, it makes sense.

Orc skin tends to run the gamut from gray to brown, and is usually dull and unreflective except when they’re sweating profusely. Their hair, similarly, ranges from black through gray. It’s slow growing and coarse, and many orcs keep it cut short. Only the priests and priestesses grow it long and curl it elaborately, and them only if they lack the Mark of the Blessed (see below).

Orc hults are like undecorated dwarf-hults—networks of caves and tunnels, usually branching off a central stair-lined shaft. They are often not as extensive, since orcs are far more likely to spend their time outside hunting dinner then they are inside excavating (though they do mine some ores). They do much of their crafting inside, after a hunt, in communal workshops where tools are shared around. But sleeping and praying and other intimate actions are carried out in private chambers. Of all the races, orcs value their privacy the most.

**Racial Characteristics**

**Orcs are incredibly tough.** Orcs get the Advantages Hard Headed and Leather Tough (meaning, an extra wound box at every location except the head, which gets two extra) for free.
Orcs are strong. Any Difficulties levied on Body based Skills are reduced by 2. (That is, if a task normally has Difficulty 5, it becomes Difficulty 3.)

Night vision. When in dim light or even complete darkness, they can still roll Sight without penalty.

Carnivore. Orcs get the Advantage Cannibal Smile for free, but they can only subsist on meat (though they can eat it cooked).

Orcs are inelegant. Perhaps it’s the pointy teeth. Orcs can never have a Charm score above 3, and any Charm-based roll they make cannot exceed a Height of 7. They can never get the five point version of the Beauty advantage.

The Mysteries of Purity

Orcish religion is a touchy topic for anyone who isn’t both blood-orc and raised in an orc-hult. So touchy, in fact, that most questions end with pointed silence, pointed insults, or pointed sticks lancing through the questioner’s most vital bits.

The principle doctrine of the Purity Mysteries is that the orc race expresses the foundation of the world. Curiously, though it’s a racist faith, and it’s a hate-filled faith, it’s not a religion of race-hate. Orcs believe there is a proper place for all the races of Ardwin, and that a safe and peaceful nation will persist endlessly once the orcs assume their role as the rulers of the farmers, miners, woodworkers and the rest.

Blessing of the Pure (1 point): An orc with this trait has been chosen by the priesthood as being unusually blessed and predestined for greatness. The priesthood favors orcs born of orcs for this commendation, but those born of other unions can and do receive it. The blessing takes the form of a scarified pattern on the forehead. It’s hard to forge, and the penalty for claiming a false blessing ranges from death to being scalped alive. That said, if you do get a good forgery, few orcs are going to question it. The blessing gives a +2d bonus to all Command based rolls issued to people who are culturally orcs.

Hymn of Bloodlust (2 points): Most orcs know this, but not every orc can really perform it. To sing it, roll Command+Inspire before leading followers into battle. If you succeed, your followers are temporarily immune to Morale Attacks as they get swept up with the promise of sweet red murder. But as soon as anyone in the group parries or dodges, the effect ends.

Orcish Death Chant (3 points): There’s a natural transition from the Hymn of Bloodlust (sung before carnage) to the Orcish Death Chant (sung during carnage). This does not require either action or roll—any decent orc leader can lead a Death Chant without it interfering with his warmaking. As long as the leader has an equal or greater number of followers (as compared with the group he’s fighting) the enemy troops can’t be given the Morale bonus during the fight.

Stonefelling Hymn (4 points): This is typically taught to the priests of the pure, who sing it as they lead assaults on stone-ensconced enemies. It’s open to debate whether the song, as claimed, “turns the stone against our foes” or whether it’s simply very inspiring to orcs when they see a priest standing there chanting against a brick wall. However it works, it means that an orc Company’s Might doesn’t tire during attacks on stone-based fortifications.

Predator’s Focus (5 points): Priests of Purity undergo many secret and mysterious rites and ordeals involving heavy stones on their chests for extended periods, starvation, privation, the ingesting of toadstools usually considered poisonous, and the like. Among other effects (knowing who’s to be Blessed, twitching) these rites make orc priests into obsessive bloodletters. Once an orc has injured an enemy, he gets a +1d bonus on his next attack against that foe, as long as he doesn’t relent in his attacks or do anything but attack. No dodging, no parrying, no inspiring speeches, though multiple action attacks are just fine. Every successful hit on that opponent after that raises the bonus another die, until the attacker pauses or the target perishes.
Orc Ways

Orcish culture is informed, to an unusual degree, by orcish instinct. Unlike the other races, orcs are exclusively predators. While those who live among orcs without being born sharp-toothed partake in the religion and the culture (meaning, a born-dwarf orc in a scar-kin warband still gets bonuses from the hymns and chants if he’s a follower) there are some techniques that only those orc-born can learn. While these are far more common in orc culture, where they’re accepted, orcs raised by an elf or dwarf parent, or adopted into a gnome town, can develop them as well.

Hunger-Keen Senses (1 point): They say the only thing more keen-eyed than an elf is an eagle or an orc who missed breakfast. For every day that the orc goes without food, he gets a +1d bonus to Sight, Hearing, Direction and Scrutiny, up to a maximum of +3d. But while he’s got any bonus from Hunger-Keen Senses, he takes a -1d penalty to Lore, Eerie and Empathy.

Speak to Me, Silent Brother (2 points): Just as elves are comfortable climbing trees, orcs are comfortable climbing rocks. If an orc needs to make a Climb roll to avoid falling, if it fails he doesn’t fall, he just gets stuck in place for three rounds. (And it doesn’t actually have to be stone that’s getting climbed.)

It’s Only Stone (3 points): Orcs have an instinct for stone that parallels their own sense of where their bodies are. They never take Difficulty when they’re moving, cutting or working stone.

Scar-Bound Discipline (4 points): It may be an actual scent that some orcs emit when leading in battle. Even non-orcs know what it means when they smell it or, if they don’t, they soon learn. As long as someone with this ability is leading fifteen or more orcs (either blood-orcs or other races raised in an orc-hult), they have the Morale bonus without needing speeches and promises.

Elfin Fulfillment (5 points): If an orc kills an elf and then immediately takes an action to drop down and bite off a mouthful of its flesh, the orc feels an incredible sense of completion. He immediately heals a point of Killing damage or shrugs off two points of Shock. This experience can become addictive.
Sprites are by far the smallest of Ardwin’s races, rarely getting as tall as three feet and more often two and a half. They’re even lighter than they appear, weighing about as much as a house cat. They usually have fair, rosy skin, brown eyes and blonde or light-brown hair. But that’s not what people notice. They notice the wings.

Sprite wings are not physical, they’re radiant forms of light in gently shifting rainbow patterns. By night, you can easily read by their light and if you look at them long enough, you may start to feel dizzy, or giddy, or you may lose track of time.

Few sprites till the soil. They get by far more easily by hunting and gathering, through casual gardening or by bargaining for merchandise. Few sprites master a particular trade. It’s far more common for them to do this and that, a little fishing, a little herb gathering, a little craft if they have the skill for it. It’s a casual culture that tends, ironically, towards generosity within settlements. When times are good for a sprite, she shares it as a matter of course. There’s no insult worse to a sprite than “miser” except possibly being called “goblin greedy.”

**Racial Characteristics**

**Sprites are adorable.** All sprites get the three-point version of the Beauty Advantage for free. They can buy it higher if they wish. Unlike elves, sprites don’t ostracize sprites who get the Gruesome Flaw inflicted on them. They just feel bad for them.

**Sprites are tiny.** Any hit to location 7 or 9 is an automatic miss. However, due to their light weight and innate quickness, they move fifteen feet per combat round even when they aren’t flying.

**Sprites fly on radiant wings made of rainbows.** They can fly twenty feet per round automatically. However, they can only do this for fifteen minutes at a time before they have to take a few minutes’ break, usually by landing but (if they started from a high point) sometimes just gliding lower.

Sprites’ wings, being immaterial, can’t be injured by anything known in Ardwin. However, sprites can’t carry more than ten or fifteen pounds while aloft. Sprites take a -3d penalty on any Stealth rolls based on remaining unseen if their wings are visible.

**Sprites are frail and weak.** Sprites lose one wound box from every hit location and can never raise their Body score above 1.

**Iron hates sprites.** Weapons made of iron or steel do an extra point of Shock when hitting a sprite.

**Glammer**

Unlike the goblins, sprites are well-known for their use of magic. Indeed, most outside the sprite settlements think advanced magical talent is more common among sprites than is actually the case.

Glammer is the control of light. The sprites’ immaterial, glowing wings seem to act as antennae that bend and distort light around them, much as a prism breaks white light into rainbow. With greater practice, concentration and skill, the bending can become more and more precise.

**Flight Unseen** (1 point): The first step towards controlling light is learning to squelch it when it’s unwanted. With this ability, a sprite can make her wings invisible. This lasts until the sprite next sleeps, or until she chooses to reveal them. It doesn’t make the rest of her hard to see, but when you’re trying to move unseen it’s better to lack brightly glowing appendages. Activating this power takes one combat round.

**Hunting Stripes** (2 points): A sprite can’t fade from sight, but he can camouflage himself by changing the color of his skin and clothing to match his surroundings. The color change isn’t permanent, like a dye, but is rather a surface of glammer. As with Flight Unseen, it takes a round to put on the stripes and they last until the sprite sleeps or until the glammer is released.
Trick of the Light (3 points): At this point, the sprite can create visions of things that aren’t there, though only briefly. After a round of concentration, the sprite can create a silent illusion of something no larger than he is. As long as he concentrates and does nothing else (not even moving), the illusion remains. It can move and change, but it does not make any sound or have any heft.

Stare Not at the Sun (4 points): This is more a matter of light quantity than quality. Where the previous ability relies on having a skilled and accurate imagination, this is just a matter of making lots. It takes the form of a searing, blinding corona of sparkling color that streaks straight into the eyes of one target. The sprite rolls Sense+Coordination and blinds the target for a number of rounds equal to the roll’s Width. It has a range of about a hundred paces.

Great Glammer (5 points): This combines the deftness of Trick of the Light with the bulk of Stare Not at the Sun. The sprite magician can create a visual illusion with all the caveats of Trick of the Light, except that it fills an area the size of a large tent or wedding pavilion. It takes about fifteen minutes’ of concentration before the image appears, but no roll is required to create it. There’s no sound or scent, no sense other than sight, but within that area the illusion is tremendously persuasive. The caster has to stay in the illusion’s area and can speak, move about and conduct any business that doesn’t require intense concentration. (In other words, as soon as he makes any roll, the illusion vanishes. It also evaporates if he gets hurt.) After the first hour, it requires an Endurance roll to continue maintaining the Great Glammer. Every hour after that, it’s another Endurance check with a -1d penalty. The penalty is cumulative, so after five hours, it would be a -4d roll.

Sprite Ways

One needs the glowing wings to learn Glammer, but Sprite Ways are cultural, rather than a matter of inborn potential. Anyone raised in a sprite town or village can pick up these abilities.

Spritely Knowledge (1 point): A sprite conversation is a lively interplay, and rather than passively examine the other fellow for clues about his feelings, sprites are often adept at sounding him out subtly with active questions, often questions that seem unrelated to the matter at hand. When using this ability, a sprite can base Empathy rolls off Charm instead of Sense.

Dive-Stab (2 points): Most blood-sprites do this aerially, dropping down with a shrill shout as they impale that night’s supper (or an unwanted intruder). But non-fliers can also learn the trick of looking for an opening and then charging in with total commitment, flinging one’s entire body weight behind a single stab.

To execute a Dive-Stab, the attacker spends one action circling and rolls Body+Coordination. The next round, he makes a single attack against a single opponent using Body+Fight or Coordination+Weapon. If he hits, that attack gets a Width bonus equal to the Width of the Body +Coordination roll.

Example: Juho the sprite flits out of an orc’s reach, waiting for her chance. She rolls Body+Coordination and gets a nice 3x4 result. The next round, she makes a single attack against a single opponent using Body+Fight or Coordination+Weapon. If she hits, that attack gets a Width bonus, mangling the orc’s leg with a 5x1 strike.

Thread the Needle (3 points): The sprite-born use small weapons by necessity, and they’ve made a virtue of it by emphasizing precision over force. When striking with Coordination+Weapon and using some sort of stabbing blade, Thread the Needle lets the attacker ignore all mundane armor by targeting joints and weak spots.
Brew Heartlock Elixir (4 points): It drives the elves mad that they can’t make this stuff, which is a black, sticky ointment that smells faintly of grass. It’s obviously an herbal concoction, but there’s some secret ingredient that the elves are just unable to find.

The secret ingredient is sprite blood. If a sprite bleeds willingly, it’s two points of Shock damage. If it’s taken despite resistance, that’s a minimum of a point of Killing damage. With that much blood (and a dozen common herbs), one can make ten doses of the elixir. Applying it to a weapon takes one combat round, but it only stays potent for about an hour, or until the weapon is sheathed or strikes something. Kept bottled, it remains good for a month or so.

The heartlock elixir is a poison (or drug, if you prefer), administered by smearing it on a pin or a weapon and poking it through the skin. Only a tiny amount is required to take effect. It’s Potency 6 and the Minor Effect is dizziness, disorientation and a brief heart stoppage. This causes the victim to lose a die from his next action’s Highest set (if any). The Major Effect is weakness, trembling and a thready, irregular heartbeat, bestowing a -1 penalty to both Body and Coordination for a day. Multiple doses have cumulative effects, and if Body is dropped to 0, the target dies.

Sprites mostly use this stuff while hunting, to bring down bigger game. But they have no compunctions against using it in war.

Genial Curiosity (5 points): Sprite culture places a premium on political gossip. One can’t get away from it, but if one gets into it—really into it—all the disparate threads of history provide a running intuition about the fate of Ardwin’s races as a whole.

To benefit from Genial Curiosity, roll Knowledge +Lore. A success rates each of the six races, top to bottom, according to their current rating in a particular Quality. Genial Curiosity can be used five times per month, once per Quality. It can also be used to rate any other six Companies.
Ardwin is a large nation and, in some regions, a sparsely-populated one. In the depths of the forest, or the wilds of the swamps or the desolate ocean coasts, there are still, as yet, places innocent of the step of orc, or dwarf, or elf. Even in the settled areas, there are places of mystery—swamps only a few miles from populated and heavily trafficked rivers, where one can walk in for a half hour and starve to death trying to find the way out again. There are fields in the prairie that have not yet felt the cut of the plow and unlit hill caves which dwarven explorers have never reached.

In ancient places, ancient forces dwell.

Some who learn of these mysteries are drawn to them. They dream dreams or see visions, they are restless and distracted until they set out into the untamed, until they make a pilgrimage to a lake they’ve never seen but immediately recognize, or a great twisted tree, or a strange blank stone jutting arrogantly from the turf. They arrive and instinctively drop to their knees, lower their heads, and listen.

Others find secret places through sheer chance or, if not that, destiny. A youth chases a wayward kid for miles. An old widow hunting mushrooms falls through a dark crust of dirt to find herself somewhere larger, and stranger, and dark. Young lovers seeking privacy away from prying eyes instead find themselves in the presence of a booming voice.

Whether it’s fate or the force of enchantment, people of all Ardwin’s races have found these rare places, and almost all have come to worship spirits dwelling there. They are rarely given the option to refuse.

The spirits that animate these areas are mysterious and inhuman. They do not seem to possess the capacity for self-questioning that gives pause to elf and orc alike. They simply are. They do not consider their agendas, they enforce them. Excuses and arguments do not change their minds: They can only be persuaded in terms of their own extremely narrow and inflexible values. They show no signs of having bodies, but are all tied to unique features of the landscape. Perhaps they can only exist when anchored to such a place. Perhaps their nature warps places around them and, by the time they’re mature enough to communicate, they’ve necessarily made significant changes. Perhaps the location is a trap in which spirits become entangled, and the world is full of such creatures with no tie to the physical realm and no means to communicate with the living. Or perhaps they lack any interest in doing so. These creatures of principle have little curiosity about themselves, or about anything abstract. Questions of “why” or inquiries about ethics and morality are usually just ignored. It’s almost like they can’t hear anything that’s not relevant to their agents or agendas.

While their ends and means vary greatly, there are some elements common to how all these beings operate and exist.

As mentioned, all these spirits are tied to features of territory, usually beautiful or ominous ones, but always impressive. They are otherwise invisible and imperceptible even by magical senses. This makes them virtually indestructible.

A spirit in a waterfall resides in that space. If you divert the river, it resides in the cliff. If you manage to tear down the hill, it resides in soil beneath the rubble. There are neither Company nor personal actions that can injure them directly. This is not to say, however, that they can’t be stopped.
Reliance on Agents

For all their eternity, the spirits have little active influence on the world. They can only help those who accept their help (usually in the form of obeying their commands). They can sicken and injure those who violate their holy places, but even the largest such shrines are no larger than a few hundred paces across. They aren’t difficult to avoid, if you’re forewarned.

So the spirits develop human cults to carry out their commands. These cults are generated with Company rules and can be attacked with all the guile and craft of REIGN characters bring to bear.

Initiation

Anyone who accepts the cult’s rule can make a pilgrimage to the spirit’s site and accept a physical mark, indicating that the person belongs to its unseen master forever. This is covered in greater detail in the descriptions of individual sects, but in brief, initiates are tangibly marked, usually in a subtle way. They can offer pleas and requests to their masters at any distance, though their gods rarely deign to reply. The spirits can, however, send dreams to their followers, no matter how far the follower is. They can also speak directly to those who are present at the shrine. Different spirits can present their people with gifts, but they also punish inexorably those who disobey their strictures and commands.

Inhumanity

Even spirits whose rules seem benevolent are inhuman and inflexible. Even those whose principles seem virtuous and just are utterly unconcerned with the feelings, comfort or happiness of their followers. Consider a spirit who demands that his initiates slay any who partake of fruits that have been sanctified to it. If a mother finds her child has unknowingly violated this stricture, the spirit punishes her disobedience as viciously as it would one who disobeyed from pure spite.

Other Worlds, Other Spirits?

There’s absolutely no reason you shouldn’t be able to import Taka’Tah or something like it to Nain, Milonda or Heluso. The rules hold, regardless of the origin of the spirit or the background of the setting. Just take care how you integrate these entities into the setting. If you stick with their canonical love of secrecy, there’s no reason they’d have necessarily attracted attention in the two continents—though the magic of a powerful Uldish sorcerer might give even Mobrau pause. These creatures could be the totems behind the tribes of the Lightless Jungle. Just decide in advance whether they’re susceptible to Death Forging.

Placing them in Nain, there’s no Great Tongue word for these, and most magic simply doesn’t recognize they’re present. Compared to wizardly whims, even strict Gy’Tyah might be preferable. Especially in exchange for the power to avenge oneself on the arrogance of enchantment.
Taka’Tah is a spirit with a young cult but plenty of growth potential. Centered in the forest, its sect is highly accessible to the resident elves. Given their freedom from food, farming or sustenance gathering, joining a cult of pure order and pursuing a life of complete, predictable stability might appeal.

**Location:** Deep in the forest is a hole. It looks, at first, like a sinkhole, but upon closer approach the turf and soil wears away and reveals stone, curving gently inward, smoothly ringed or spiraling downward, getting progressively steeper, moist and dark. The hole itself—“Taka’Tah’s Throat” to believers—is about three long elf-paces across and seemingly bottomless. The trees around it grow protectively canted in above, forming a thick canopy over it. Sacrifices to the spirit are simply tipped down the hole. No sound emerges to indicate that they have struck a fundament. Indeed, if some enterprising dwarf or orc were to tunnel beneath the Throat, he would never break into the open space of it. From beneath, the ground there seems to be hard, impenetrable granite. Only from above is there the sacred abyss.

**Agenda:** Order. Taka’Tah is primarily concerned with the placement of persons and objects. Things have a place. Removing them from their place is odious.

Nowhere is this more true than at the site of its sacred Throat. Anyone who tries to cut down one of the trees that surrounds it takes an Area 4 Killing attack every round until she either (1) flees or (2) dies. The damage takes the form of spontaneous boils on the undersides of limbs or inside body apertures. If you don’t want buboes in your lungs, leave the trees alone. Moving a stone? Suffer the attack once, then again if you don’t get the message and quit.

---

**The Blessings, The Laws**

**Know You Your Place And There Reside, To Find The Favor Of Taka’Tah:** Those who dedicate themselves to Taka’Tah are required to prostrate themselves at the edge of the Throat and incise their master’s mark upon the inside surface of their lower lip. The blood is to drip into the abyss, and then the supplicant may, with the spirit’s permission, take a stone from the grove and carry it away to his home. He is to bury the stone upon his land and live there forever after. Specifically, he is to spend each night within a half mile of the buried stone. So long as he does this, he gains +MD to his Vigor rolls. But any time he spends the night away from his land or his stone, he takes a point of Shock to every location at dawn and loses the Vigor bonus die. Take a Taka’Tah cultist’s stone from his property and he’s in a real bind. The spirit, however, always knows where every stone lies.

