

A BEACON OF KNOWLEDGE



A BEACON OF WISDOM



# MISSING

Young Short Eastern Sergal  
Last seen at Roqueport



**THE RRIN PERCH**  
**10,000**  
**GOLD REWARD**

If seen, report to your nearest PTC office

# Curse of Coeurasa

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Play along! This campaign guide contains characters and settings that you can adapt into your favorite RPG system.

**Notes in boxes like these are GM Notes.** If you'd like to play as a character, skip these boxes—they may contain spoilers!



DESERT OF DESPAIR

BIPUS

THE WITHERED WASTE

COEURASA'S REACH

BISENORTH

KARBAN SEA

THE GOUGE

FAIRLANDS

ROQUEPORT

BUDDY BAY

ATLAS

SOBEAIN COVE

SECRET COVE

TARTABAN

COEURASA COAST

SHOOTY BAY

THE DRAGON'S MAW

BIZENGHAST DESERT

FROZEN SOUTH

KAOLEENSOS

HOWLING  
SEA



THE GREAT  
NORTH  
OCEAN

# Introduction to the World

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## Introduction to The Cross

The Cross is a region blessed with an abundance of natural harbors, mountains and valley passes, and a far-reaching and wide array of rivers, creeks, and canals. Trade is lucrative, competitive, and expansive. The main trade hubs cradle accessways and ports of the Karban Sea, the conduit to the rest of the world. The largest natural bays are then understandably the home of the richest cities. Massive deserts surround the inland edges of The Cross, ensuring sea trade is well maintained by all parties. Common interests regulate internally to prevent loss of profit, namely the eradication of piracy and smuggling over the sea routes. Over many generations, an extreme diversity of people, culture, government, commerce, and adventure has developed, driven by disputes on the features of the land, a smattering of strategic river crossings, Spire locations, and areas of natural resource accessibility.

## Marking Time

The common calendar of The Cross is the **Guhring Calendar**. This development of years and time keeping was initialized by The Order of Arcane Sages as one of their first acts to spread knowledge and wisdom to The Cross, as proper time keeping was important to mark and maintain records. While history has been recorded for thousands of years, prior to this act, regions marked time using their own individual methods which caused disparities and confusion with trading and maintaining historical documents. The year is now broken up and marked by the four temperate seasons. The calendar is then measured in the numbered day of that season. Days are 24 hours long, with seven days in a week, fifteen weeks in a season, and four seasons. Seasons named Wind, Fire, Earth, and Water.

**GM Notes:** Conditions of this world as presented in this book begin in the year 519.



Story

# Finishing School

by Djarums

*82nd day of the Season of Water*

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Perch,

*It delights me to say that Miss Therrin arrived safely at the dormitory this morning. She of course has her own room; and a spectacular view of the Karban coastline. We've spared no expense on updating the furniture in her room, no Perch will have even an inkling of discomfort on our watch. As you know we offer a multitude of avenues for refinement, so we have arranged for her to meet all the instructors one on one first thing tomorrow morning.*

*We are honored and privileged to have the opportunity to help Ms. Perch rise to the level of sophistication that is expected of a family of your stature.*

Sincerely,

Camille Durand III  
Headmistress

House Sobelain for the culturally gifted  
~Where nobility begins~

A black and grey sergal slowly pushes open the heavy oak door. She cringes when it makes a noticeably audible creak, but pokes her muzzle through the opening and peeks inside. Two figures dressed in white jackets, breeches and armed with épées are in the midst of a bout. One of the combatants shifts their gaze slightly over to their new audience member. The opponent lunges and his épée's point lands on the distracted fencer's chest, bends and almost grazes their mask.

The victor withdraws his weapon and pulls off his mask. The lithe leopard's ears wiggle a bit after being freed from the mask, then he looks squarely at his opponent, raising a paw up and extending a finger, "distraction and opportunity."

The student slouches and removes his mask. The german shepherd's gaze briefly shifts from the leopard to the sergal and then back.

"Things happen all the time and it's how you chose to react. She came in," the leopard gestures toward the sergal without even looking at her, "you chose to look, I chose to strike." The leopard grins.