**Mark Unto Taka’Tah Your Children With A Promise, And Upon Their Growth Let Them The Promise Fulfill:** When a cultist has a child, he must take the child to the shrine and mark its forehead with Taka’Tah’s emblem, using moisture from within the holy Throat. A cultist who fails in this permanently loses a Wound Box from a leg location as his foot curls and twists into a clubfoot. The child can then receive dreams from the spirit. When the child is ready to move into its own home, it must voluntarily enter the service of Taka’Tah, (as described above). If the child refuses, the parent must disown it and never speak to it again until it relents and joins the sect.

A parent who refuses to mark a child develops a mist over his vision, increasing the Difficulty of all Sight rolls by 3. Each additional child refused to Taka’Tah increases the Difficulty, to a maximum of 9. But every time a parent dutifully marks his child, one Company to which the parent belongs gets a +1 Territory bonus for that month. Companies can only benefit from this once per month, however, no matter how fertile their cultists are.
Render Unto Taka'Tah Sacrifice While Alive, 
And Upon Your Death Return To Taka'Tah Your 
Master: At every full moon, a deer, sheep, ram or 
stag is to be sacrificed to Taka'Tah at the hand of 
the cultist. Cultists who can’t lay hold of the 
appropriate animal can substitute a small bird, 
and those who can’t perform the sacrifice 
personally can designate a close relative to 
perform the killing. Those who perform this rite 
gain the Blessing of Taka’Tah, which can be spent 
one time to either add a 2x10 success to any roll, 
or to increase the Width of a set by two. No 
individual can have the Blessing more than once. 
Moreover, traveling to sacrifice offsets the “sleep 
at home” order.

There is no specific punishment for failing to offer 
sacrifice, but a cultist who fails more than twice in 
a year is bound to get some stern words from his 
fellow Taka’Tah congregants.

The Cult of Taka’Tah

Currently, cult is led by an elfin woman named 
Beridel who has the advantage of living a mere 
five mile hike from the sacred abyss. She makes 
the pilgrimage weekly and Taka’Tah speaks to her 
far more frequently than to anyone else. At least, 
that’s what she says.

The strictures of serving the spirit make a crusade 
of conquest impractical, to say the least: No army 
is going to ride out to victory when Taka’Tah is 
plaguing them with injuries every morning they 
spend away from their designated home site. But 
Beridel is cunning, ambitious and a true believer. 
Her goal is to recruit everyone of every race who 
lives within two days’ travel of the Throat. She 
pursues this by visiting the ill 
and promising them 
health as a reward 
for loyalty. She 
has also 
identified 
some stubborn 
‘apostates’ 
who are aware 
of the cult (though many dismiss it as silly 
superstition) living close to the Throat. Her goal is 
to drive them out of the region, making their land 
available to proper worshippers.

Outside direct proximity to the Throat, she has 
few agents. Her most trusted are her three 
children (two elves and a sprite from her second 
marrige), ages 13-19, who receive dreams from 
Taka’Tah but are not yet tied down to their own 
property and are therefore free to proselytize all 
over Ardwin. Through them (and others who 
have yet to plant a stone) the cult is negotiating 
with some goblin settlements along the central 
river. The goblins are too distant to join the sect, 
but have some interest in fostering beliefs that 
prevent some elves from answering any military 
call-ups.

Close to the Throat, the struggle for supremacy is 
subtle and not violent, but grudging and 
increasingly bitter. Some cultists are open— 
indeed, abusive!—about their recruiting. Others 
keep their faith to themselves but still work to aid 
their fellows and undermine unbelievers. The 
nonbelievers are feeling increasingly besieged and 
paranoid.

Might 0, Territory 3, Sovereignty 3, Treasure 2, 
Influence 1

Assets: Small Horizon, Patriotism, Defensible 
Terrain, Blessed Cult (see page 129)
Unlike Taka'Tah, the sect worshipping Gy'Tyah is well established and has a history stretching back decades. Mostly adored by a mix of orcs and gnomes, Gy'Tyah is selective about the worshippers she accepts, but has been known to send her call hundreds of miles into the dreams of the lonesome and susceptible.

**Location:** Along the ocean cost, miles from the nearest fertile field or defensible hult, there is a weird spire of stone, rising alone from the sand and unlike anything else around it. The twisted tower is called Gy'Tyah’s Shrine. There are three villages surrounding it, about ten miles away in each direction, entirely occupied by her followers, the Purified of Gy’Tyah. They do not look kindly upon strangers who wander into their territory. Unless, of course, they too believe.

**Agenda:** Purity. Specifically, Gy’Tyah seeks to isolate her followers from anyone who does not worship Gy’Tyah.

**The Blessings, The Laws**

**Gy’Tyah Shall You Adore, And Her Token Carry Always:** A token of Gy’Tyah takes the form of a smooth pebble from around her cliff face, incorporated into the body. This is most commonly done by piercing and stretching an earlobe or lip to accommodate the stone, but some followers swallow (and periodically boil and re-swallow) their stones, or carry them in other locations. The most dedicated incise their flesh and sew the stone inside. Anyone who bears such a stone in his body gains two benefits. First, he cannot be subject to the Gy’Tyah Curse (described below) and secondly, he always knows how far the shrine is and in what direction. (For some Direction-based tests, this can be worth a +1d to +3d bonus.) Note that he does not have to be a worshipper. Someone who can sneak to the shrine, steal a rock, and incorporate it into his body gains Gy’Tyah’s benefits, regardless of the spirit’s will.

There are consequences for such theft, of course. By the spirit’s command, such thieves are to be dragged back to the shrine and tormented for a full day of pain for each day they held the stone, until death is a blessed release.

Cultists who do not carry the stone are not punished, other than by the loss of its direction and protection.

**Like Shall Cleave To Like, And From Unlike**

**Be Held Apart:** Orcs who worship Gy’Tyah marry only other orcs. Gnomes marry gnomes. Elves marry elves. Any who take Gy’Tyah’s stone and then intermarry (or have any sort of sexual contact with someone of another race) are subject to the Blasphemer’s Burden.

Here’s how the Burden works. The first day, it rolls a pool of 4d+MD against its victim. With any set, regardless of the victim’s Body or Vigor or anything else, the accursed loses a point of Body and suffers intermittent headaches, joint pains and horrible nightmares. The next day, and every day after, it rolls 4d until it gets a set. When that happens, Body drops another point. Then it rolls 3d every day until it gets a set (costing another Body point), then 2d every day until the victim dies. The only way to purify oneself from this
punishment is to journey to the shrine and make an offering of an unblemished calf or sheep. Re-offense, of course, means resumption of the curse.

The same burden and absolution process apply to any Gy’Tyah follower who wears a garment made of two different types of fibers woven together; who stores two different types of grain, fruit or vegetable in the same container; or who eats both meat and fish in the same meal. The final stricture is that those who obey Gy’Tyah cannot touch the living flesh of nonbelievers. As long as there’s no skin-to-skin contact it’s all right, but as soon as they touch someone faithless, including a fellow worshipper who has been subjected to the Burden, the Burden falls upon them as well.

On the other hand, every follower who spends a month pure gets to add a Master Die to all attempts to catch fish. If you’re an orc living on a barren seashore, that’s pretty attractive.

The Pure Shall Know Gy’Tyah’s Mercy, But Those Who Torment The Obedient Shall Be Struck Down With Great Wrath: Anyone who belongs to the Purified of Gy’Tyah can curse others of his race, so long as they are not also Purified. Pure orcs can curse impure orcs, but not impure elves. (Why not? Because orcs have no business worrying about the spiritual cleanliness of elves or sprites or anyone but orcs. Similarly, Purified elves need only concern themselves with cursing other elves.)

This curse is not as strong as the Blasphemer’s Burden from Gy’Tyah herself, but it’s still nasty. To place the curse, the cultist has to say “Gy’Tyah’s curse be upon you!” to the target, or at least mutter the words in his general direction. Then the cultist has to make some kind of representation of the victim—a painting, a statue, a voodoo doll or what have you. It doesn’t need to incorporate any hair or body matter from the victim, however. Upon completing this mystic focus, the target immediately loses a point of Body and suffers the usual Burden symptoms. Every day, the target makes a Body+Vigor roll against the 4d Curse pool. It’s opposed. If the Vigor roll can gobble out the Curse set, nothing happens. If the Curse gets a set in, another point of Body drops. If Body hits zero, the victim dies.

Each cultist can only curse one enemy at a time. If the cultist dies, the curse lifts. If the victim can find and destroy the effigy, that breaks it as well. Otherwise, he’s going to have to get to Gy’Tyah’s Shrine and steal a stone or get religion.

Cultists—even those who share a race—can’t curse one another because their Gy’Tyah stones protect them. If a cultist doesn’t have his Gy’Tyah stone, he can be cursed, but he won’t be because the law states “The Pure Shall Know Gy’Tyah’s Mercy.” In practice, this means Gy’Tyah cultists don’t hurt one another. Any of the Pure who strikes another, bare handed, with a weapon, with a spell, on purpose, accidentally—doesn’t matter. If you do so much as single point of Shock to a fellow cultist, or even do no damage but still slap him, you permanently lose a Wound Box from the location from which the damage originated. Bit him? Lose a point from the head. Kicked him? Lose it from the leg. Punched him or threw a stone? Comes off the arm. This damage takes the form of the limb withering and shriveling as if badly burned or prematurely aged.

The Cult of Gy’Tyah

Individual Purified tend towards insularity, avoiding speech and even eye contact with strangers, but this actually runs counter to the cult’s stated goal of bringing all of Ardwin (or even the world) under the benevolent gaze of Gy’Tyah. This is easier said than done, but there are evangelists traveling the roads and waterways of Ardwin, seeking the downtrodden and weak, promising them provender and vengeance if they only accept their place in the natural order. All they have to do is make the pilgrimage and accept the stone.

These recruits are typically secretive about their worship, and the evangelists never stay in one place for long, especially after persuading
someone to make the trek to the Purified villages. Some who join the cult stay in the coast villages, becoming one more fisherman, albeit one with strange songs and stories to help earn the regard of neighbors. But there are few goblins, dwarves and elves in the villages, and the lack of romantic opportunity usually propels the recruits back toward their homelands. Only now they’re armed with Gy’Tyah’s Curse.

The dwarves and goblins along the river have their suspicions about a weird cult of witchcraft that has seeped up from the shore, but so far little is known beyond suspicion of those who won’t shake your hand skin-on-skin. Some unscrupulous Gy’Tyah cultists have taken a proactive stance by accusing others in their home towns of witchcraft; sometimes going so far as to place a curse, hide the token in their patsy’s home, and then let it be found. By far the most active Gy’Tyah cult outside of the Purified villages is in the city of Blackflag. The dwarves of Blackflag, a neutral minority in a politically polarized tyranny, were already viewed with suspicion by both the Redflag revolutionaries and the Klogue family rulers, so they were already isolated and trading at a disadvantage. A disgruntled dwarf who converted to Gy’Tyah and used the Curse judiciously against his business rivals quickly came to prominence within the community and has rallied many to his religion. But recently the Klogues have started paying attention to rumors of curses and (wrongly) jumped to the conclusion that the Redflags are poisoning people. They’re gearing up for major repression.

The only other place with Gy’Tyah worshippers in any real community is the city of Bountiful, where an interracial group follows Gy’Tyah joyfully and openly, seeming like nothing more than a silly, happy cult with some inconvenient rules, but nothing that precludes trade. Unless the course of events changes drastically, they’re going to be amazed and appalled when Blackflag erupts in violence and

The Sect of Gy’Tyah

Might 1, Territory 3, Sovereignty 3, Treasure 1, Influence 2

Assets: Blessed Cult, Shipshape Navy, Patriotism
Where the voices of other totems are usually booming and deep, Jossode speaks in small and still tones of perfect rationality. It (or “he” to his servants) sounds like somebody’s grandfather dispensing pearls of wisdom. This is one factor that has led to Jossode worship being widespread throughout Ardwin. But at the same time, the disorganization of Jossode’s cult, and the requirements of honoring it, keep its numbers small. There aren’t many cultists to this entity, but they aren’t geographically bound.

Jossode does not call out to the lost or searching like Gy’Tyah. Rather, the unjustly persecuted are more likely to draw his attention and receive his dreams, guiding them to his domain where he offers them power for service. Perhaps every year, a few hundred in Ardwin feel put upon enough to open their minds to Jossode’s dream call. Of those dreamers, only one in ten, or less, is desperate enough to set out into the mountains. But of those who survive to find his locus, most accept his patronage eagerly. His initiates consume one leaf (no larger than a flower petal) from the sacred tree and shave their heads completely. (Yes, eyebrows too, giving some a look of perpetual surprise.) Forever after, they are expected to keep their hair and beard and eyebrows denuded, storing the daily shavings until they can be brought back to Jossode once a year, on the anniversary of the pilgrim’s first pledge of loyalty.

**Location:** High in the mountains, on the ever-disputed border between the dwarves and the orcs, there’s a hidden canyon, small and steep and barren of life… except for one tiny tree. At the far side of the gorge, a half-mile hike over rocks, there is a perfect miniature tree growing from a crack in an otherwise smooth plane of stone. While it’s the size of a sapling or shrub, closer inspection reveals that it has the shape of an ancient tree, only in miniature. (Someone from our world would recognize it as a naturally-occurring bonsai, hundreds of years old but shrunken due to the scarcity of soil and water.) This tree, described in hushed tones as “distant even when close enough to touch, huge despite its small size” is the seat of Jossode’s will.

**Agenda:** Justice. Not in the vague mortal sense of general fairness on a social level, but personal, individual, *particular* balance between harm done and dealt, and favors given and received.

**The Blessings, The Laws**

**Leave No Offense Unavenged, Nor Kindness Unrewarded:** The cult of Jossode is often composed of loners, though one gets small and very tightly bound clusters of worshippers, often with a family or marriage basis. When these solo worshippers do manage to talk with one another, there’s often reference to “debt.” This doesn’t mean money. It means a spiritual imbalance between insult or benevolence.

If you do a favor for a Jossode cultist, she will do a favor in return, one of exactly equal merit as close as she can judge it. (If she judges wrongly, a dream from Jossode is sure to correct her.) Save the life of one marked to Jossode and the cultist is likely to follow you doggedly until an opportunity to spare you equal peril arises. A Jossodite who ignores a petty favor loses a point of Charm as her face erupts with disfiguring warts—the greater the debt, the more warts, or larger, or more prone to ooze odious matter. This never results in a loss of more than one point of Charm, however.

One who ignores a major favor loses her voice. She is unable to speak until she rights the imbalance. (This is reserved for punishing violations like a life-debt she’s not even attempting to repay.) Interestingly, Jossode only tracks debt of favor from the moment of initiation onward. Jossode cultists owe no particular debt to their parents, but their children are owed protection and sustenance until they’re old enough to see to themselves. (Jossode sees the act of bringing a life into an unjust, uncertain world as an imbalance that incurs debt on the parent.) Abandoning a child is the fastest route to muteness. However, these curses do break when the initiate returns on the anniversary of initiation and offers Jossode the shaven sacrifice.
Naturally, the oppression of indebtedness means Jossodites tend to be standoffish and independent. Several die every year as a direct result of their unwillingness to ask for or accept aid.

The other side of the coin is that Jossodites cannot leave insult or injury unavenged. Indeed, anyone who damages a follower of the tree receives damage in return. Someone who does only Shock damage to any location on an initiate of Jossode receives one point of Shock to the same location, immediately. This ignores armor and can't be dodged or parried. Anyone who does a point of Killing damage, or any combination of Killing and Shock, to a cultist, receives a point of Killing damage to the same location. Followers of Jossode are permitted to inflict additional damage, but they are forbidden to kill others. (That's an overreaction.) The exception is, they can kill anyone who killed someone to whom the Jossodite was indebted. Even if the debt was minor! (A Jossodite who kills while defending herself is considered to have committed a minor injustice, as described below.)

If someone owed a life-debt dies from violence or injury, the Jossodite either permanently loses the point of Charm from warts (if she was at least trying to save him) or loses her speech (if the cultist abandoned her responsibility). If the holder of a life-debt dies of a preventable cause like starvation or thirst, that's cause for muteness. Dying of illness or age usually results in the wart-curse until the cultist returns on her initiation anniversary.

**Debts of Vengeance**

Debts of favor only matter after initiation. Debts of revenge are negotiated separately. Specifically, when someone is in the presence of Jossode and considering taking the leaf, she can name specific individuals who have harmed her and the degree of punishment she thinks their harms warrant. Jossode, in turn, indicates how much punishment he thinks their crimes deserve. If it's sufficient for the querent, then Jossode helps her achieve the payback after initiation. If it's not enough (or too much) she can walk away and try to avenge herself unaided.

For the murder of a close relative or beloved friend, Jossode's usually willing to countenance a death sentence. A gross theft, tormenting assault, or failed murder attempt usually justifies the permanent removal of an arm or leg, by Jossode's reckoning.

The Blessing of Jossode is no mere vague invocation of good will. It's a specific benefit and it's transferrable. Jossodites receive one blessing per week. They can store them up until needed. Handing out a blessing (which is done by waving your hand at someone and muttering “May Jossode’s wisdom guide you” or some similar platitude) equalizes a minor debt—someone did you a favor but it wasn’t major, life-changing or life-saving. (Major debts have to be equalized with tailored actions, not just spiritual tokens.)

Any initiate with a blessing can use it whenever he wants and hold it indefinitely. To use a blessing, one simply meditates on a question and you can punish. The armed men who forced you off the unfairly-seized land? Them you can wrack with banes all night and day. Similarly, the man who called you a beggar and made extravagant japes at your expense after giving you a bowl of soup? You owe him a blessing. The Blessing of Jossode is no mere vague invocation of good will. It’s a specific benefit and it’s transferrable. Jossodites receive one blessing per week. They can store them up until needed. Handing out a blessing (which is done by waving your hand at someone and muttering “May Jossode’s wisdom guide you” or some similar platitude) equalizes a minor debt—someone did you a favor but it wasn’t major, life-changing or life-saving. (Major debts have to be equalized with tailored actions, not just spiritual tokens.)

Any initiate with a blessing can use it whenever he wants and hold it indefinitely. To use a blessing, one simply meditates on a question and...
receives a hint from Jossode in a dream. These dreams can be cryptic and confusing, but usually are memorable and have a strong sense of importance. Nonbelievers who’ve been blessed typically get an insight on something that’s troubling them within a week, whether they consciously want supernatural advice or not.

Jossode isn’t all knowing, but he’s aware of everything that his followers know, which gives him a broad (if shallow, and alien) insight into the broader doings of Ardwin. He can also see anywhere within a thousand miles of his tree as if from the perspective of a hawk or eagle circling above. If he knows a living or dead person’s name, he can find where that individual is. All this information can be conveyed in dreams to the blessed.

Alternately, there’s Jossode’s Bane, which you can use on anyone who has harmed you, stole from you, damaged your property or otherwise materially done you wrong. To inflict the bane, you have to look at the target and hiss. (He doesn’t have to see you doing this.) Every round you do this, he takes an Area 1 Shock attack. It ignores armor and can’t be dodged, parried or otherwise stopped. If it hits the head or torso, it takes the form of bleeding from an associated aperture (eyes, nose, throat or other). On a limb, it’s a bruise that’s vaguely shaped like Jossode’s tree-glyph.

This can be done over and over, but the tricky part is, Jossode decides when the victim’s had enough. Then the Bane stops working, though the damage done remains. For a minor affront, 3-4 points is typical, or until it starts converting to Killing damage. For a major insult, it goes until the limb is filled or until Killing conversion. At that point, the harm has been balanced and the cultist has no call to further harm the victim.

(No...
The Sect of Jossode

Might 2, Territory 1, Sovereignty 3, Treasure 2, Influence 2

Assets: Blessed Cult, Sinister Operatives, Irregular Forces

The cult is changing, however. One orc named Hultharp was drawn to Jossode by a dream of vengeance after a rival tribe razed his hult and killed his sons. But Hultharp had his war band with him and they all pledged their oath to Jossode on the same day. So now their collective yearly pilgrimage has a far different tone than the lone journeys most Jossode cultists undertake. Hultharp is shrewd and makes good use of threats and bluffs against non-cultists to get their loyalty. (His ability to dispense the Blessing is well known, as is his scrupulous honor when it comes to paying his debts.) His goal is to build or seize a hult and rule it in accordance to Jossode’s law. If he succeeds, many of those sullen loners are going to have opportunities they never expected.

The Sect of Mobrau

The goblin-cult of Mobrau is vicious, voracious and (to outside morality) utterly ruthless. It exists to consume. Those who fall under its sway are sent to drag in more thralls, under threat of torture if necessary. Any who resist are anathema. Compromise is allowed only as a prelude to betrayal. Secrecy is the inflexible rule until the dominion of Mobrau is complete. Only then can its priests throw aside their disguises and rule openly.

But their animosity towards those who will not follow is equalled by their generosity to their fellows within the sect. No Mobrite can rest while his fellow worshipper is in distress and he could help. They aren’t required to love one another—Mobrau cares naught for feelings—but they are inflexibly obligated to help each other.

Location: Where Ardwin’s central river emerges from the mountains, it branches off into several odious swamps before flowing into firmer ground and winding its way past Blackflag and into the gnomish heartland. Deep in one of these swamps, there is a circle of five trees and, in the middle of the circle, a low island of pure, white, sparkling sand. That island is the temple of Mobrau. No matter how heavy the rains and how high the river, it is never submerged. No matter the extremity of draught, its trees never parch and the water around it never drops. Between tree and sand is the clearest water in Ardwin.

Agenda: Total authority. Mobrau wants to rule all and, failing that, enslave those too foolish to bend knee to it.

Mobrau’s goal is to blanket the world with its four-tiered caste system. At the top is Mobrau itself, receiving homage and obedience. Below that are the priests, who have constructed their own shrines. The priests instruct the faithful who have made their own peace with Mobrau, and the faithful use as slaves those who have refused Mobrau’s offer.
The Blessings, The Laws

The Sacred Sand Of Mobrau Is With You Always: Those who accept Mobrau’s dominion do so in the temple grove, or at a subordinate shrine (as described below). When they agree to live by Mobrau’s rule, they make a small cut on a knob of their spine, insert a few grains of the sacred white sand, and then bandage over it so that the sand heals inside their flesh. Every year, on the year’s longest day, they must attend a shrine and add more sand to the scar-sac that develops. (Some who have obeyed for decades have wens the size of oranges.)

There is no concrete mystic advantage to pledging fealty at this level, but every Mobrau cultist has nightly dreams of great beauty and pleasure, visions of the paradise that awaits a world utterly in thrall to Mobrau. These dreams fade, as dreams do, but give the Mobrites a great deal of confidence even during severe hardships.

Belonging also has practical benefits. For one thing, any Mobrau cultist you meet takes care of you if you’re in trouble. If you’re not in trouble, there’s little motivation to serve Mobrau, which is why its faithful often make trouble for the faithless. Mobrau approves of conversion-by-the-sword. Indeed, anyone who enters the grove and disobeys Mobrau is vulnerable to being consumed by fire. (This is a 10d attack pool that does W+2K damage, Waste Killing.) Fortunately, the flames won’t strike outside the circle of trees.

Anyone who cuts off his sacred buboe immediately and permanently loses a Wound Box from every location as Mobrau punishes him for insolence. If the buboe is cut off by someone else, the cultist still suffers (for taking insufficient care of Mobrau’s property).

The Stranger Gets One Chance To Join Before A Lifetime Serving: Here’s the heart of that “conversion by the sword” business. Mobrau cultists are expected to seek power over the unconverted and, when they achieve that power, offer a chance to join the sect. Any Mobrau cultist who kills someone without offering the chance to ‘repent’ and join suffers terrible wracking pains, inflicting a point of Killing damage on every location. The same punishment awaits a cultist who offers the person a second chance after being refused. Some cultists have died after asking a loved one four times to join them in service.

If the offer is refused, the cultist can perform the enslavement ritual. But this rite can only be worked upon those who permit it, so usually it’s offered as an alternative to death. When the rite is complete (it consists of a muttered prayer to Mobrau and the uncovering of the sacred buboe), the slave must see the person who performed the rite at least once a day or suffer an Area 1 Shock attack. The slave is freed upon the death of the enslaver, though the Mobrites try to keep that secret. Freedom can also be achieved through initiation or spiritual warfare (see page 138).

The Beloved Of Mobrau You Shall Serve and Aid. The Despised Of Mobrau You Shall Deceive And Destroy: If a Mobrite knowingly leaves another cultist in distress—hungry, thirsty, cold, unclad, imprisoned, without shelter—the Mobrite is tormented by nightmares and loses a Wound Box from his torso until he makes amends. The same punishment awaits those who voluntarily spend more than one night under the same roof with an unbeliever.

However, Mobrau also blesses the obedient with the means to deceive outsiders. Every Mobrau follower emits a subtle perfume that narcotizes suspicion and brings agreement—but only when dealing with the faithless. When using any Charm-based Skill on the unbeliever, any set of Width 2 gets promoted to Width 3.
**Show Your Faith With Blood For Mobrau:** On the shortest night of the year, every Mobrite must go to the temple or to a subordinate shrine and sacrifice a warm-blooded animal by breaking its neck, hanging it by its hind legs, and slitting its throat over the sacred sand. Mobrites who do this are instantly healed of all damage and illness. Those who fail to do so (and it must be attended to in person) take an Area 10 Killing attack as Mobrau strikes them with convulsions and open weeping sores.

**Those Whose Service Is Pure May Become Priests And Guide Their Fellows:** After serving Mobrau for two years or longer, a cultist can make a special pilgrimage to the temple on the shortest winter night and perform a human sacrifice to become a priest. The sacrifice victim must be someone who refused conversion to Mobrau and who also resisted enslavement. If the sacrifice is made, the killer becomes a priest and may take a handful of white sand away with him. Wherever he plants that sand in the soil becomes a subordinate shrine to Mobrau, where new cultists can be inducted and sacrifices offered. Gradually it becomes whiter and sandier until, after fifty years, it’s the size of the original sand bar. But unlike the temple in the swamp, this shrine can be destroyed (using ‘spiritual warfare,’ described on page 138) and Mobrau cannot strike interlopers with fire at it.

In addition to having his own shrine, the priest gains the Voice of Mobrau: Any time he’s speaking to Mobrites, any pairs he rolls with Command Skills are widened to 3x sets.

The priest can charge fees for access to his shrine and, if he pronounces judgment on a court matter brought before him by Mobrites, they are expected to abide by it at risk of being excluded from Mobrau’s delightful dreams. But a priest who gives advice that Mobrau dislikes can also find himself cut off from the visions of reward.

---

**The Cult of Mobrau**

Currently there are three major priests of Mobrau. Two of them are goblins living in the swamp in very traditional small-scale tyranny. They have villages far off the beaten path where they monopolize shrine access, engage in a sort of grudging socialism, and periodically raid their non-worshipful neighbors for food, profit and warm bodies. In the past many of those captives converted, especially when they realized that the alternative was slavery, but recently their neighbors have become very vigilant about defense and (consequently) very wary of any stranger who might be a Mobrite in disguise.

The more interesting shrine was founded by a sprite named Marhaul, a traveling herbalist who got captured, was enslaved, but figured out where the temple was and went there figuring (correctly) that if she initiated herself she’d no longer have to serve. She then set off, tearfully told of her capture, and roused a group of gnomes on the swamp’s borders to strike at the ‘debased villains.’ But of course she’d warned her cultists beforehand. It worked so well that two years later she tried the same thing with a group of credulous orc mercenaries a few towns upriver. Two of them escaped, but she got one as a sacrifice, so she has her sand in hand and is looking for a good site to set up her shrine. Currently, she has traveled far, far, far away from the cult’s initial home, with a group of eight goblin bodyguards. She’s eager to spread Mobrau’s word.

**Might 2, Territory 3, Sovereignty 3, Treasure 2, Influence 2**

**Assets:** Eloquent Diplomats, Blessed Cult, Permanent Underclass
Darohay’s observances are not talked about so much as talked around. As a fertility cult, its practices are morally suspect among polite gnomish company, but too many people have seen too many failing farms make impressive reversals to dismiss the goddess entirely.

**Location:** Not all of the predominantly gnome-inhabited plains of Ardwin are settled. The population isn’t so thick that you can’t find large acreages of undeveloped prairie. This is particularly true for land with less access to water, where the hills and fields are kinder to scrubby sedge grass than to typical gnomish crops.

In the middle of one such wilderness, there’s a dell hidden among a series of low, rolling hills, and anyone who tops one of the surrounding mounds is treated to a breathtaking sight. The low valley before them is absolutely filled with flowers—bright buttery golden in spring, deepening to a peachy rose in summer, and finally turning velvety blood red in autumn.

(In winter? In winter the dell is not there. From the first snowfall to the Spring Equinox, the valley of Darohey simply does not exist.)

The blooms are the size of a little coin, but so thick upon the soil that one can hardly see through to the pale green stalks holding them up.

Anyone who walks into the blossoms is ankle deep after three strides, quickly rising to waist height at the very center of the vale. It is there, at the center, when one is the focus of a bowl of glorious beauty, that Darohey speaks.

**Agenda:** Fertility. Darohey seeks to make the land bloom and increase the offspring of her followers.

**The Blessings, The Laws**

*Know Darohey And Know Increase, But Yield Unto Her The Firstborn From Her Fertility:* To become a Darohey cultist, one needs only accept her rule from the sacred dell and eat a petal from one of her flowers. Upon leaving the dell, a bright gold ring forms around the irises of the cultist’s eyes. The thin ring requires a Difficulty 3 Sight roll to spot casually. If the cultist is face to face with someone and looking wide-eyed, it’s noticeable without a roll. Even when seen, it’s not unnatural—it could be passed off as an unusual bit of pigmentation, if you’re not superstitious.

Once per month, the cultist can bless a Company with a temporary +1 Territory bonus. A Company cannot benefit from this more than once per month, no matter how many cultists bless it. This benefit takes the form of fecund fields or beasts, or unusually productive work. The cultists cannot use this power between the first snowfall and the Spring Equinox.

However, every cultist is expected to offer the firstborn of all his animals—cattle, sheep, ducklings, kittens—to Darohey by taking it to the grove, letting it eat the flowers, and then setting it free. (This applies only to animals born after initiation.) Animals offered in this way have their eyes turn **completely** golden. If a Darohey follower kills a golden-eyed animal or eats of its flesh (even unknowingly) he permanently loses a Wound Box from his head and becomes sterile. He loses the Wound Box but remains fertile if he sees someone else trying to harm one of Darohey’s animals but does nothing to prevent it.

**Spiritual Warfare**

It’s up to individual GMs whether totemic curses can be broken with mortal magic or epic quests, but there is one way to escape from spiritual punishments: A different Blessed Cult can collectively pray for his release. This is a Sovereignty+Influence roll, opposed by the curse-cult’s Sovereignty +Influence. This is a dynamic contest, with the single Highest set prevailing. However, the sect praying for release takes a -1d penalty if it’s asking on behalf of someone who is not, himself, an initiate.
If a cultist goes an entire year without bringing the firstborn of his animals to the dell, he gets the Wound Box and sterility punishment until he brings the animals and consecrates them.

Members of the sect also offer their own firstborn children, by taking them to the valley and offering them a flower to eat. This must happen before the child is five years old, or else Darohey punishes (as described above). The children who eat the blossom are treated as initiates—receiving the dreams and the fertility blessing, having to obey the bans—whether they want it or not.

Darohey Is Jealous And Success Is Only From Her: Once per month, Darohey smites an unbeliever close to the cultist (if there are any). This takes the form of a fertility curse. Hens lay bad eggs, cattle have stillbirths or give sour milk, land becomes parched and stingy. This inflicts a -1 Territory penalty to one Company and, as with the benefits of blessings, the penalty never gets beyond -1, no matter how many Darohey cultists are innocently infecting it with their proximity. Additionally, human beings who aren’t believers have a difficult time conceiving when their neighbors are cultists. While those in Darohey’s sect don’t have to want this and can’t control or direct it, they’re usually aware of it through dreams in which they (for instance) tear apart a neighbor’s cattle barehanded, or uproot his crops. The only respite from this happens between the first snowfall and the Spring Equinox.

You Shall Spread The Seed Of The Word On Fertile Soil, But Withhold From Barren Places: To become a priestess of Darohey, a female initiate must travel to the dell with a pot of soil, uproot one of the plants, and take it away with her. (Only women can serve Darohey in this fashion.) That plant, so long as it lives, serves as a shrine to the goddess. People can eat its leaves to become initiated and can offer their animal sacrifices to it before releasing them. If transplanted into good soil, the plant grows rapidly.

Priestesses immediately gain a +2d+ED bonus to all Vigor rolls. However, if the plant (or, post sowing, their Darohey garden) dies, so does the priestess. No exceptions. Note that like all of Darohey’s curses and blessings, the Vigor bonus disappears during the winter—just like the flowers.

Anyone who kills a priestess of Darohey after the Spring Equinox and before the first snowfall becomes permanently sterile, sexually deadened, and loses a Wound Box in the torso. These symptoms are relieved in the winter, but the only way to be permanently freed is to become Darohey initiate, or to engage in spiritual warfare.

The Cult of Darohey

The sect is widespread and disorganized. There is little in the way of ‘leadership’ because the soft approach works so well. Cultists move into a new area and their farm prospers, while their neighbors work harder and harder just to break even. When those neighbors ask for advice or aid, the cultists are happy to help, and can sincerely say, “You know what worked for me? Darohey. Her way is truly a better way to live…”

Those lovely groves can be found on prosperous family farms all the way to the mountains in the north and in hidden groves in the western forests.

Might 2, Territory 3, Sovereignty 3, Treasure 3, Influence 2

Assets: Blessed Cult, Predictable Bounty, Unbalanced Economy
Enemies of Awful Scale

The mountains north of Ardwin are brutal and inclement, and not only because they are home to orc-hults so suspicious and insular that they reject even connections to their neighboring orcs. The peaks are cold, tall, angular, full of unexpected crevasses and plunging, hidden valleys. For all this, they are home to a great store of game—goats, birds, sheep and squirrels all feed orcs, along with predators ranging from hawks to mountain lions (which are also eaten by orcs). But the larger predators need to be more mobile, ranging ever-farther in search of beasts large enough to fill their bellies, or else striking smaller meals with great frequency.

The tallest, iciest peaks are home to the deadliest predators of all, the monsters that are legends to the civilized and educated orcs who trade with Ardwin’s other upright denizens. The tales of hot-blooded lizards who scream scalding steam, fly miles every day seeking food, and are capable of wiping out a shallow hult single-handedly? They’re dismissed as credulous stories from unsophisticated hill folk, their minds no doubt addled by excessive cannibalism.

They’re true though. The drakons can boil an entire lake to scoop the fish off its surface, then sleep for a year, or two, or a decade, before rising to gorge again. They’re fierce, hungry, swift, and well beyond the killing ability of any individual within the nation.

They’re also the degenerate offspring of the true dragons from across the sea, beings as smart as any elf, stubborn as any dwarf, and greedy as any goblin.
The most-requested rules adaptation for REIGN at this juncture was ‘rules for big clashes between epic individuals and companies of mere mortals.’ At least once, the example of the Hulk facing off against the US Army was bruited about.

I’m not going to stat up a bunch of Ardwin dragons. I’ll leave that fun exercise for individual GMs. What I am going to do is provide a framework for resolving physical clashes on the Company level when facing an individual that’s a credible threat to a city, army or other armed enterprise.

The Factors of an Epic Threat

What separates an ‘epic threat’ warranting a general call to arms from a simple insurrection or (for that matter) from an unusually competent bar room brawler? Two things. One is, the epic threat is an individual. (If it wasn’t, you could stat it with the Company rules, after all.)

The second thing is, it possesses two or more of the following factors that let it resist individual deterrence or which allow it to menace large, armed groups.

To qualify as an epic threat, an individual, monster or entity must possess at least two of those factors, and one of the factors has to be aggressive. (Those are the first three factors listed — the ones in red text.)

For each factor it possesses, it has Might 1. This is why the spell Cataclysmic Transformation produces Might 2: It gives the caster Terror and Carnage.

Example: A drakon finds its way out of the mountains. The GM has given it two wings, two legs, and two heads (’cause why not?). Each of these locations has 20 wound boxes and its torso has 40. Each head can breathe scalding steam once before it has to go and reload its stomach and let its throat cool. Each breath attack is an Area 10 Killing attack, ouch. It flies at 30’ per round. People who’ve never seen a giant murder lizard before take a Morale Attack 4 every round. Finally, it’s got AR4 on every location. It can make some bite and claw attacks too, if it doesn’t spit steam.

The Factors

- **TERROR.** If the creature can produce a Morale Attack every round without any limiting factor, it can produce stampedes and disrupt entire settlements.

- **CARNAGE.** If the creature can produce an Area Attack every round without a limiting factor, that makes it a broad menace.

- **MAYHEM.** If the entity can reliably make three or more attacks per round, it’s more than most small unit tactics can handle.

- **INDESTRUCTIBLE.** Armor 4+ on every location makes a creature pretty epic.

- **MOSTLY IMPERVIOUS.** If it has Armor 5+ on all but one location, that’s also a concern.

- **AIRBORNE.** Creatures that can fly are a particular problem for armies that can’t.

- **SWIFT.** If the creature has a base movement rate of 50’+ per round, it can out maneuver infantry and give cavalry a good challenge.

- **LEVIATHAN.** Does it have 150+ total wound boxes? That’s epic.

This gives it the factors of Terror, Indestructible, Airborne and Leviathan. Though it also has an Area Attack, it can only do that twice before having to break out, so it doesn’t qualify for Carnage. With four factors, it attacks with Might 4.
Pretty simple so far, right? These things are largely handled like Companies that don’t have to worry about Sovereignty and which can only take Might-based actions. There are some individual refinements to those specific actions, as listed below.

**Attack**

Let’s face it: This is largely what epic threats do. It’s what makes them threats. If they went around making huge statues of themselves (as if they were trying to Rise in Stature) they’d merely be epic eccentrics.

When epic entities attack, their Might temporarily drops, just as it does for a regular Company. (This is covered in a separate section “Epic Injuries,” starting on page 143.) If they take a hit that would cause a Company to lose a point off a quality, that, too, is handled as explained under “Epic Injuries.”

**Raiding.** If a threat makes a move on your treasury, you may just want to back off slowly with your hands up and let him have it. Unlike an invading army, its ability to actually haul away booty may be limited. Specifically, it can’t haul away more than Wealth 5. It can only increase a Treasure rating as much as it could with Wealth 5.

**Annexing.** Another job that’s really best handled by a large number of mere mortal invaders than by one deathless monster. An epic threat can only annex land equal to Territory 1, and that only as long as it’s physically present. Sure, the threat of its return works for a while—call it months equal to its Might. But if it’s not there, people get lazy, no matter how detailed their instructions were.

If the threat incorporates either the Swift or Airborne factor, it can take and hold a maximum of Territory 2. If it has both, it can manage to terrify Territory 3 into obedience, but that’s it without forming some sort of Company to help it oppress.

**Symbolic Victory.** Without the wide but diffuse presence of a Company and its agents, the personal gains of a symbolic victory are transitory. An individual beast can temporarily increase an allied Company’s Influence, but that’s really its only gain. However, if it attacks to reduce its target’s Sovereignty or Influence, those losses are permanent. (Providing memorable narratives is one thing at which epic threats excel.)

**Pre-Emptive Defense.** This can be handled without any change to the rules.

**Defend**

It’s a bit harder for one individual (invulnerable or not) to defend himself against an encircling force than it is for a massed force to break, dissolve, and reform in a couple days. Therefore, when attacked, an epic threat can only defend dynamically. It can’t just generate gobble dice and try to ride it out.

**Unconventional Warfare**

While epic threats can target whatever they please with unconventional attacks, if their scheme is discovered beforehand it automatically fails. Unconventional warfare is premised on surprise and conspiracy, and a collective defending against an individual has too many options to protect, move or replace assets that are vulnerable to unconventional attack. Moreover, epic threats can’t exfiltrate. They might be able to sneak away as individuals, but they can’t make rolls to cover their tracks the way a well-connected conspiracy can.

**Policing**

While an entity with epic capacities can, in the face of unconventional warfare, choose to either roll up the conspiracy singlehandedly or foil it during its deed (that is, can take dynamic or contested options), it cannot halt an exfiltration. A lone wizard of awesome ability may
singlehandedly strike down a group of villains, but when they scatter to the winds along pre-planned escape routes, that same enchanter is unlikely to be able to get all of them.

When armies clash, it ends with ceded territory, strategic withdrawal, the honored dead, and the survivors bandaging their wounds. But what happens when one ‘side’ is a single individual? What does “lose a point off a Quality” mean to a drakon (or to the Incredible Hulk)?

It depends, because not all losses of Might are created equal. Some are temporary and some are permanent. If the Company rules would yield a temporary loss, use the results on the “Lesser Epic Injury” list.

Typically, the GM assigns one which fits the narrative, but depending on how far out you’re abstracting events, the more reasonable it becomes to roll at random. I’d recommend GM choice unless it’s a background event—an epic GMC confronting a non-PC Company to set up

---

**Lesser Epic Injuries**

1. **Misery.** The creature isn’t physically harmed, but if it has Passions, one of them is negatively impacted and the issue is ongoing. A loved one or treasured object gets captured, for example.

2. **Battered.** Half the entity’s Wound Boxes at each location are filled with Shock damage.

3. **Tragic Loss.** Like Misery, only this time the valued thing has been destroyed beyond recall. Could be a tangible item, or a more abstract price. (“This rampage has cost you all my respect, father.”)

4. **Inspires Nemesis.** Some individual has dedicated himself to revenge on the entity. He’s obsessed. If he can’t kill the epic threat, he makes do ruining everything it loves and gathering others to do his dirty work.

5. **Shows Weakness.** In the course of its battle, the threat did something to give its enemies courage, revealing a fear or weakness—or even something they only perceive as such. The entity’s Morale Attack drops by 1 against this Company. (This is only an option to epic threats that produce Morale Attacks, of course.)

6. **Blistered.** The epic beast has been weakened. It’s Armor rating drops two points off every location for a month. (Naturally, this result only makes sense against threats with Armor ratings.) Its foes may or may not know that it’s now more vulnerable.

7. **Defilade Removed.** The Armor rating on one hit location drops to zero for one month. (Assuming it has some ongoing Armor rating, of course.)

8. **Exhausted.** The entity is forced to flee the site of the confrontation and is unable to attack or take any other meaningful action for a month. (Probably licking its wounds and/or sulking in its tent.)

9. **Hurt.** One limb is completely filled with Shock damage and two points of Killing damage as well. Lucky shot? Concentrated fire? Who knows, but the threat may have never experienced pain like this before.

10. **Grounded.** If the entity can usually fly, it’s stuck on the ground for a month. If it usually has the Swift factor, its movement rate is reduced to 15’ per round. If it doesn’t have either of those traits, it’s stuck in a small area, no bigger than a single village or mountain. What keeps it in place depends on the narrative—illness, a curse, injuries, moral obligation? Whatever works.
some later plot point. Alternately, an absurdly generous GM might let the players pick which issue crops up for the ‘monster’ if they can explain how they accomplish the injury. But don’t expect that to go through without veto if the idea is (to be blunt) stupid.

It’s the same with “Greater Epic Injuries.” If an outcome would result in a permanent loss of Might, the GM assesses a problem off the list and assigns it. In rare occasions, a targeted result or random outcome may be more fun, but it’s usually best to go with GM judgment.

Greater Epic Injuries

1. Flensed. “Flense” is a verb meaning “to strip the fat,” typically off a carcass, but in this case it was done alive. It’s not necessarily fat either (though it could be). The creature has been burned or peeled or otherwise evenly basted with wounding force. It permanently loses a point of Armor at every location. (This only makes sense if it has permanent Armor, naturally.)

2. Achilles’ Heel. All the Armor at one location is reduced to zero, permanently. Again, if the entity doesn’t have some sort of permanent Armor, pick a different injury.

3. Grendeled! Someone has removed one of the entity’s limbs, possibly hanging it over a door frame. Ouchies! It now has a missing arm, leg, tail, pedipalp or what have you and any hits to that location go straight to the torso.

4. Savage Pummeling. Half the wound boxes at each location are filled with Killing damage. This is the literal meaning of “beaten half to death.”

5. The Rasputin Treatment. The entity has inspired the formation of a conspiracy to destroy it, like the infamous Russian mystic Rasputin. This means the GM constructs a Company whose sole motive is to destroy the entity or, failing that, stymie and thwart it. It’s like a nemesis that you can’t physically kill.

6. A Bad Reputation. Just what it sounds like: The epic threat is now renowned through the region as a, well, as an epic threat. The GM picks three companies in the area: Each of them acts against the entity as soon as it’s convenient or opportune.

7. Impaired. Forever. The entity has permanently lost a facility that contributes to its menace. Maybe it’s now blind or deaf. Perhaps it somehow lost that Area attack that was instrumental in driving off the hoi polloi. Or maybe it’s laboring under a curse and has to drink a virgin’s blood every full moon, on penalty of death. It all depends on the resources the enemy Company brought to bear.

8. A Good Thing to Beat. News about the fight has gotten out, and it’s being told on the Company’s terms. Whether they’re telling the truth, spinning the facts or outright lying like rugs, their version of the battle is the standard narrative. Since they got some good licks in on the threat, they’re now regarded with greater respect: The Company permanently gains a point of Influence.

9. A Most Excellent Enemy. You know what unifies a fractious and sullen community better than just about anything? It’s not new public works or an inspiring leader. It’s a common foe. People who are scared and angry look for an outlet, and a Company that’s just tangled with an epic menace is usually happy to give them one. The Company permanently gains a point of Sovereignty.

10. Tactical Intelligence. Regardless of who won or lost the battle, the Company did something to the beast that revealed a weakness. Its many eyes were watching and now its many brains are thinking. The next time this Company fights that entity in any sort of Might-based clash, the Company’s sets all gain a +1W bonus. It happens the time after that, too. Indeed, this +1W advantage is permanent until either the Company or the epic threat is no more.
President Obama must have crapped a boulder when the UFO sat down in Mumbai. Or the French. Some French people think there’s French culture, which took a piss, and its piss-puddle is global culture. More or less how America thinks about power, or Europe thinks about history.

But no, Mumbai got it. Mumbai got the blinding white light with all those squiggly energy snarls, the thundering boom that blew out windows all around and sent twelve-foot waves crashing on the bay shore. Then the crackling light all around the blocky brick of a spaceship as it wavered and trembled its way through the sky before setting down in Shivaji Park. Wham! Clouds of dust and millions, millions of Indians staring gape jawed at the Big Dumb Object that just teleported into their laps.

Some people ran back and a few cautiously crept forward, and then the police had a cordon around it and I would guess about a hundred and forty people in the city sat up at their desks or stools or samosa stands and said, “They can’t hear me!” Just like people in France at that moment sat up straight muttering, “Ils ne m’entendre pas!” and in China saying whatever that is in Mandarin or Cantonese.

The door opened and a thousand cell phones filmed the first aliens to step foot on Earth (or at least the first to get recorded doing it). We now know—and by “we” I mean people who have the first clue about aliens—that those critters were tiddahs. That’s what we named them, because they don’t have names, because aliens don’t have names. They have identities but none of us had an inkling of that, we just watched these two things that looked like orange-
and-yellow preying mantises with tentacles where their heads should be, nine feet tall and moving out onto the grass fast. And then Farida Gaodam, a woman whose courage should make any man on Earth feel like his testicles could comfortably fit in a peanut shell, she stepped forward and said, “Who are you?”

The world held its breath as those expressionless insectile monsters regarded her with their tentacle-heads writhing like question marks, and then one reached out with a four-foot long serrated forelimb and cut her right in half.

In every alien invasion movie since “The Day the Earth Stood Still” there’s the screwup at first contact that ends with a chatter of machineguns, and the Mumbai police department didn’t disappoint. Watch the video. It takes less than one second for those aliens to get literally torn to shreds by bullets. Then the cops fuckin’ storm the breech, they charge up the ramp guns blazing while that white lightning starts sparking again, and a few of them jump out as the ramp starts retracting, but there were still five guys stuck in there when the army showed up. There isn’t film of what happened next, but the consensus is, they huffed and puffed and blew the door in, sent in a squad and got three of the cops out before the ship twinkled and sparked and blew out any remaining windows when it disappeared.

The whole cock-up in Mumbai took less than an hour, during which it turned out those five cops had killed six more aliens of various descriptions before getting locked in. They were starting to smell a change in the atmosphere when the soldiers blew the door in, so ET had finally figured out that humans are as vulnerable to smothering as we are to mantis claws.

The ship disappeared and the UN condemned the Indian government live on TV—bet they were hoping their new Sky Gods were watching, though they stopped short of “I, for one, welcome our new alien overlords.” There are reports that Russian, CIA and Iranian agents all tried to steal the dead alien chunks, and that a couple billionaires tried to buy them or (next best thing) some of the police who’d been on shipboard. You never saw those cops again, that’s for sure. I’d like to think they’re in quarantine on some pleasant island.

The next step wasn’t nearly as direct, and it wasn’t taken by the aliens, and it wasn’t managed by the US or the UN or by any other national governing body. It a guy called Cai Ting who lived out in some backwater province I can’t pronounce. Turns out, ol’ Cai was Earth’s strongest psychic broadcaster (which, as we now know, isn’t saying much) and he managed to convince the renegade Queen Leatherback on the ship (because that’s what it was) to take another try. He got them to drop space gravel over London, Shanghai, Chicago and Tokyo at the stroke of midnight, local time and, more importantly, he got them to do this a day after he loudly and publicly predicted they’d do this.

Cai, the psychic—and let’s make that the strongest psychic out of six billion people—had just about enough brain-juice to communicate simple concepts to the ETs, but he was almost as head-deaf as the rest of us. So you can call him the first suck-puppy if you want, but I don’t think that’s accurate. Certainly he was less dramatic than the motley crew of six that showed up in Brussels claiming to speak for the aliens. No one would have taken ‘em seriously if they hadn’t all spoken in unison, in Italian, despite the fact that three of them had never learned Italian and one wasn’t even fluent in a European language. But the strongest receiver, turns out, was from Napoli, so all the nearby pickups heard the rogue Leatherback’s thoughts in Italian.
Out of the Violent Planet

The Chorus of Six was happy to tell the world that the violence was all a mistake, that the tiddah hadn’t realized Farida was actually alive, the visitors are our friends, we come in peace and, by the way, was there anyone a little more sentient they could talk to? ‘Cause obviously Earthlings were sentient, since we’d built satellites and cities and those crazy machines that tore the mantids into orange-yellow shreds but… where were the rulers?

The officials in Brussels went ‘round and ‘round with the Six for quite some time before they realized that it was only the aliens’ Italian sock-puppet who was drawing distinctions between the concepts of “ruler,” “sentient” and “psychic.”

In all modesty, I was the one who twigged to that, and my reward for this brilliant insight was, first, to get marginalized, second, to lose my job six months later and, finally, to wind up on a terrorist watch list with a bunch of trumped-up charges after my name. Remember kids: That’s what happens to xentropologists who guess right when the men in charge really, really want a wrong answer. I’m sure they’d have had me quietly wet-worked if the Imperial Leatherbacks hadn’t shown up just in time for me to go underground.

-Salvatore DiPaoli, Ph.D

Introduction

Everyone is psychic. Everyone in the known universe. Everyone except us.

Think about what that means for a minute. Humankind is unique. Alone in all the cosmos, we have sentience without psychic ability. Sure, one in a hundred thousand people has a tiny inkling of it, but in terms of historical impact that’s been a genetic hiccup on par with having your earlobes detached. A receiver’s no good if no one’s broadcasting, and vice versa. 99+% of humankind is psychically inert, while 100% of alien sentience is psychically active.

Aliens don’t have language.

At least, they don’t have spoken language. Their written communication is quite advanced, better than ours in some ways, but why would they need to talk? They can just beam thoughts and ideas across.

Some alien cultures have traditions of profound intellectual discourse and debates. Others? They get by with a nifty little trick that humans translate as “ego breaking.” Instead of persuasion, they just invade minds and rewire them so that disobedience is inconceivable (or, if you’re not that good, at least uncomfortable.) The most degraded inmate in the harshest Earthly prison has a freedom of thought that is beyond the reach of 80% of the galaxy’s sentient.

Not every race can ego break, and some minds are too strong to enslave, but there are other ways. Alien psychics can hijack muscular control centers, making another’s body a mere drone or puppet under their command. Others can simply broadcast enough psychic feedback that the victim can’t pay attention to anything else.

Picture, if you can, warfare with these abilities. They’re not technologies, they’re not developments, they’re natural resources, as easy to the gifted aliens as clenching a fist. Would such battles focus on armies? No, the last thing you’d want to do is cluster your troops! That makes it too easy to break their egos in one grand sweep, or puppetize half and send them against the other half. Warfare for psychics is, you find the location where your enemy has lots of people and you move heaven and earth to get some kind of slaver mind in range. Wars are fought in idea-space, not the three dimensions of armies and aircraft.
Aliens don’t build weapons.

Let me repeat that: *Aliens don’t build weapons.* Until they met us, they had no concept of making a machine with no purpose beside harming others. Why would they? The carnivores either have all the fighting gear they need bestowed by nature, or they can just think their prey dead. The aliens who can’t kill with their brains can make a meal want to walk over and lie down in their fire, or they can make it lie there whether it wants to or not.

Extraterrestrials with none of these abilities? They either make do without (like herbivores or entities that subsist on light and heat) or they’re slave-races for the races that can kill, hijack, and brainwash. Alien society revolves around the psychics strong enough to yoke other minds to their will, thereby becoming stronger, so that they can enslave others, increasing their might yet again, over and over until there are planets that are world-minds, wholly occupied by a single identity that has overwhelmed millions of others.

Then they came to Earth.

They tried to turn humans into fawning pets. They hit humans with ego breaks that would turn an average psychic into a slavering fanatic, and one Earthling in a thousand was receptive enough to think that maybe he’d smelled a pleasant aroma.

They tried to simply seize control of human bodies. One in a thousand was receptive enough to get a mild tremor or facial tic.

They tried to kill us and one in a thousand felt their hearts briefly slow.

The extraterrestrials came to invade Earth and found a race invulnerable to attacks so commonplace that they were instinctive.

A race with guns.

---

**Introduction**

**So, What Now?**

Now is one year after Mumbai and as far as the average Joe Dork in the street knows, the aliens are extremely cautious about approaching us after the inexplicable Indian bloodbath. There has been limited exchange of pleasantries and a consortium of governments (meaning, the US, the EU, Russia and China) are collaborating on a space station “where our visitors will be more comfortable negotiating exchanges of culture and technology.”

Mostly, citizens know spin. Most of that “stellar consortium” is concentrating on developing nukes that can reach Mars, despite the evident fact that the aliens who can get to our solar system at all can just teleport themselves wherever the hell they want. If you could get someone in the know to discuss matters in a frank and open manner, he’d probably describe that “contact station” as “a pickup bar where aliens come to trade tech for psi-blind soldiers.”

But between the Beyond Top Secret guys combing the hills for psychics who can negotiate with aliens, and the ignorant masses hoping for the best while having nightmares about tiddahs, there is a murky gray layer of mercenaries, gun runners, people smugglers, unlicensed psychics and rogue xenthropologists. The military-industrial-intelligence combines refer to these freelancers as “Private Contractors.” “PCs” for short.

So far, Earth has made contact with two major stellar civilizations and a handful of struggling independent systems. The big players are the Leatherbacks and the Cyblobs, but both empires contain many species. Given the way psychic warfare works, converting populations is far easier than seizing land.
Think fishy, scaly crustaceans with cockroach-brown skin, glassy eyes on the tops of their heads, a sort of floppy fin or sail on their backs and three short, trembly tentacles for faces. Three stubby legs can hold them upright for short spans of time in Earth gravity, and with these they can squirm forward on flat ground, covering about ten feet in a minute. They’re more maneuverable in liquid (though water poisons them), their natural habitat. But even there they wallow more than swim. That’s OK. They don’t need to be fast. They can just teleport instead.

This doesn’t mean they pop up all over the place: Psychically warping space is still rare among them, but it’s a 1 in 1,000 occurrence instead of 1 in 100,000 like it is with the other races. Moreover, Leatherback warpers have historically tended to inbreed with one another, producing bloodlines that can produce warpers as frequently as one egg in ten.

**Social Order**

Leatherbacks aren’t any better at ego breaks or possession than any other race, and worse than many, but as a species they tend to be psychically strong, so those tricks are far harder to work on them. Independent and mobile, some Leatherbacks (especially warpers outside the bloodlines) live freebooting lives as pirates and smugglers. But that sort of petty liberty is disdained by the Imperial Leatherbacks, a sprawling court of the five strongest teleporting lineages and their hangers-on.

The Imperials leverage their mobility to serve as the circulatory system of their empire. They decide who and what travels where. Worlds and systems within the Empire may be dominated by another race of puppeteers or breakers, but on the galactic level, it’s the Imperials allocating resources, dictating trades, and stifling information.

---

**Greed vs. Wrath**

Many players, regarding the aliens’ access to teleportation, are going to ask “Why don’t they just nuke the site from orbit? Seriously, if I was psychic and found a psi-immune race of warrior monkeys, it’d be all ‘Rocks fall, everyone dies.’” It’s a reasonable question.

The answer is, psychics, while callous, are perhaps more empathetic than humans. Ever listened to a million souls screaming in horror, suddenly silenced? Even a cynical elder Cylob is going to avoid that headache if possible. Granted, they understand that the human shrieks would be (mostly) silent, but they’re just not used to deploying orbital strikes. It’s an unusual idea in their tactical lexicon. That’s part of it.

The other part is considerably less beneficent. They’re greedy. They don’t like to destroy anything they might one day possess, and given the longevity of a Cylob entity that can distribute its identity across a thousand biological brains with more being born into it daily, they can afford to be patient. According to this setting, the intrinsic human evil is wrath. (I could make a historical case for this, really I could.) We tend to get pissed off and destroy that which annoys us, even if it annoys us by being inscrutable and mysterious instead of aggressive. The essential alien evil, on the other hand, is greed. (Or, if you prefer, gluttony.) They want to own people and if they can’t immediately seize something, they just redouble their efforts.

On an unrelated meta-game level, convincing your GM that the aliens’ most sensible course is to scour Earth clean of life with meteor strikes is probably not the way to get a long, satisfying campaign out of her.
The Leatherbacks

Culture

The central cultural notion of the Leatherback Empire is that Leatherbacks are heroic and special. They are treated much like celebrities are on Earth, to the point that there’s a thriving market in Leatherback DNA splices that won’t give you any of their badass psychic abilities, but will make you look more like a Leatherback.

(The counterpart to the Earthling tendency to turn savagely on a celebrity who disappoints—Hi Lindsay! Give Tom Cruise a fist-bump for me!—is Imperial disdain for non-warping Leatherbacks who disgrace themselves in public. They get a proper Mel Gibson treatment. Warping Leatherbacks, however, are just too valuable to punish. Even if their powers are weak and limited, their potential as brood-stock warrants a lifetime Get Out Of Jail Free card for any and all legal and ethical indiscretions. The only warp Leatherbacks who are allowed to be publicly vilified are those who choose to selfishly live the freebooter life or, worse, voluntarily leave the Empire for the Cyblobs or for a third option.)

Outside Leatherback adoration, culture within their Empire is parochial. Planets have their own music, stories and religions, just as they have their own histories and biologies. The Imperial families are pretty careful to keep it that way, too. They’ve had some annoying insurgencies arising based on religious or racist dogmas, including one where the ruling ego breakers were strong enough that the whole system had to be placed in quarantine. They send in expendable spies every fifty years, though now that they have access to humanity, taking the mind-slavers by surprise is sounding more and more attractive...

Other than that, they’re pretty laid-back about the governing and cultural prejudices of their client-planets. It’s hardly egalitarian, but it works. Join the Leatherbacks and you get access to the biota and creativity of a thousand worlds. (1,048 settled planets to be exact.) You get access on the terms of a snotty and egotistical ruling elite, but the option is to turn them down and enjoy isolation. At least, until the Cyblobs show up to make you shiny, happy and industrious.

The Empire gets hardassed if you try to take over a warp Leatherback, or if you hold out unreasonably with your own species’ warpers. The Leatherbacks promulgate a myth of warp hazards, which isn’t entirely untrue. They also have a lot of mind readers and ego breakers on hand to co-opt and enslave other warpers. They project an identity as “interstellar opportunity enablers” and they are well rewarded for their ruthlessness. Most worlds in the Empire have some warpers. Some have warpers who can reach other solar systems. A few have enough long-
jumpers that they could maintain interstellar trade if they chose to break away from the Empire. But the Empire is an 800-pound gorilla in the interstellar market, and given a choice between pissing off the Empire or pissing on an upstart rebel, most Imperial worlds openly support the Leatherbacks.

Goals

The primary Imperial goal, unstated because it’s so obvious to the rulers, is to maintain and expand their dominance of warp travel. FTL travel by machine is an idea to be suppressed by any means necessary (and when you have strong mind readers working for you, strangling research in the cradle gets a lot easier). Reclaiming Leatherback warpers brainwashed or enthralled by other factions (especially the Cyblobs) is always a mission of great importance. So is co-opting, seducing or destroying warp psychics of other species.

That’s the Empire’s reactionary and selfish goal. A rather more upbeat and positive goal is exploring space and finding new intelligences. Past a certain point, warp has no range limits (!) but the entity opening the rift has to have a solid idea of where the target is, and what. This means that to get to Earth, they had to know that they were looking at a sun of a particular size orbiting the galactic core at a particular rate. Once in-system, the jumper could get information about the planets and they picked out Earth as the most promising.

What are they hoping to find on those brave new worlds? (Not a psi-dead biological weapon like humanity, but they take what they get.) They want biological material (uncommon) and cultural contributions (very rare). Not every Imperial planet has an economy of plenty and comfort, but to their credit the Leatherbacks make an effort to prevent starvation. (The cynical view is, it’s cheaper and easier to forestall poverty than it is to suppress the bad news about it.) Most aliens won’t overpopulate because mind-reading lets powerful psychics attain a form of immortality (or at least ‘identity continuance’) and those immortals then have the perspective to perceive ecological problems on a global scale (easier to do when you have a thousand bodies) coupled to the means and motives to keep things in balance. Why let lesser minds breed unchecked on your world? If you’re a powerful psychic, you can probably program them to dislike reproduction.

That’s not to say every alien world is a stagnant nightmare utopia of smiling neuters happily denying themselves for the Supreme Mind. Plenty are, but there are worlds with practical shortages and threats. Often, the solution to pragmatic problems like construction issues and health care comes from alien biologies that evolved to face an entirely different set of problems. (If the Leatherbacks were motivated, for example, they could have their clients bioengineer a microbe...
that would eat carbon monoxide and excrete oxygen and stable fullerines, thereby cock-punching Earthly global warming in one mighty blow.) Controlling access to alien biology and, more, information about alien biology is one way the Leatherbacks keep their systems in line.

The same thing happens with culture. The human ability to murder aliens regardless of psychic strength is certainly our most noteworthy feature, but no other race has spoken poetry or the interaction between sound and logic-forms that we encounter every day in advertising jingles. “Music” and the idea that there can be music could, in time, become Earth’s #1 commodity in a galactic marketplace.

The Cyblobs

Have you ever been eating a nice fresh salad, maybe something from someone’s backyard garden, and suddenly there’s a squirming slender vermiform with too many legs on the end of your fork, staring at you? Magnify that until it’s twelve feet long and you’ve got the base stock of a Cyblob. Now put some metal limbs and steel plates on it here and there, along with some circuit boards and lights poking through the skin. That’s what the Cyblobs are today. Borg Queen meets giant undersea moray eel, only less sexy.

Social Order

The Cyblobs (which is Earthling for “cyber blobs”) are the unquestioned masters of ego breaking. Their psi is strong and with that they’re able to leash other species, those with greater native intelligence, better mind reading or superior psychic range.

The most important of their slave-races are the Flaques Boueuse, who have been seen by exactly one human, a French gundaddy who gave them the name. (“Flaque Boueuse” means “muddy puddle” and that’s what these creatures look like, a pile of slime in which someone disemboweled a cat and a TRS-80 home computer.) Flaques are adroit puppeteers but, more importantly, their ability to hold minds together in psychic contact is practically unlimited. If they hook up with another telepathic entity, their capacity rises instead of shrinking. A Cyblob who ego breaks a Flaque (or more likely, several) has the backbone of a psychic network that can cover an entire planet.

If the Cyblob can then get a Pokozica (“Epidermis.” Croatian.) hooked into the network, it’s really in business, because Pokozicas’ telepathy isn’t so overwhelming or
unlimited, but it is long range. With the Flaque, the Cyblob can theoretically link every sentience on a planet into a psychic gestalt, and with the Pokozica, it can make psychic contact with other planets.

Sadly, the Pokozica/Flaque Boueuse interface isn’t perfect. While a Cyblob can travel all over a planet, chaining wills with its ego break and adding them to its network without ever having to break contact (if the Cyblob has a Flaque Boueuse), it can’t reach through the Pokozica’s link and enslave a receiver on another world. Indeed, it can’t break egos through the Flaque, either. It has to be within range. (Don’t think this limit doesn’t drive the Cyblobs crazy, either. See “Goals” for a look at what they’re doing about it.)

What typically happens, then, is that the Cyblobs find a new sapient populace, warp in an ambitious young Cyblob and its fawning retinue of servants, and try to get it as close as possible to as many aliens as possible so that it can call them to serve it before anyone figures out what’s happening. For many planets, by the time they realize an alien is overlording its inhabitants, it’s too late. There are hundreds, or thousands, willing to die for love of the Cyblob. They may be networked by Flaque, letting them function with a single will. Individually powerful ego breakers may be able to pry some souls free of the Cyblob, but without Flaque-level interconnection, it’s always going to be minnows swimming away from a whirlpool. That’s assuming that the Cyblob was greedy and came alone. Often that’s the smart way to bet, but for a particularly ripe, populous or biologically diverse world, several rival Cyblobs may set down simultaneously and start carving the world up among them. They compete with one another, sure, but their prime goal is to claim the world for their collective. Any native who tries to play them against each other is in for a very, very rough time of it.

This might lead you to assume Cyblobs are super-geniuses, since they’ve got the think-power of a million minds running in harness, right? Thankfully, it’s not so. Sure, loads of processing power and memory help, but only to a point. In computer terms, all the RAM and hard drive space in the world won’t help you if you’re running MS-DOS 4.0. If a Cyblob is capable of coming up with an idea or solving a problem, it happens about ten times faster. If not, not.

It’s like the famous mathematician Ramanujan and his taxicab numbers. If you don’t think “Hey, you know what’s nifty about the number 1729? It’s the smallest natural number that can be expressed as the sum of two cubed digits two separate ways!” right off the bat, you probably wouldn’t notice that even if you spent all day contemplating 1729. You’d just get bored. Massively networked Cyblobs get bored with dizzying speed.

Moreover, Cyblobs aren’t all by themselves in those psychic networks. Individual personality can survive within the gestalt, if the Cyblob permits it. There are often hundreds or thousands of subordinate identities swimming around in the psi-soup, supported in hundreds of thousands of bodies, sometimes as many as a million.
So a planet has a big pooled consciousness, or several. These conjunctions can contact one another across interstellar distances but, without risking valuable Cyblob physical identities, they can’t attack one another. This is the foundation of the Cyblob Protectorate.

Without the Leatherbacks’ wealth of warpers (well… relatively speaking), the Protectorate has a lot less physical trade going on. They make up for this with information trading. The Leatherback Empire keeps scientific progress, even simple biological data, in lockdown. They don’t want their client worlds to know the structures of (say) a tiger’s DNA because those clients might then reverse-engineer tigers. If that planet’s going to have tigers, the Leatherbacks want to be the ones to sell the tigers. Cyblobs, on the other hand, reserve their uncommon warpers for critical missions (as described under “Goals”). The cultural goods that the Leatherbacks try to monopolize move much more freely among Protectorate worlds. After all, a religion or ideology that could threaten Leatherback dominance may not make a dent in Cyblob brainwashing, so why not let a thousand flowers bloom?

**Culture**

Put yourself in a Cyblob’s shoes, if it wore shoes instead of non-skid pads on its metal hindlimbs. Your mind has been augmented to the limit. You can make most entities you encounter love you with about as much effort as I put into that little shoes/non-skid pads joke. You run a planet. What do you want?

If you’re a typical Cyblob, you relish novelty and you treasure dissent. No really! Cyblobs like nothing better than people who tell them they’re wrong. One of their great strengths is their taste for differing perspectives. It’s not like they’re about to get emotionally insecure about their opinions—mind tyrants don’t do angst. Some minds differ from them as a component of friendship. They’re ego-broken and really want what’s best for the Cyblob, so they aren’t going to let it make a damaging mistake. Other times, Cyblobs keep enemies active, unbroken, and _hating_ them, in the name of an interesting point of view. If an alien messes with a Cyblob hard enough, the blob may not just spare it the mind-rape, it may _equip its rival with a Flaque Boueuse to help it form firmer opposing positions_. Cyblob hell is an echo chamber of yes-men.

That said, they draw a line at letting upstarts communicate off-planet. A healthy exchange of hatred is a fine thing, but there’s no point getting _stupid_ about it.

**Goals**

Most Cyblobs are into personal aggrandizement, but given the way their individual wills blend into the body politic, selfishness starts looking like patriotism. They believe their way is the best. It’s clearly good for them. They can make everyone a part of that ‘them.’ It then follows, as the day the night, that their way is the best for everyone.

Therefore, the best warpers of the Cyblob Protectorate are kept busy shuttling ambitious ego breakers from world to world, among the independents and planets within the Empire. They seize footholds where they can, sometimes getting driven off, sometimes engulfing an entire population, and sometimes bogging down into stalemate conflicts that can drag on for generations.

The real limit to Cyblob power is the range constraints on ego breaks. If they had the range of a Pokozica, they could conquer other worlds without getting off the couch, so their best funded and most secure research has been aimed at expanding their reach. So far, they’ve developed some mental disciplines that help, and built a few machines that amplify it a bit, and bodged together some biological enhancements that are good for an extra mile or so, but getting cosmic-range mind touching seems to be a difference of
The Cyblobs

Type, not degree. So they’ve taken the next step and are trying to find a way to blend the mental architecture of two very, very different races. No luck so far, which is good news. They’ve had similar slim results with attempts to steal the Flaques’ psychic networking powers.

Other than trying to expand their personal power, the main goal of the Protectorate is constant expansion. This is not just a race with the Empire (though it is that, definitely), it’s also a reflection of the ruling Cyblobs’ thirst for new sensations, new pleasures and new biologies to exploit.

The Cyblobs have only achieved communications with Earth in the last three months, but they’re already fascinated by psi-less consciousness. The notion of installing an “off” switch on their psychic receptivity has only occurred to the wildest and most ambitious outsiders, but if one were to succeed at gaining a selective version of human psi-defenses, it would change the nature of psychic conflict throughout the galaxy.

Unfortunately, even temporary psi-blindness would have terrifying consequences on a Cyblob’s mental stability. So the military game-changer would also be insane.

Qualities of the Cyblob

Influence: 4

Influence Asset: Small Horizon, Eloquent Diplomats

Might: 2

Sovereignty: 5

Sovereignty Asset: Mass Appeal

Territory: 2

Territory Assets: Defensible Terrain, Cultural Tradition

Treasure: 2

Treasure Asset: Permanent Underclass

The Free Worlds

Cosmic independence is a tough row to hoe. Unlimited warp means that, for all intents and purposes, every world shares a border with every other. Therefore, any world that opts out of the Protectorate and the Empire is likely to find itself pinned between them.

Each independent world has something about it that makes it untenable for occupation by both Cyblobs and Leatherbacks, and often it’s a factor that’s unique to one planet, race or solar system. But though they may not be able to share what ever it is that keeps them free, they can share news, information and the odd plea for help.

What Keeps Them Free

Note that the alien planets are here designated by their Earthling names. As with all things alien, identities expressed telepathically have a greater firmness than mere descriptive terms. Naturally, only Earthlings use these terms.

- Arco Iris: If things were different, Arco Iris would be a human tourist destination. Weaving a complicated orbit through a triple star system, the atmosphere of Arco Iris is constantly broken into rippling rainbow hoops. To human eyes
and sensibilities, it’s stupid beautiful, 24 hours a day. Though actually, the Arcodians have no concept of “day” because their orbit is so chaotic that there’s no recurring rhythm you can count on. Arco Iris’ stochastic orbit leaves it largely barren, supporting only life-forms that can withstand punishing radiation shifts, brutal weather and frequent, drastic temperature changes. This same staggering procession makes it hard for warpers from the Protectorate or the Empire to bring a ship directly to the planet, and the Arcodians have seeded their entire solar system with rapid-response warships filled with powerful telepaths, ready to pounce on any enemy incursion before it can make psychic contact with someone planetside. The penalty for communicating with anyone in the Protectorate or the Empire is both bodily death and personality erasure from the communal mindspace. Arcodian belligerence, along with the navigational hazards and threatening weather, leave Arco Iris free by default. Neither hegemony considers it worth conquering. When the Leatherback renegade who first contacted Earth fled our solar system, she went to Arco Iris.

- **Lugubre:** On gloomy, mist-wreathed Lugubre, the native biology favors high Psi, even though any psychic ability beyond telepathy is virtually unknown. Their culture is highly mannered and honor-driven and, most importantly, draws a keen distinction between what’s personal and what’s public. Invading privacy with telepathy is considered both a crime and a gross breach of propriety. The use of abilities like ego breaking and possession is illegal and, unlike many species, Lugubrites have the psychic brawn to throw off unwanted effects. This, coupled with intense suspicion of both major factions and some deft political maneuvering, keeps Lugubre free.

- **Mizu Sekai:** The corrosive seas of Mizu Sekai are a barrier to colonization simply because they tend to eat their way through equipment unless extreme precautions are taken. The dwellers on Mizu Sekai (serpentine creatures dubbed “hoshi unagi”) are of average psychic vulnerability, but have the advantage of being able to survive naked in the seas of their world. (Note that there is no dry land whatsoever on the planet.) The expense of bringing in a habitat for a Cyblob has left the world unappetizing to the more powerful ego breakers, though a few desperate and shady Cyblob breakers are at work in secret. As for the Leatherbacks, they’re indifferent to Mizu Sekai: It has no commodities they desire, so if it doesn’t want to join the Empire, they’re not going to bother taking an acid bath.

- **Planet Crapsack:** A dusty, volcanic planet named by a redneck American ductee, Planet Crapsack is a floating cosmic anomaly. It’s a true rogue planet, in orbit around no sun, just drifting through the void. It is, nevertheless, inhabitable. It has an atmosphere and sufficient geothermal energy. There’s no native life, but it’s governed by powerful psychic twins who emerged from the same egg. That’s not uncommon for their species (which has been labeled “Star Lice” by that same spacefaring yankee). What is uncommon is for one twin to be a powerful ego breaker, and the other to be an equally potent warper. The breaker twin keeps the permanent residents of Crapsack bound to a single command: Thou Shalt Not Tell Outsiders Where Thou Art. Being a motley assortment of condemned criminals, refugees and assorted galactic trash, they’re fine with this law. The warper twin keeps Crapsack supplied from Imperial and Protectorate black markets, from other independent worlds, and from a few undiscovered supply planets. Having contacted Earth early, Crapsack is now eager to augment its security with human warriors.

- **Planet Paola:** This world was named by the first Earthwoman to set foot on it, and she named it after herself. Paola is a world of rigid, inflexible order, its citizens immune to ego breaking because their brains’ pleasure centers atrophied millions of years ago. A people of perfect order, the Paolans live in strictly enforced balance...
with their world. They take no more than it can supply and never breed beyond its capacities. They therefore have nothing excess to sell and no needs to purchase, leaving them indifferent to the Leatherbacks. Naturally, since the Cyblobs and Leatherbacks have both been rejected by the perfectly logical Paolans, they are absolutely mad to have the world by any means necessary—as long as they can seize it on their own terms.

Politics

The politics of the outside worlds are fractious and unruly. Their sole point of agreement is that they don’t want the Empire and the Protectorate to get so strong that they can’t stay autonomous. When they’re not bound together in defiance, they squabble with one another, a behavior that hasn’t escaped the notice of the two looming hegemones. That’s another reason that both have, intermittently, fallen back on the strategy of letting the independent worlds squabble and weaken each other. But someone, ambitious Cyblob or arrogant Leatherback, always decides to press its luck, figuring that it will be the one to succeed where so many others fail. In their defense, conquering one of the free systems would be a victory to resound through the known universe, except for the 394 Imperial worlds that aren’t permitted to know that independent worlds exist.

By and large, each planet deals with its own interests, and dissent between them takes place on the level of political snubs and trade embargoes. The same factors that make conquest hard for the big gangs makes it damn near impossible for another independent, and having been defiant for so long, they’ve made a virtue of necessity. They disdain conquest, since failure would be all but ensured if they embraced it.

On the other hand, the entire nature of conflict just changed, throughout the universe. At least two free worlds (Crapsack and Arco Iris) have examined humans firsthand and understand their potential value in warfare. They’re two planets, lightly populated, when compared to the teeming realms of the Empire and Protectorate, but by the same token they’ve got a lot less to lose from big risks, and a lot fewer vested interests defending the status quo.

Culture

While the individual free systems tend to have their own art forms and entertainments (as befits diverse biologies) one recurring theme is the value of freedom and autonomy. These values are enshrined in fiction, history and the creative arts, and while they’re almost always expressed as freedom from Cyblobs and Leatherbacks, some of that liberality is extended to local planetary governance as well. This culture of tolerating the individual’s ideas could let an independent alien understand some facets of human politics from observation better than a submissive Imperial telepath would even after completely assimilating some suck puppy’s mind and memories. The ideas of freedom are that radical in a telepathic cosmos.

Goals

The big, reactive goal is to remain undigested by the Empire or the Protectorate. To that end, some Free Worlders are studying this human style of ultra-violent warfare and wondering if they can master it even without importing huge numbers of uncontrollable mammalian slaughterers.

Outside their beleaguered survival, the different worlds in the loose collective all want to strengthen trade ties with one another, improve their science and explore for worlds to colonize. But pressure from without has left all those ambitions far out of reach.
Qualities of the Free World Alliance

Influence: 1
Might: 1
Sovereignty: 2
Sovereignty Asset: Defiant Tradition
Territory: 1
Territory Assets: Defensible Terrain
Treasure: 2
Earth is just about as factionalized and divided as the thousand worlds of the Leatherbacks, combined. When you don’t have psychic powers to blend people together, you get that. But you also get structures and societies that support individual rights, that protect individual liberties, that hold elections and apply one set of laws to everyone. Alien societies don’t even pay lip service to that stuff.

Stated up here are groups that deal with aliens. Note that many of these groups are interconnected with other groups, or with one another. But for the purposes of this setting, using “Cyblob allies” as a power group is more useful than “The US Government.”

The Global Elite

What you have here is a constellation of the internationally wealthy and influential. These people aren’t usually celebrities—they’re politicians at best, more commonly majority shareholders and billionaires and third generation military commanders. These people were, generally, born to rich families, had privileged educations, expect second chances and know “want” or “poverty” as abstractions that happen to people far away. They regard themselves as the pinnacle of human achievement because they didn’t lie back on the gains of their forebears, they took them and pushed on for greater hegemony, greater control and greater authority. Lots of Freemasons and Ivy League grads in there.

They’ve aligned themselves with the Leatherback Empire, whom they (wrongly) see as an achievement-driven economic powerhouse. They also believe the Leatherbacks are concealing weapon and transport technology. They’re willing to send up crews of souls (see page 168) in return for biotechnology and information on cosmic physics, though some of them suspect the combat missions are some kind of elaborate psychological or tactical readiness test.

Though they’ve willingly sent human soldiers to fight and die for their allies’ interests, the Elite would betray their alien collaborators in a New York minute if it netted them control of an alien spacecraft. They’ve dismissed the Leatherbacks’ claims of a warp monopoly as a bluff.

Thanks to the Leatherbacks, the Elite have a fairly accurate view of the Cyblobs as an oppressive cult-regime of Supreme Leaders dominating others through a biological descent so inbred it might as well be the Divine Right of Kings.

Qualities of the Global Elite

Influence: 1 in space/4 on Earth

Influence Asset: Entangling Alliance with the Internationalists

Might: 4 in space/1 on Earth

Sovereignty: 2

Territory: 4

Territory Asset: Cultural Tradition

Treasure: 3

Treasure Asset: Permanent Underclass

Although the idea of a tiny group controlling 99% of the property is, in fact, the status quo the Elite strives to protect on Earth, the idea of aliens doing it with mind control (instead of “hard work and frontier spirit,” which is how they view their inherited prerogatives) repulses them.
The Internationalists

The Internationalists are a group of gung-ho young turks who felt that the world was changing too fast for the traditional systems of “nationalism” and “hierarchy” even before the aliens showed up. Most of the people in this faction are billionaires or political populists, and a fair number are both. Some in this clique call themselves “self-made men” without blushing because they believe it, even though the background from which they struggled and strove to escape was upper middle class. New media kingpins, political reformers, cybergrassrooters and technocrats, this is the group that looks forward, can’t wait for the newest gadget, and believes that there’s a cleaner, quicker, cheaper solution to life’s problems if you’re just clever enough. Lots of Freemasons and Ivy League grads in there, too.

Alien trade with Earth strikes them as the best thing since NAFTA or the Eurozone. It disquiets them greatly that the second most sought-after commodity Earth has to offer is guns, exceeded only by people with the will and knowledge required to use guns.

They’re allied with the Cyblobs whom they regard (wrongly) as an enlightened post-biological collective in which the smartest organize things through an emergent intellectual meritocracy. (One of their misapprehensions is that “telepathically powerful” automatically means “smart.”) They’ve been taught that the Leatherback Empire is a monopolistic fixed market dominated by a racist clique of “Imperial” families who hate nothing in the cosmos more than the idea of free speech.

They believe that the happiness of the Cyblob worlds is real, but exaggerated, because the Cyblobs neglected to explain that they’re imposing bliss from above. The Internationalists
see a networked Cyblob planet as a marketplace of ideas, a technocracy where altruism works because science has made it so simple to meet the needs of the population. (They are unaware of the artificially low population rates of the Cyblob worlds, but if they found out they’d probably chalk it up to wise policies of population management and environmental harmony, or some damn thing.)

They insist that the soldiers they send are on humanitarian (or, um, whatever the trans-species, interplanetary version of that is) missions helping defend the Cyblob civilization’s integrity against incursions by pirates or, worse, Leatherbacks. But of course, they only have the Cyblobs’ version of events.

In the meantime, the ‘Blobs have been generous with medical and biological expertise. The Internationalist business wing is gearing up for a biotech revolution, and they’re only too happy to provide their alien allies with human cadavers for study, along with blood samples and research data. After all, if the Protectorate isn’t allowed to understand human bodies, how are they going to cure cancer?

The Internationalists are less cynical and more gullible than the Elite, so they’d be loyal to their Cyblob associates longer. Amusingly, they’re so gullible that they believe warp is a psychic ability, not a technological one, so they have no plans in the works to steal a ship. They know it wouldn’t do any good.

**Qualities of the Ideo-Fascists**

- **Influence:** 2 in space/1 on Earth
- **Influence Asset:** Sinister Operatives
- **Might:** 3 in space/1 on Earth
- **Might Assets:** Irregular Forces, Keen
- **Sovereignty:** 1
- **Territory:** 1
- **Treasure:** 2

**Ideo-Fascism**

Ideo-fascism is fanaticism with better publicity. This Company represents fringe political, religious or social elements that are few in number, radicalized, and disinterested in negotiation. You’re either with them or against them. The only elements these groups have in common is (1) they espouse violence with great enthusiasm and (2) they are incredibly eager to work with aliens. Which means, of course, being eager to work against aliens.

To right-thinking people, it may seem a little odd that rabidly parochial terror groups would eagerly embrace Leatherbacks and Cyblobs while remaining steadfastly unwilling to negotiate with human rivals whose thought-styles, philosophies and biologies are so much closer to their own. But to an ido-fascist, Earth is all that matters and aliens are a means to an end. The clash of Protectorate and Empire concerns them to the exact extent that it helps them fund their earthly battles. Beyond that, they care about as much as you care exactly how your ATM works.
Within the Ideo-fascist cabal, there is an odious variety of race-supremacist groups, violent religious fundamentalists of every stripe (Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Jewish and, surprisingly, Buddhist) along with the odd anarchist cabal and communist conspiracy thrown in for good measure. Before the aliens, the only reason these gangs weren’t killing one another was their burning hatred for their real enemies—elected governments, NATO, the US, the World Bank, the WTO, mainstream religions, Russia, China, UNICEF, etc. Now, they’ve also aligned in a desperate attempt to leverage alien attention, bio-tech, and gold in pursuit of their disparate agendas. As far as they’re concerned, the New World Order (or the Elders of Zion, the Bilderbergers, the Illuminati, or Merlin, Dracula and the Comte Saint-Germain) have secretly monopolized wealth and power on Earth for millennia. Damned if they’re going to let them monopolize contact with aliens, too! The space brothers need to know the TRUTH, so that they’ll join the fight against the infidel (or the bourgeois oppressors, or those illegal immigrants).

When it comes right down to it, this is a grab-bag of criminal and terrorist outliers who are willing to perform any atrocity against aliens without batting an eyelash, as long as the price is right. Unfortunately for the ideo-fascists (and lucky for everyone else) the aliens haven’t given them biological weapons because the aliens’ grasp of human biology (and the idea that anyone would want to kill a bunch of people) is still nascent. Moreover, the ideo-fascists are doing business with the rag-tag collective of Independent Worlds, who have far fewer resources to offer than the Leatherbacks, and less information than the Cyblobs.
With infinite-range warp, every known planet is in play. The Cyblobs’ world of origin is targeted for Leatherback harassment as often as any other in the Protectorate. Though, given the incentives to spread out, and all aliens’ advanced adaptive technologies, the idea of a “home” or “capital” world doesn’t really fit. Cyblobs are rooted, but their greed for power drives them as far away from rival masterminds as they can get. As for Leatherbacks, mobility is their greatest strength, and they play to it. All negotiation and agenda-setting is done through long-range psychics, so why gather the strong warpers together? Unity is vulnerability.

There’s low-intensity conflict throughout both stellar nations, but it’s intermittent everywhere. The location for steady, ongoing, intense confrontation? It’s a planet with a unique resource, one that can’t be managed directly.

The real hot zone is Earth’s solar system. Hm, suddenly those Mars-range nukes don’t seem so silly, do they?

Cyblobs, Leatherbacks and independents are all prowling the solar system, bringing in long-but-limited range teleporters to jockey for position, trying to keep one another away from the Elite and Internationalists station. That’s a tall order, of course, but between them the Leatherbacks and Cyblobs make it pretty tough for the free worlds to make official contact with humankind. That leaves the outsiders going directly to Earth, which often means clashes with human air forces or militaries. That’s why they’re constantly trying to reverse ego breaks on the station Cyblobs (or assassinate them with convenient human minions).

The Cyblobs have a world in their portfolio that’s close enough to Mars. A few tweaks to its inhabitants’ DNA will give them colonists who can survive on the Martian surface unaided. Protectorate forces in environment suits are already building residences. The Empire has twice succeeded in overtaking the Protectorate explorers (once with an ego break, once with mass possession) but in each case the Protectorate was able to either rescue or sanction its personnel before the Empire could damage or seize too much of their development. Their willingness to kill their own people indicates just how seriously the Cyblobs are treating the conquest of Mars. And how much they’ve already learned about humankind’s warfare-unto-death.
Character Concepts

…theoretical xenthropologist willing to hoist a shotgun in exchange for field data...

…hidden suck puppy spying on alien broadcasts...

…government psychic “recruiter” who’s seen too much and is going rogue...

…deeply religious gundaddy who believes God wants all aliens dead...

…shady criminal who lucked into alien contacts...

Group Concepts

…Air Force team tasked with preventing abductions and debriefing ductees when they get there too late...

…mercenary corporation working the Elite against the Internationalists...

…tiny sovereign state that just happens to have a psychic serving on the high court...

…biotech firm that just acquired a private security company...

…family, abducted while on vacation, returned and agitating against alien interference with human affairs...

Plot Complications

…Cyblobs develop a course of “gene therapy” that can give any human weak psychic reception...

…a team of Chinese physicists and biologists capture a royal Leatherback and start on the path of building artificial warp engines...

…a squadron of souls takes control of a Leatherback ship and sets course for Earth, intending to bombard Iran’s nuclear facilities...

…the Internationalists learn the truth about Cyblob mind control...

…Russia declares settlement of worlds in Earth’s system forbidden and backs it up by launching a nuke at the Cyblobs’ Mars mission…
It’s a big universe, full of gristle-encrusted, pulsating life. Some of that life is human, but most isn’t. Historically, humans tended to pay the most attention to one another, even though they were surrounded by a rich world’s bounty of animals. That may just have to change.

**Private Contractors**

Most thinking residents of the third stone from Sol have only seen real ETs on TV, and for that they should be deeply grateful. Rather than focus on the 99% who exist in ignorant bliss, however, we’re going to turn our attention to the 1% experiencing deeply discomforting knowledge.

**Ductee**

Oh, for the good old days when people who claimed aliens kidnapped them could be dosed with thorazine and safely dismissed. Alas, alien abductions are on the rise, both imagined and all too real.

The big, smart, powerful alien groups already have human allies among governments. When they need some disposable humans to sterilize an enemy outpost, they send a message to their government-sanctioned psychic ambassador, offer some sexy biotech, and teleport a squad of high-grade elite soldiers offworld to a cosmic wetworks adventure. If these cliques were crime films, they’d be brainy games of cat and mouse like “Heat” or “The Sting.”

Not all aliens are smart, connected, or powerful, however. Sometimes a desperate, scrappy independent world resisting a larger power wants humans to even the odds (or to offset the other side’s humans). Many aliens have a hard time telling humans apart (since they’re all psychically unreceptive), so they just sweep up some isolated individuals or, better, a group and throw them into a conflict, trusting the humans’ violent instincts to see them through.

If these aliens were crime films, they’d be “Fargo” or “A Simple Plan.” They’re intergalactic fuckups shoplifting humans and fleeing before the real players can bust them on it. Their unlucky human abductees—or “ducktees” to people in the space-mercenary demimonde, who are all too busy to bother with extraneous syllables—sometimes survive long enough to get rescued by souls (see below), or find aliens who at least pay them for fighting. Some even turn the tables on their abductors. But very few ever make it back to Earth.
Gundaddy

As a rule, gundaddies don’t have résumés, but if they did, an honest entry for “Position Sought” would be “Psychopathic Mass Murderer For Hire.” Gundaddies are violent, usually crazy, and either dangerous or dead soon. Not that there’s any reason they can’t be both.

Gundaddies are criminal loners with histories of violence. One way or another they hook up with a suck puppy or a shady xenthropologist and take employment from any alien who wants a murder ape to enter enemy territory and shed some ichor. They are mercenaries without the professionalism or courtesy, warriors without rules and nutjobs who just happen to find killing aliens more interesting and rewarding than killing humans.

(Incidentally, the female of the species is a “gunmommy” and, while vanishingly rare, anecdotal evidence indicates they are indeed more deadly than the male.)
Suck Puppy

The name is a corruption of “sock puppet” intended to make it even more insulting and, as you might gather, the primary job requirement is to move your mouth while someone else talks out of it. Suck puppies are those rare, one-in-a-hundred-thousand human beings with trace psychic receptivity. This means that if a powerful human transmitter breaks a sweat staring at Zener cards, the suck puppy’s chances of picking the right card are around 25%, instead of the 20% you get from random chance. More importantly, it means that if an alien tries to tell one something, he can understand it.

Aliens don’t talk aloud, they just mind-send, so they’re ill equipped to “speak English” or any other human language. They can write notes, but since alien alphabets and writing are intended to convey information when time or distance precludes a psionic info-dump, they privilege completeness over speed. But some aliens are learning Earthly alphabets and some xenthropologists are learning alien writing. Their successes to date are about on the level you’d get if you took this paragraph, translated it into Spanish, then wrote it out in the Chosongul alphabet and handed it to someone from Portugal.

Easier, then, to find a suck puppy and talk through him. Lucky aliens get human translators who can broadcast a little bit too.

The drawback, from the Earthling perspective, is that suck puppies lack the normal human immunity to enslavement. Anyone who negotiates with a suck puppy would do well to remember who and what he might really be dealing with.

If the fear of having your personality molded or your body seized by alien intelligences isn’t quite enough, there’s also the issue of black-bag government interest. Every nation on Earth wants to control as many psychics as it can, not just to negotiate with aliens but to prevent their allies from getting the same advantage. Enemies, I mean. Prevent their enemies.

So if you’re a suck puppy you’re pretty much whipped from pillar to post, beset on one side by opportunistic extraterrestrials looking for a mouthpiece and, on the other, by three-letter spook agencies. On the plus side, however, psychics are about the only people aliens even can negotiate with as equals. If the puppet has the strength of will to retain his autonomy.

---

**Advantage: Suck Puppy** *(1 Point)*

If you take this advantage, you cannot also take the Gundaddy advantage. You get the Psychic Stat and a point in the Telepathy Skill. You can increase these normally, but only to a maximum of 2 in each. You cannot learn any other psychic Skills.

That’s it, really. You’re psychic. You can understand aliens and make them understand you. The downside is, you’re naked in the storm when an alien decides it wants to rifle through your memories, or make you its slave, or its lapdog.
**Soul**

“Soul” is the short form of “soldier.” Souls are generally obedient, well-trained military men who’ve earned the trust of their superiors and who are sent to fight and die on foreign planets so their masters can get tossed scraps of alien biotechnology. Or, if they’re from impoverished nations, gold. (Aliens love paying humans in gold because, while it has some value in their economies, it’s disproportionately valued by those crazy psi-blind mammals.)

The notion of hiring out as mercenaries so their bosses can make private or public fortunes in medicine or manufacturing is repugnant to many Army of One types who signed up to defend their nation. Cynics point out that going far from home to fight for resources is hardly a shocking development, but at least in Iraq there were legitimate arguments about human rights. *This* is just military prostitution stripped bare of any pretense. Money’s on the dresser, I’m not paying you to talk. The notion that we’re antagonizing aliens who could psychically teleport a battleship into the space a hundred feet above New York hasn’t escaped the notice of the more thoughtful souls, either.

But hell with it. Not everyone signed up for honor and dignity: Some guys wanted a paycheck, health care and maybe some thrills. Soul duty provides all the above in spades. Afghanistan or Aldebaran? No contest! Half the aliens don’t even have *faces*. Moreover, alien defense instincts tend to start with “lash out with the psi,” leaving a slight but noticeable gap before they start dodging and spraying acidic spittle, or whatever.

The hardest missions, for some, are “sterile removals,” which is the phrase of the moment for “We’re sending you in to kill a bunch of ETs who, while they might be mighty warriors of the mind, are essentially unarmed and defenseless as far as you’re concerned.” (Nobody ever suggests that these are, in fact, “war crimes” or “massacres.”) But other souls consider those missions the *easy* ones and, as soon as the brass figure out your opinions of sterile removals, you’re likely to either never face another one, or to face little else. It’s win/win!

---

**Advantage: Soul** (5 points)

You cannot take this advantage if you have the Gundaddy advantage. (People with that particular constellation of personality issues tend to wash out of militaries or, at best, get stuck in low-level positions like “subordinate potato peeler.”)

As a Soul, you’re trained to work together with a team. Your instinct is to obey your officers, and if you have rank, other souls tend to obey you.

If you’re in a firefight with at least 10 followers at your back, your Widest Firearms set gets a +1 Width bonus every round. All morale attacks against your followers are reduced by 1 while you’re in charge.
How'd you get into the alien business? Were you an academic from the same sorority as someone who wound up on the Joint Chiefs of Staff? Were you brilliant, or connected, or just obsessed? Did you publish some science fiction that read a lot like what went down in Mumbai, or was it all just dumb luck?

How'd you come into xenthropology, the study of unearthly life? Were you originally a biochemist, a psychologist, an anthropologist? Your background indicates how you came at extraterrestrial knowledge, however you got access.

For a while you were poised on the bleeding edge of human knowledge. You were at the front of the line to learn about new life in the universe. Maybe you got to autopsy what was left of a Mumbai tiddah, or maybe you interviewed the Cosmic Six in Brussels. Maybe you were tasked with taking apart scavenged (or shot down) alien technology. Perhaps you debriefed ductees or interviewed aliens personally.

It all went wrong, of course. You’ve got a poisoned career, either because you’ve been sworn to secrecy and can’t publish, or because your theories are unpopular. Or maybe you got out-maneuvered by a rival, plain and simple. Or maybe you’re mistrusted because you’re a known associate of ductees, gundaddies and suspected off-license psychics. Are you still consulting for a government or a corporation with offworld interests? If so, they’re watching you carefully. If not, you still have some contacts on the inside—probably associates who recognize that someone as smart and disreputable as you is likely to come up with some brilliant idea they can steal.

Anyone can buy the Xentropology Skill, and anyone who has it is, by default, a xenthropologist. (In fact, given that they’re PCs with actual opportunities to observe and interact with aliens, they’re probably among the world’s foremost xenthropologists. Unfortunately, anyone the PCs worked with denies it, so forget about a cushy Ivy League tenure with dewy-lipped grad students of your preferred gender hanging wide-eyed on your ever utterance. They’ll call you mad at University. Mad, I say!)

When you’ve observed an extraterrestrial (or its environment and artifacts) you can roll to make an educated guess about it. GMs, you can always give a little something even on a failed roll, but if players beat a situational Difficulty, they get better information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fifteen minutes of examining artifacts, or a momentary glimpse of the creature in movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ten minutes of observation or interaction, or autopsy of a badly damaged or decayed specimen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>More than ten minutes of direct observation or interaction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the alien is built on the One Roll charts, every point of Width reveals one die’s result in the roll that created it. (So, for example, if you rolled a 2x8 after a glimpse of a Leatherback, the GM might indicate that it looks like it’s from a heavy gravity world, the 2x6 result.)
Sure, you could easily kludge together Martial Paths for the firearms of “Out of the Violent Planet,” but wouldn’t there always be that nagging voice in the back of your mind wondering if you’d messed up and were going to somehow derail the rules with a degenerate combo? I have that voice too but, luckily, my years of experience keep me safe. So with no further ado, here are some Martial Paths and Esoteric Disciplines fit for the coming world of “Violent Planet.”

Sniper School

A sniper is a soldier who specializes in long range gunshots from cover, using telescopic sights, adjusting for windage, and resisting the urge to shout “BOOM! Headshot!”

These techniques can only be used with Weapon (Firearms) and, moreover, only when shooting one shot from a long barreled weapon. You can’t apply the lessons of Sniper School as part of a multiple action or while dodging.

Sight In (1 Point): If you take a round to aim, you get +2d to your roll instead of +1d. Additional rounds of aim give no further bonus.

Pick It Off (2 Points): If no one attacked you in a previous round, you can make a called shot without the usual -1d penalty.

Center Mass (3 Points): If you aim at the torso and hit, you do damage as if your hit had +3W. It’s still timed normally. You also get the benefit of Pick It Off, as long as you weren’t attacked the previous round.

Surprise! (4 Points): If your target is unaware of you and you hit any location, you do five extra points of Killing damage.

Aim Tight (5 Points): If you weren’t attacked the round before, you can ignore up to three points of Armor when you shoot. If this still isn’t enough to allow you to do damage, you inflict a point of Shock as a sort of consolation prize.
Cool Under Fire

Military trainers have a lot of problems to worry about. Their trainees might freak out because they’re being shot at, or because they shot someone, or because they didn’t shoot, or because their buddy got shot. But the common factor there is the freak out, and most military drill is conducted with the goal of preventing it. In your case, it worked.

You don’t get angry, scared, confused or conflicted. You get the job done.

You cannot take Gimlet Eye if you have the Shrikey Freaky technique. All the techniques of Cool Under Fire work with the Weapon (Firearms) Skill, and then only when you’re using a rifle, submachine gun, or assault rifle.

Gimlet Eye (1 Point): If you roll a second set while taking a single Firearms attack, and you use your timed-first set on shooting, your second set goes off as a Sight roll. If there’s nothing interesting escaping your notice, you instead intuit which enemy has the highest attack pool.

Handy in the Hectic (2 Points): You take no multiple action penalty if you combine a firearm attack with a single task off the following list.

- Provide first aid.
- Tactical evaluation.
- Dodge.
- Help a comrade (dragging him to safety, for example).
- Drive a vehicle.

Stone Cold (3 Points): You don’t lose dice out of your sets if you take damage, as long as you’re making a Firearm attack.

Unflinching (4 Points): You take no timing penalty for drawing or preparing your weapon. You can reload automatically without it impairing or delaying your actions. When your attack goes off, you can choose to redirect it at anyone within ten feet of your declared target.

Killing Machine (5 Points): You can combine all the previous levels in Cool Under Fire. Also, one firearm attack per round is timed as if it had +1 Width.
Path of the Crazy Motherfucker

This can’t be taught, only learned. Specifically, learned by people who accept and even relish violence and bloodshed. These people are not merely competent: They are so well adapted to carnage that it might as well be their natural habitat. Naturally, this is disturbing to nearly anyone who doesn’t scream “What’re YOU lookin’ at?!” at least once a day.

Interestingly, this Path can be used with a variety of weapons, as it is less a matter of technique than frenzied attitude. However, when you buy Shrieky Freaky, pick a broad weapon category it works with—handguns, shotguns, rifles, axes, bludgeons, short blades—and forever after, you can only activate the Path of the Crazy Motherfucker when you are attacking with that particular weapon. (It’s what your reach for when you feel an episode coming on.) Note that if you pick a firearm, it has to be loaded. You can’t Mean It Man with an empty rifle. Also, none of the techniques on this Path can be used if you’re dodging or behind cover. You cannot take Shrieky Freaky if you have the Gimlet Eye technique.

Shrieky Freaky (1 Point): Once per encounter, the character can attack with a bloodcurdling howl and an expression of psychotic aggression. This cannot be part of a multiple action. In addition to the attack, this provokes a Morale 4 Attack.

I Mean It, Man (2 Points): The character does not take the normal -1d penalty when attempting a Display Kill.

Just Don’t Give a Fuck (3 Points): There are a surprising number of battle reports in which people stalk out into the middle of a blazing crossfire, not running, not dodging, not hiding and, to everyone’s astonishment, not dying. These people just don’t give a fuck.

Far Beyond Reason (4 Points): As long as you’re attacking, you can continue to fight with your torso filled with Killing damage. You die as soon as there isn’t anyone you can attack—because you ran out of ammo, or no one’s in reach, or you killed them all—but until that happens, only a head shot puts you down. Well, or having both arms disabled. That does it too.

Still Don’t Give a Fuck (5 Points): This is exactly like Just Don’t Give a Fuck, except that you can use it as often as you like.

You can use this ability once per combat. To use it, you move forward at your normal rate, while attacking. This cannot be part of a multiple action. If you get hit during the round you Just Don’t Give a Fuck, roll a single d10. If the result exceeds the attack’s Height, you take no Shock damage from it and all Killing damage is reduced by one point. If it exactly equals the Height, you take no damage.

Further Study
Exosapience

Now that the phrase “xenthropology” has been used on Fox News and even small Liberal Arts colleges are opening departments in its name, the people on the cutting edge—the folks who’ve interacted with aliens as opposed to reading books and picking through their trash—talk about ‘exosapience’ or ‘other-knowing,’ a deeper understanding that reaches beyond the mere degrees and accolades that those Harvard assholes rack up with appalling ease.

This is, of course, used with the Skill “Student: Xenthropology.”

Eye For Anecdote (1 Point): You know what’s interesting? Aliens! Obviously you know this, and you’re not the only one interested. When you think of the jokes, feats and stories that arose just on Earth, access to a multitude of other species just expands the wonder exponentially. You’re pretty good at conveying that wonder, especially if someone else is paying. If you succeed at a Xenthropology roll, it gives you a +1d bonus on your next Fascinate roll.

Enginerd (2 Points): Most xenthropologists are xenobiologists, but you combine that with a healthy interest in off-world technology. While everyone else is trying to suss out their diet by observing their mandible structure, you’re watching their devices to see if you can guess how they interface. You can use Xenthropology to understand alien technology. It won’t make you a master, but you might at least have an idea how to switch it on and which direction to point it.

Drinking It In (3 Points): You’re like a sponge for alien information. It’s not just that you read the scholarly journals cover to cover and watch the scant footage of them on news over and over.

When you’re in the presence of one, your every sense is blown open, absorbing any detail that might, in later recollection, reveal something, anything. (So no, you do not have to actually drink anything.) Instead of basing your Xenthropology roll on Knowledge, you can roll it based on you Sense Stat.

Xentho Genius (4 Points): What does it mean to truly grasp the broad outlines of an alien’s behavior? Is there a price to dissociating yourself from humanity enough to grasp aliens so fully? Or does the vast perspective permit the human a deeper understanding of his own humanity, in the way that we only appreciate our homes after travel? I don’t know man. I just work here.

Mars Needs Spin Doctors (5 Points): No matter how deep your fascination with things extraterrestrial, you always filter everything through a decidedly practical Earthly perspective—or, at least, you can when you choose to consider it. This means that you can relate alien goals to human means, or vice versa. With you as a go-between, a group of aliens seems a lot less inhuman to the seething masses of Earth. You can permanently give an extraterrestrial Company a +1 boost to Influence, one time, as long as they’re working with Earthlings.
Humanist ESP

If you’re psychic, the good news is that your abilities are finally accepted as real. The bad news is, most people still don’t have them and a large population of inimical aliens do. But you do the best with what you’ve got, and what you’ve got is humanity. If you can find a way to turn ‘being human’ into an advantage, you’re going to do it. What else have you got?

(This is not an original idea, of course. Other races may or may not be able to learn similar abilities, which would be “Pokozican Telepathy” or “Cyblobby Telepathy.”)

This is used with the Telepathy Skill.

Bro, the Humanity! (1 Point): Psychic intrusion is humiliating and scary, and so it’s no wonder people are looking for ways to bolster their resistance to it. By focusing on unique elements of the human experience, you not only confound your attacker, you steel your own resolve to resist. With this ability, you’ve practiced concentrating on a story or episode that’s speaks to you about humankind’s unique worth. Could be Gandhi’s legacy or the memory of Mom’s cookies, but when you’re assaulted, it’s your safe place. When using Telepathy to defend, you gain a +2 Height bonus to one set.

Eyeless Eye, Watching (2 Points): You can attempt to bolster your flinching instincts by opening your mind to the malevolence of psychics around you. As a combat action, roll your Telepathy pool. If you get a set, on your next turn you can add a bonus equal to your set’s Width to your Dodge or Parry pool against a psychic attacker.
Example: Gina rolls a 3x5 on her Telepathy pool during a blistering firefight. Next round, when she attempts to run screaming across the spaceport deck, she gets a +3d bonus to her Dodge roll.

Mindsense (3 Points): To use this, the psychic emits a brief broadcast ‘ping’—a highly personal, emotionally charged phrase or image, unique to the telepath—and listens for the momentary echo of a confused other mind perceiving it. This not only tells the psychic how many telepathic consciousnesses are within range of the ability, but the direction in which each lies. Unfortunately, every mind detected with Mindsense also becomes aware of the psychic’s proximity (though not, crucially, the psychic’s direction). To use Mindsense, roll your Telepathy pool. For every point of Height, your sense radius increases ten meters, unless you’re in the United States, in which case it’s ten yards. You get no idea who or what they are or how strong their psychic abilities are, but you know they’re present. Note that this doesn’t detect humans, except for other Suck Puppies.

Filthy Lust (4 Points): Adolescence, with its burgeoning sexual feelings, is a confusing time for a young adult—and that young adult has billions of years of mammal evolution equipping it to deal. Imagine, then, getting a burst of intra-species reproductive squick pounded into your forebrain. Would you run away? Throw up? Collapse? Collapse in your throw-up after trying to run?

You now have an idea how a Filthy Lust attack works. When you broadcast a musky blast of intimately personal erogenous information, any vulnerable entity within range suffers a Morale Attack equal to your set’s Height.

To be ‘vulnerable’ the creature must (1) be an Unworthy Opponent, (2) be of a different species and (3) have enough telepathy that it can pick up the signal.

The range of this effect is a radius equal to ten meters (or yards) for every point of your Psychic Stat.

Emotional Kleptomania (5 Points): Your filters aren’t very good. Whenever you’re receiving information telepathically, you always pry and peek and try to get a little something extra. It’s like sticky fingers only, in your case, it’s a sticky medulla oblongata.

If you roll an excess set with your Telepathy Skill while trying to receive a message or pull information, you can turn it into a success for one of the following uses:

- A Xentropology roll to understand the species of mind touched (as long as it was alien).
- As an Empathy success to determine the target’s intentions.
- A Direction roll to sense the target’s location and distance.
The unique achievement of the human race, right here. For our purposes, these are pretty abstract. If you want more detailed descriptions, I recommend Wild Talents Essential Edition. Need more detail than that? GODLIKE has pages and pages.

Unless otherwise noted, all guns have Long range.

**Handgun**

Given the grain of the ORE, just about anything you’re likely to pick up and shoot with one hand does Width in Shock and Killing damage and only has Medium range. If a gun is particularly small, like a .22, it may be a Short range weapon. If a gun is particularly large, it does W+1SK. Most revolvers hold six shots. With semi-automatics, it’s anywhere from six (or less) to twenty (or more).

**Rifle**

The typical bolt- or lever-action hunting rifle does W+1SK. If it has a scope, aiming gives a +2d bonus after one round instead of +1. Most of these can hold between 4 and 8 shots, though there are exceptions with higher capacity.

**Submachine Gun**

This is what you’re more likely to carry into battle against hostile ETs. They do W+1SK and fire out to Medium range. They typically hold between 10 and 30 bullets, though there are models with 50 round clips or drums, as well as aftermarket equipment to raise that capacity. But what really interests most PCs is the selective fire capacity.

**Selective Fire**

Selective fire weapons can be fired in one of three modes. You can fire a single bullet. You can fire a three round burst. Or you can spray the whole clip. Here’s what that means, in rules terms.

**Single shot: No change to the rules.**

**Three round burst: Add a +1d bonus and it does an extra point of Shock and Killing damage.**

**Full auto: Just like the three round burst, but with the tasty extra that you can use every set you roll, even if you didn’t declare multiple actions. You have to have at least ten bullets left to go full auto.**

**Shotgun**

Do you feel like trading range for damage? You do, don’t you? If so, you want a shotgun. Shotguns do W+2SK, but only fire out to Short range. However, if you roll extra sets while firing one, you can apply them to the target or to anyone standing right next to or behind your target. Hunting models typically hold 2-4 shells, while military, police or “home defense” shotguns hold eight or more.

**Assault Rifle**

This category covers your AK-47s, M-16s and other selective fire, room-clearing military weapons. On a single shot, they do W+2SK, and they hold 20-30 rounds. As with hunting rifles, a scope can give you a +2d bonus after only one round of aiming.

**Bigger Weapons**

There’s a ton of them, but there’s a lot of pressure on Earthlings not to take anything bigger than an AK-47 offplanet, just to make it a little harder for the ETs to reverse-engineer the rocket propelled grenade. That’s probably a vain hope, but another issue is that a lot of action takes place in spacecraft or other sealed environments. A .50 round may or may not hole that hull, but an
antitank round certainly will. That’s fine if you’re the aliens paying to kill everything aboard—better than fine, it means you don’t have to pay your mercenaries! But humans who want to come home might do better to contain their ambitions.

That said, if you want to set up grenade launchers and flamethrowers, it’s not that hard with the spell design system. Stuff like loose dice doing Shock, along with Area Killing attacks, simulate explosions pretty well.

**Guns**

In the *Unearthlings* section, there’s a series of one roll charts for creating fantasy monsters. This is the same sort of thing, optimized for bug-eyed alien psychics.

**Step One: Baseline.** Every alien starts out with one point in every Stat except Knowledge. In Knowledge they have three points. Each alien also has an Expert Skill in some ability fit to its position, rated at 3-5. Aliens all start with 1-3 in their Psi Stat, and 1-2d in Telepathy. Moreover, unless you opt to use one of the Alternate Body Profiles in the appendix, it uses a human wound silhouette.

**Step Two: Roll ‘Em.** Roll a pool of d10s, as big as you like. The bigger the pool, though, the tougher and weirder and harder to job out the alien is likely to be. I recommend 3d for minor antagonists, 10d for a session’s climactic opponent, and more for really epic enemies.

**Step Three: Sort it Out.** If you get a set, look at the appropriate chart—set of fives, you have a flier (or at least something that can fly in Earth gravity). Set of tens, it’s got extra psychic abilities, for all the good that’ll do it. The loose dice give it random evolutionary quirks.

Unlike one-roll character generation, this is not intended to be terribly well balanced. It’s meant to be interesting and exciting and produce weird creatures and a variety of challenges. As usual, all sets are cumulative.
One Roll Aliens: Set Chart

x1: Big

2x It is about seven feet tall. +1 BODY, +5d Run
3x More like ten feet tall. +1 Wound Box per location
4x It's the size of a subcompact car, if not necessarily the shape. +1 BODY
5x The creature is the size of a pickup truck or a minivan. +1 Wound Box per location

x2: Squamous

2x It has a greasy coating of some sort of oil. +1 COORDINATION, +3d+ED Stealth
3x It glistens and is sticky. Very sticky indeed. +5d Climb
4x Its movements are boneless, even if it has some kind of exo- or endoskeleton. +1 COORDINATION
5x It leaves a slime-trail, but the residue dries and vanishes with startling speed. Change Stealth ED to MD

x3: Hairy

2x It has some kind of hairs or bristles in patches. +1 SENSE, +2d Dodge, +3d Intimidate
3x Some of its hairs are quite fine and seem concentrated in cup-shaped declivities. +3d+ED Hearing
4x The downy hairs in some places seem to move independent of wind or the shifts of skin below... Improve Hearing ED to MD
5x Those bristles and strands seem to move in a purposeful manner. +5d Scrutinize

x4: Predatory

2x Its reflexes are blindingly fast. Even if it's confused, its hesitation ends before you can take advantage of it. +3d+MD Fight
3x It has something pointy or serrated or clawlike to it. Jaws? Talons? It can be hard to tell the difference. Natural weapons do W+1K
4x Those natural killing tools (Articulated horns? Pincers?) are unbelievably sharp, or perhaps they secrete some kind of toxin or anti-coagulant. Natural weapons also do W+1S
5x It's remarkably aggressive and tenacious, and quicker than anything you've seen on Earth. All strikes with natural weapons are timed as if they had +2 Width

x5: Flier

2x It flies! Does it have wings or is it actually some kind of lighter-than-air gas-sac? +1d+MD Flight, with a movement rate of five feet per point of Width rolled
3x It definitely has some kind of wings or fins—something it can flap to change direction. +5d Flight
4x It's fast and if its natural form isn't aerodynamic, it can somehow reconfigure itself into a low-resistance posture. Its flight rate rises to ten feet per point of Width rolled. If it rolls a spare set on any other roll whatsoever, that set can be used as a Flight roll.
5x Huh. It can hover. Does it do that naturally, or...? The creature can hover in place without a roll

x6: Heavy G

2x It has a low, blocky silhouette. +1 BODY, +5d Athletics
3x It seems to have some solid plates, either on the surface of its body or just beneath the skin. +1 Armor to all locations
4x It ripples with muscle. +4d Endurance, one Athletics die promotes to ED
5x There's a thud of great weight as it moves, but it seems quick and lithe. Athletics ED promotes to MD

x7: Drones

2x The entity has some kind of subservient creatures. Its children? Robot servants? Limbs that are remotely controlled through its psychic abilities? No way to know short of autopsy. It has five Threat 2 Minions
3x There's a crowd of servitors around the main body of the thing. It gains five additional Minions
4x The slave-creatures move with an eerie unison of purpose, as if they're not separate but are connected in dimensions you can't perceive. All its Minions are now Threat 3
5x Its body is littered with orifices to which the subservient entities can cling and attach. It gains five additional Minions.
**One Roll Aliens Set Chart, Continued**

**x8: Cyborg**

2x The creature has a clear, articulated shell around it with a few metal fittings. *The creature can survive in hard vacuum, does not smother and is immune to extreme heat and cold.*

3x There are metal discs suspended in the air between you and it, mirroring its movements. 

4x It has some kind of piston-driven treads attached to its underside. *It can move an additional ten feet every round.*

5x There’s something like a radar dish on it, hooked to what looks like a fuel pump. *All its attacks gain the “Spray” quality.*

**x9: Bloboform**

2x It has no discernible head. *Hits to location 10 go to the body. The body location gains four boxes.*

3x It doesn’t seem to have any limbs dedicated solely or primarily to movement. *Hits to locations 1 and 2 go to the body. The body location gains ten more boxes.*

4x In fact, it doesn’t seem to have ‘limbs’ as you or I understand them, though it may extrude pseudopods or be covered with interchangeable flagella. *All hits go to the body, which has ten more boxes. It cannot move after losing half its boxes and loses consciousness when it only has five boxes left.*

5x The creature seems to have a uniform consistency throughout, it’s... **foamy. The creature does not die, pass out or stop moving until the very last box is destroyed.**

**x10: Extra Psi**

2x You get a strange feeling like it’s waiting for you to say something. 

3x You suddenly get an itchy, tingly feeling in your fingers and toes. *It gains the Possessor ability.*

4x Despite its objectively grotesque appearance, you find yourself thinking it’s kind of cuddly. *It gains the Ego Break ability.*

5x Maybe it’s just posture, but this thing moves like it’s the star of the show and the rest of us are just bit parts. *It gains the Psi Warp ability.*
Common Traits From Loose Dice

The loose dice on your one-roll alien indicate particular evolutionary traits that it developed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Die</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Sprinter.</strong> For some reason, running real fast was an advantage in its environment. Does it have long legs, or a lot of them, or are they just incredibly springy and strong? +5d Run Skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Lurker.</strong> It used surprise and concealment to either catch prey, or to avoid becoming it. Does it do this with small size, or color-changing chromatophores, or is it something else? +5d Stealth Skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Prey.</strong> It’s a prey species. For all its intellect and psychic ability, its first instinct is to flee aggression. +3d+ED Dodge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Acidic.</strong> Maybe its homeworld’s pH balance leaves this thing neutral, but compared to humans and most other aliens, it secretes or bleeds or exudes something that’s highly corrosive. Touch does 1K damage. Strikes do W+1K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Climber.</strong> Does it do this with electromagnetic pads, velcro-like hooks, something sticky, or is it just agile? +MD Climb Skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Low-G in Armor.</strong> The creature has some kind of artificial exoskeleton enabling it to operate in gravity that other races consider “normal.” Without that equipment, it’s weak and vulnerable. +2 AR to all locations, but -1 Wound Box at all locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Spores.</strong> As an attack, defensive instinct, or reproductive strategy (oh... ick) the entity emits a cloud of biological discharge that busily makes itself at home in the flesh of nearby aliens. Maybe it even hurts others of the same species. Maybe not. The alien can make a 5d attack. It does WK, and the loose dice do Shock damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Sensory Array.</strong> Echolocation? Electromagnetic perception? Maybe it sneezes out biologically active droplets that telepathically broadcast back touch data? Something, man. +1d+MD Perceive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Parasite.</strong> The body you see is not the body. This creature wears other creatures like a cheap suit and, when the suit gets irreparably torn, it slinks off to find someone new to wear. (Does this thing require a psychic body to control, or can it take over a normal human through purely biological means? Good question...) <em>If the creature is killed, a blob with one Wound Box escapes, containing the memories and autonomy of the entity. This blob has +1d+MD in Stealth.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Psi-Strong.</strong> Whoa. Check out the pulsing brain-sac on that guy! +1 Psi Stat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Uncommon Traits From Loose Dice

You can use this as an alternate chart for your loose chart, or mix and match freely between them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Die</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Long Leggy. The creature has unusually long, stiltlike legs, or some other extended limbs that make it harder to get close to its creamy middle. The Height of all attacks against it are at -2 (down to a minimum of 1) until its Locations 1 and 2 are full of Shock or Killing damage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Semi-Fluid Habitat. The creature swims and walks on dry land. It might be something like an otter (swims but doesn’t breathe air) or it could be something that breathes water but primarily walks on a seabed. For respiration purposes, it doesn’t matter—it's got a cyborg installed rebreathing apparatus. This is at Location 8 and can be hit if specifically targeted. (Otherwise, hits to Location 8 just do normal damage.) If the respirator is targeted, it has Armor 4 and two Wound Boxes. If filled with Killing damage, the creature smothers in 2-3 rounds. Note well that the creature has +2 Coordination—it’s used to moving through a lot more resistance and a gas atmosphere makes it much easier for this critter to be graceful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Elaborate Head-Crest. This could be composed of frilly tendrils or brightly-colored cartilage or stiff twists of spiny horn. It could be a mane or something like feathers. Whatever it is, it probably serves some mating function because it’s big and, otherwise, useless. It does provide a fair amount of extra mass around the head that can be struck without having any effect upon the creature (unless it’s protective of those mating functions... which it almost certainly is). Whenever the creature gets hit in the head, the GM rolls 2d10. If they come up a match, the shot either missed, or did no damage because it passed harmlessly through the crest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Scald-Blooded. This thing’s normal internal body temperature is way, waay too high for human comfort. Anyone who touches the thing bare handed takes two points of Shock to the area that makes contact. Moreover, its blood pressure is absurdly high. When struck, it sprays its white-hot blood around it, like live steam. Anything within ten feet takes an Area 4 Killing attack. Finally, any damage to the creature from heat is reduced by two points per Location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Leaper/Pouncer. In normal Earth gravity, this thing can make a ten foot vertical jump without a crouch or a run-up. Similarly, it can make a standing long jump out to twenty feet. It can do this once per round without a roll. This means it can make the Charge maneuver using Athletics without taking a -1d multiple action penalty. It has a 6d Athletics pool, minimum, unless some other rolls have given it a greater one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Spines. It’s covered in thick pointy bits, like a porcupine or a sea urchin or a Triceratops. It gets AR2 and if you get a hit on a hand to hand attack against it, you take an Area 3 Shock attack in response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bombardier. It produces some kind of chemical reaction and discharges it violently. This is loud, produces a shockwave, and is often foul smelling. It can do this once per combat. Everyone within ten feet takes an Area 4 Killing attack. Everyone within twenty feet takes an Area 4 Shock attack instead. Anyone within either radius is deafened for 6-60 minutes unless they were wearing ear protection or covered their ears.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cyblob

The overminds of the Protectorate often have other technological surprises built into their bodies, but the typical ambitious conqueror has these sets. They also start with at least Psychic 3 and Ego Break 1.

2x2, 4x8, 4x10

Flaque Boueuse

You wouldn’t think a living mud puddle would move at all, so it’s little consolation that they don’t move fast. Of course, depending on what other creatures they have hooked into their network, they may not need to move at all. In addition to what’s listed here, they have the unlimited Flaque version of the Psychic Hub Advantage from page 185.

4x9, 2x2, 2x10

Imperial Leatherback

These lizard-fish things aren’t all warpers, but those are the Leatherbacks that innocent human dupes are most likely aimed at. In addition to their normal mental abilities, they have Warp 1-5 and Psychic 3-5.

2x6, 3x9, 2x10

Pokozica

Imagine someone’s discarded, mangy, filthy velvet coat. Now imagine it’s crawling towards you. That’s a Pokozica and you probably don’t really care that its telepathy has no range limit, do you?

3x3, 2x4, 2x6, 2x10, 2, 5

Uncommon Traits From Loose Dice, Continued

8 Gelatinous Encasement. The thing exudes some kind of slime that rapidly hardens into a half-transparent coating when separated from its maker. It can (with a successful Fight or Coordination+Grapple roll) put a layer of slime on anyone it grips. Indeed, it can automatically slather anyone who successfully grapples it. Once someone’s slimed, he takes -1d to all physical actions until he can get the gunk off. This is cumulative: Every round, the creature can put on another layer, increasing the penalty by an additional -1d. Each layer imposed requires one round of scrubbing and picking to break. However, it should be noted that this creature can only use this effect on entities its own size or smaller.

9 Shell. The thing loses two Wound Boxes from each location but has AR 4 everywhere.

10 Telepathic Defense. This race is particularly strong when it comes to psionic defense. It has +2 Telepathy and every time it uses Telepathy for defense, it can increase one set’s Height by 2. Hm, has humankind got some competition in the “not so easy to brain-whip into squealing sycophancy” game?
Tiddah

These large, quick, tentacle-headed squid-bugs breed fast and tend to have low Psychic ability, making them fine stock soldiers for any galactic empire.

3x1, 4x4

Psychic Abilities

All aliens have them, and a very, very, vanishingly small percentage of humans. But what are they? What do they do, how do they work and how can they be abused for personal gain and power?

The Psi Stat

Psychic entities have a seventh Stat, in addition to Body and Coordination and the others. It’s called “Psi” and indicates the general strength which their minds can exercise on the world around them. Note that it is entirely separate from Command and Knowledge. You can be dumb as a rock and easily manipulated, but still a powerhouse of psionic energy. (This explains a lot about the troubles alien empires seem to have.)

Psi combines with one of the four psychic Skills to yield the dice pool rolled for various effects. It also measures the range at which powers operate.
There are four known psychic Skills (no telekinesis, no clairvoyance, no conversation with the dead) of which the most common and necessary by far is telepathy.

**Telepathy**

Telepathy is the ability to send thoughts from one mind to another. The range is determined by Psi rating, but within that distance, the power’s utility depends on the Skill rating.

There are two functions for telepathy, sending and receiving. The higher an alien’s telepathy Skill, the more powerful its reception and transmission are. (Humans, the head-blind, sometimes have only one ability or the other.)

Sending is used to broadcast ideas, thoughts and information. Usually this occurs on a superficial level: You get a message and it’s like hearing someone speak to you in a conversational tone. Or perhaps you receive a dense packet of information, something like intimate knowledge of an area’s geography, but you still recognize the external source of the information. The fine film “Inception” dealt entirely with the difficulties of giving someone an idea and having that person believe it’s his own. Aliens, who grow up without the benefits of spoken language, already have bizarre and unique thought-patterns. To sink an idea into a human mind (a mind that is used to existing in splendid isolation) is beyond impossible. Aliens can’t even do inception on other aliens of the same species. In fact, the best an alien can do is broadcast generically at Skill 4. At a telepathy range of 1-3, the sender’s identity is immediately perceptible.

But in addition to communication, there is such a thing as telepathy aggression. Just as a conversation is different from having someone scream in your ear, there’s a difference between a telepathic message and an overload of psychic garbage. A blast of psychic static imposes Difficulty on the targets’ next action as he (or it) fights to ignore the nattering excess data.

In addition to sending messages (or messes) telepathy is also used to listen. Even a weak broadcaster can be heard by a strong receiver, if the receiver is attuned and focussing on the sender’s spatial area. (That’s how the rogue warper controlling the Mumbai ship heard the Chinese psychic’s broadcast.) Moreover, a superior telepath can hear more than deliberate sendings. Depending on rating, it might be able to scan surface thoughts, rifle through memories, or completely replicate an entity’s opinions and beliefs.

Telepathy is also the Skill used for psychic defense. The defender rolls Psi+Telepathy automatically when hit with any psychic attack. If the attacker can overcome the defense (beating Height, Width or both, depending on the nature of the attack), the attack’s effect kicks in.
Psychic Abilities

Skill | Telepathy Abilities
--- | ---
1 | Can only send thoughts to those who are deliberately open to reception. Can only receive thoughts that were deliberately sent, and then only with concentration. But all languages are understood when filtered through telepathy.
2 | Can automatically receive any deliberate message. By beating a target’s Height and Width on a psychic defense roll, the telepath can access surface thoughts. Any successful attack imposes Width Difficulty to the next roll.
3 | By beating a psychic defense roll’s Height and Width, the telepath can access covert thoughts. Any successful telepathic assault imposes $W+1$ Difficulty.
4 | By beating a psychic defense roll’s Height, the telepath can access emotionally neutral memories. Successful telepathic attack imposes $W+2$ Difficulty.
5 | If the reader beats a psychic defense roll’s Height, it can access deep memories with strong emotional connotations. Psychic attack imposes $W+3$ Difficulty with a success.
6 | The reader can completely replicate the target’s mind if he beats a psychic defense roll’s Height. A successful psychic attack imposes $W+4$ Difficulty.

Psychic Networking

Flaques Boueuse (see the “Intro” file) are renowned for their ability to string consciousnesses into psionic networks, like a wireless Internet without tvtropes.org or a “log off” button. This is done with telepathy, but only the Flaques can do it instinctively. For everyone else, it’s learned. Specifically, it’s an Advantage.

**Psychic Hub** (3 points): You can connect people into a psychic network. You can disconnect anyone you wish, though if they want to hack back in, you have to make a defensive Telepathy roll against their Telepathy attack. Similarly, anything who wants to leave the network when you want it to stay has to make a defensive Telepathy roll against your Telepathy attack.

Everyone attached to the hub gains a +1d bonus to all Knowledge Skill rolls while connected. Anything in the network can attempt to possess, ego break or mind-read anything else in the network, regardless of the aggressing entity’s usual range.

For every point you have in Telepathy and Psi, you can connect 100 consciousnesses.

Every Flaque Boueuse has this ability for free, and can connect an unlimited number of individuals, unless it has suffered some kind of catastrophic brain damage.
**Ego Breaking**

The Ego Break Skill accesses the brain’s pleasure and pain centers, creating bonds between actions and sensations. The first time I ate a wild morel, I was violently ill all over my aunt’s kitchen table. Since that time, I’ve hated morels. Ego breaking simply sets up negative reactions like that without bothering with the tedious stimulus and repetition. Or alternately, a dog whose master rings a bell every meal time develops an association and starts drooling when it hears the bell, even without seeing or smelling food. Ego break makes positive associations like that, as well.

Most commonly, the associations are “Agree for pleasure, disagree for misery.” That’s usually all it takes, if the responses are strong enough. Mechanically, this is expressed through Difficulty. The stronger the conditioning, the greater the Difficulty to oppose the master’s will.

While Psi determines range, Skill shows how many egos can be broken at a time, as well as how the target can resist and how strong the emotional shackles are.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Maximum # Slaves</th>
<th>Ego Break Abilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Beat Height and Width of target’s psychic defense roll to enslave. Difficulty 4 to take a forbidden action or do something else instead of obeying an order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Beat Height and Width of target’s psychic defense roll to enslave. Difficulty 5 to take a forbidden action or do something else instead of obeying an order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>Beat Height and Width of target’s psychic defense roll to enslave. Difficulty 6 to take a forbidden action or do something else instead of obeying an order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>Beat Height of target’s psychic defense roll to enslave. Difficulty 7 to take a forbidden action or do something else instead of obeying an order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>Beat Height of target’s psychic defense roll to enslave. Difficulty 9 to take a forbidden action or do something else instead of obeying an order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>Beat Height of target’s psychic defense roll to enslave. Forbidden actions are impossible, as are any other actions if a direct order has been given.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Psychic Abilities**

---

**Possession**

This is a straightforward psychic attack. Brutal and horrifying, but straightforward. The possessor locks onto your mind and hijacks the voluntary motor controls. You become a puppet: Regardless of your intentions, your body does what the possessor wills.

This isn’t easy, though many possessor psychics remain still while controlling others to make it slightly less complicated. (Many. By no means all.) Because they’re using total control, they can’t direct as many entities as an ego breaker. On the other hand, it’s possible to contradict most ego breakers a little bit, even to the extent of doing nothing instead of taking an order. Possessors don’t have to worry about passive resistance.

The duration of possession varies greatly depending on power, as does the number of individuals who can be compelled. All possessed entities act as a single unit, though this doesn’t mean they all do the same things. Think of a good marching band. They’re all playing the same song and stepping at the same time, but they’re playing different instruments. Same thing with groups possessed. If there’s a door they need to go through, one opens it and holds it while the others proceed, they don’t all try to turn the knob at the same time.

Possessed individuals are considered minions with Threat 3 (motivated and “enchanted”) unless they’re armed, in which case they’re Threat 4.

But though the apex of possession is perfect puppeteering, there’s another way to use it. This quick and dirty psychic attack doesn’t attempt to control the muscles—it just crashes them. A strong dose of contradictory impulses to the motor controls can leave a group twitching and convulsing instead of attacking coherently. This attack, instead of giving control, simply inflicts a penalty on the targets’ dice pools, as described below.

---

**Psychic Abilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Maximum # Targeted</th>
<th>Coarse Attack</th>
<th>Possession Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-1d penalty for one round</td>
<td>Beat target’s Width and Height to control one limb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-2d penalty for two rounds</td>
<td>Beat best of targets’ Width and Height to control four limbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-3d penalty for three rounds</td>
<td>Beat best of targets’ Width and Height for full body control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-4d penalty for four rounds</td>
<td>Beat best of targets’ Height for whole body control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-5d penalty for five rounds</td>
<td>Beat best of targets’ Height for whole body control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-6d penalty for six rounds</td>
<td>Beat or equal best of targets’ Height for full body control.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Warp

The most mysterious and rare of the psychic powers is the ability to warp space itself. An object within the Psi-defined range, of the Skill-defined weight or less, can be made to move to any other location within the range. If the object is solid, the whole object has to be moved, and everything within it—solid, liquid or gas—goes with. So if you teleport a glass, you get the water in it as well. If you teleport a quantity of water out of a bathtub, you get up to your maximum weight, or less if you wish, and it just splashes about loose on impact. In this fashion, it’s possible to move an entire space ship and everyone inside it.

You can’t break solid objects with warp. If an object is too heavy, or right at the edge of range, the warp simply fails to open. Nor can you warp one solid into the middle of another: That just fails as well. You can warp a solid into a gas or liquid where it can displace the loose molecules and push them out of the way.

Warp is also sense-limited. To move an object requires you, or someone in telepathic contact with you, to sense it. If you can see an object, you can send it or call it. But a space ship out there in the void? Even if you know exactly where it is from instruments, you can’t warp it. (You can, however, warp yourself onto it, or warp in a squad of tiddahs, as long as you see them.) See it on a camera? Not good enough. But if you can read the mind of someone on that ship, and he’s seeing or smelling or touching or echolocating through the vessel, then you can lock on and send it directly into the solar corona (or to within dominance range of your allied ego breaker).

The other great limit on warp use is time. It is not easy to warp objects. After you warp something, you have to wait a while before warping anything else. (This is why the Mumbai ship had to stick around for a while, even when it was blindingly apparent to its Leatherback commander that something had gone very, very wrong.)

If you move something at the top of your weight range, no matter how far it goes, you can’t warp again for five hours. That’s how long it takes to recharge your psychic batteries. (Less demanding psychic abilities—like, say, all of them—can still be used during this no-warp period.) If you move something lighter, the recharge time drops, moving along a scale from hours to minutes to rounds to seconds. For each step you take up the chart, moving something lighter, the recharge speed moves to a faster rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Weight Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>One pound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>100 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>500 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10 tons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1000 tons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: I have Warp 4. The biggest thing I can move is 500 pounds. I teleport someone into orbit. Now I have to rest five hours before I warp someone else. After three hours, I get jumped by a bunch of humans. Rather than warp one of them into orbit, I warp a razor blade into one’s lung cavity. Since this is less than a pound, it’s four steps down on my weight limit. My recharge time is three seconds, or one combat round. I can put a blade in someone’s mouth every round.

While warping is finicky, there is one big advantage: There’s no defense against it. You see someone, you can send him to deep space if your capacity’s high enough, and no matter how strong his Psi, or how head-blind he is, he’s taking that one-way trip.
A Final Thought: How Do We Breathe?!?

Going on missions to strange worlds, seeking out new life (and ending it) raises one obvious question: How are humans, adapted for a nice oxygen/nitrogen atmosphere, supposed to breathe out there?

The answer is that Earth’s atmosphere isn’t terribly exotic: There are at least thirty other species who breathe something close enough, and the biotech the Cyblobs and Leatherbacks developed to let them trade and travel works just fine for humans, too. Humans nicknamed it “peep-dip” and it’s a transparent, plasticky goo into which you’re submerged. (Like a science baptism.) You emerge with a millimeter-thick coating all over your skin, with some pouching over your nose, mouth, and ears. A simple gas exchanger, about the size and shape of a loaf of bread, can be attached on the chest or back and you can breathe through that for up to 70 hours of intermittent heavy activity before you smother.

Drinking is an issue, but bottles with electrostatic polarized neck holes can work through the film without letting in gasses. Elimination? The film expands around it, like a balloon filling up, and when it’s about the size of a plum, it breaks off. Not perfectly sanitary, but they’re working on a polarizing electrostatic... device.

The film won’t protect you from freezing, burning or getting sliced in half, but you don’t have to worry about atmosphere. Also, most alien viruses, bacteria and prions are from highly divergent biologies. You’re less likely to catch something off a space mission than you are off a truck stop sink.
REIGN was built to run games where fantasy cults and factions clashed at their edges. Some changes are obviously necessary to abstract it up a level into a modern world where some of the people with whom I have daily interaction are thousands of miles away. The primary area to update is the impact of media. PCs playing Out of the Violent Planet can warn, alarm or mislead millions worldwide. Most of this can be handled with the standard company actions described in Chapter Four. Access to powerful message-shaping and dissemination technologies is handled with Advantages (if they’re the sole property of an individual) or Assets (if they’re run by a company).

Advantages

AM Radio All Day Long (3): You either are an AM radio talk show host (unlikely) or you’re a frequent and prominent guest for one, or you’re a regular feature on the show. Your words, opinions and ideas are in people’s ears all day long. It won’t get you good seats in a restaurant, but you can influence the national dialogue. In particular, your steady pressure can take one year’s fringe movement and make it reputable by the next election cycle.

Your Company can raise its Influence to 6 using the “Rise in Stature” action.

I Can Haz Blog (2): Or a vlog or a huge swarm of Twitter followers, or whatever the hot new social media is now. You have an internet link that is casual, but which reaches a large cross-section of people.

With this Advantage, any time your Company uses the “Rise in Stature” action, you can add +1d to the pool. (This assumes, of course, that you’re abusing your blog privileges for shameless self-promotion.)

My Documentary Film (1): You’re a scrappy indie film-maker with a backwards baseball cap and a hand-held digital camera. You won’t take ‘no’ for an answer.

Amusingly, you don’t have to finish the film. Or you can have already made one and be working on another. This Advantage is simply the persistence, resources and (for want of a better word) cachet that comes with being a struggling director.

When using Espionage to find information, you can add a free +1d to your pool if there’s a Difficulty.

My Sunday Column (1): You’re one of those stodgy tree-assassins of the lumbering, obsolete print media, but your day has not yet passed. Not as long as there’s one retired English teacher who still cares about spelling and grammar.

Your Company automatically gets a +1H bonus to all Counter Espionage sets if its Territory is 2 or less.
Assets

As is typical with Assets, you acquire these as if you were permanently increasing one of your company Qualities. They are bought as if they were Sovereignty or Influence.

900,000 Bookmarks: This is not just one lone voice crying in the wilderness (or, rather, typing in the Starbucks with free Wi-Fi) but a large, financially solvent information movement site—something like Wikileaks or the Huffington Post. Lots of writers, lots of coverage, lots of ones and zeroes. Because so much information is flowing through the site, now and again something arrives from someone motivated, not by profit, but by patriotism, guilt, or simple spite and boredom.

Once per month, you can use this Asset to keep your Treasure from decreasing after an Espionage use.

Bland, Bloated Internet Portal: To purchase this asset, you need to first purchase 900,000 Bookmarks. Now, in addition to a prominent news site, your Company controls an internet portal. As far as your dumber clients are concerned, you are the Internet. This means that you’re expected to be publicly disinterested and take care not to offend anyone, but it has its rewards behind the scenes.

Any time you use the Espionage maneuver to build confidence for a hidden agent, the bonus jumps to +2d after one month instead of two.

Regional Coupon Tabloid: Instead of a glamorous internet site that anyone can get to with a few free mouse-clicks, you’re stuck with a regional newspaper that runs on ad revenue. (Free bit of advice: Do not alienate the advertisers.) But despite being small and parochial and limited in scope, you have your loyalists, who can (properly motivated) get more loyal still. Usually, this motivation takes the form of puff news that distracts them from broader problems.

Once per month you can decrease your Influence by 1 to raise your Sovereignty a point. These are both temporary.

Respectable Journalism: ‘Respectable’ being a code word for ‘not just some blowhard abusing the Comic Sans font on a web site and not just some blow-dried empty suit at an anchor desk.’ Print journalism is still around, grudges, leaks, and grime included at no extra charge. This is a national newspaper (or magazine) running exposés, doing investigative journalism, going undercover, and gracing the coffee tables of countless dentists nationwide.

Before buying this Asset, you must have the Regional Coupon Tabloid Asset. When using the Be Informed action, any Difficulty your Company faces is decreased by 2.

Cable Action! News: “If it bleeds, it leads.” Say it with me. Again. And now “If it has upskirt, the ratings won’t get hurt.”

People want spectacle, sex, disgrace and scandal. Cable news does that better than anything else, still. If you can’t raise your head with pride, you can at least cash a nice-sized check.

If you use the Espionage action to change opinions, emphasizing your agenda through Cable Action! News gets you a free +1d bonus to the roll.

Heads, Talking: Mainstream TV journalism took a hit when HD made it clear just how scary aging newscasters can look in a clear, sharp closeup, but it’s still popular with the astigmatic demographic. It remains the first choice for people crashing on the couch after a hard day. (They don’t want anything lengthy or complicated.) It’s the common denominator of public opinion. But before you get this Asset, you have to first get Cable Action! News.

If you’re taking the Be Informed action and there’s no Difficulty, you get a +2d bonus to your pool.
...Weather & Traffic After
This: A large amount of
news actually gets ingested
in between commercials for
sales at local car lots and
some teenager’s cruddy
desecration of a classic
MC5 tune. If you’re
making decisions about
which 2-3 minute news
bites make it to nationwide
FM radio, you have an
influence that’s pervasive
and subtle, if not
overwhelmingly powerful.
Moreover, aggregating
news for radio stations
exposes you to a very large
number of sources. Some
pan out.

If you’re making an
opposed contest to Be
Informed, you can give
one set you roll a +1
bonus to either Height
or Width.

National Public Radio:
NPR prides itself on its
independence, relevance
and dignity (except during
pledge drives or when
“Car Talk” is on). It’s an
outlet that thrives on
deeper analysis and on
assuming an intelligent and informed audience.

Being listened to and taken seriously, NPR is one
of the media outlets that can say something
unpalatable to a group that will actually ask
themselves if they might be wrong and the radio
might be right. This is seldom done, of course.

Once per month, you can drop Sovereignty
by 1 and increase Influence by 1. These are
permanent.

Our Documentary Film Career: A well-funded
film corporation making a documentary is
something quite different from one guy with
editing software and a mission. It can strike
thousands of theaters and, when people pay eight
bucks to see something, they take it seriously.
Even if it’s a vessel for a whopping great lie.

One time only, you can permanently lower
Influence by 1, to get a +3d bonus to one
Influence-based roll.
Appendix: Alternate Alien Silhouettes

Phalangoid

Note: Phalangiod life forms have nine limbs and one central organ sac at Location 10. They survive until Location 10 is full of Killing damage.

Segmentoid

Segmentoids die instantly if Location 10 is filled with Killing damage. Filling Locations 1–3 with Killing slays within an hour. Once 6-7 is fully Shocked, it can’t move, and if 8-9 is fully Shocked they’re blind and deaf.

Tuberoid

Note: Tuberoids die if either torso (Locations 7–8) or central ganglion (Locations 9–10) fill with Killing damage.