The shep's ears perk up inquisitively. "How did you know sh-"

The leopard raises a brow at his student. "Worry more about your wandering eye, master Mazak."

The shep ever so slightly bows his head and lowers his ears.

The instructor approaches the young canine and places a paw on his shoulder. "We can have another bout tomorrow master Mazak, as you can see I have a guest."

"Th- thank you, Mr. Tarkway." The shep moves to put up his épée and mask, then leaves for the changing room.

"Why, how lucky am I to be graced with your presence, Ms. Perch!" Mr. Tarkway removes his gloves without looking at the sergal.

Therrin's paws grip the strap on the messenger bag across her torso and her fur slightly stands up when she's finally addressed. "I didn't mean to interrupt Mr. Tarkway; I can come back another time." The sergal stands up straight, attentive, and dressed in a loose shirt of the finest linen and tailored leather breeches.

"Nonsense, nonsense Ms. Perch, you're more than welcome. Please excuse my..." the leopard gestures to his fencing outfit, "less than formal attire." He then performs a slight bow.

The sergal extends a paw awkwardly with the leopard in mid bow. "Therrin Perch," a look of steely conviction in her eyes as she waits for a handshake. "I was supposed to meet with each instructor yesterday, but you seemed to be absent from the tour. I was certain you were in the brochure."

Mr. Tarkway looks up and arches an eyebrow, then extends his paw to meet the sergal's. "Oh! I am. It was requested that I... might want to have a field trip yesterday." The instructor feels the sergal's grip tighten with his response.

Therrin's fur stands up a little more and her eye gives a little bit of a twitch, "It was, was it?" She says through clenched teeth.

*19th day of the Season of Wind*

*Dear Mr. & Mrs. Perch,*

*Just wanted to update you on Ms. Perch's progress. Your daughter shows almost limitless ambition. Hardly a moment transpires where we see the young lady idle, or even sleeping for that matter. She has thrown herself at her studies and her instructors couldn't be more pleased if they tried. In fact our linguistics instructor Mrs. Beaumont has begun referring to your little sergal as a prodigy.*

*The amount of work she has been putting in is commendable considering the understandably light first semester she's chosen.*

*Sincerely,*

*Camille Durand III  
Headmistress*

*House Sobean for the culturally gifted  
~Where nobility begins~*

The young Ms. Perch hurriedly stomps around the busy courtyard. Frantically looking around, she finally catches sight of her instructor. Mr. Tarkway sits at a table alone, holding a cup of coffee up to his muzzle with both paws, though not drinking, just seemingly lost in the act

of people watching. With a furrowed brow, the agitated student's claws clack against the tiled ground as she makes a beeline for the leopard.

"I know it's you! Why do I have this!?" Therrin drops her messenger bag on the table in front of Mr. Tarkway. She looks around nervously, then opens the drawstring and aims the opening at her fencing instructor. Inside her bag is a rather large hardbound book with numerous bookmarks and slips of paper between the pages titled 'Regional Dialects and Customs of The Cross'.

The leopard stops his people watching, raises his eyebrows, lowers his cup, and says calmly, "Ms. Perch, I'm fairly certain you should have that book since you chose to attend that class this semester."

The sergal pulls the bag closed, concernedly looks around the courtyard again, and says in a hushed tone, "Yeah, but not Professor Beaumont's copy!" Therrin pulls the bag to her, leans close to the leopard and whispers with a hint of fear in her voice. "If I'm caught with this my M-

"Look," the feline interrupts, looks the sergal directly in the eyes, and whispers earnestly, "Seeing how much time you spend training with me, I'm assuming you're not doing much studying." Upon hearing this the sergal gets visibly flustered and her eyes widen.

"Wha-"

"Not only that, a lot of the faculty talks, so if you're worried about proof that you're a little more focused on your stance rather than the intricacies of the fertility festival of the northern tribes, you only have yourself to blame."

Therrin scowls and hugs her bag even closer.

Mr. Tarkway smirks and continues, "There's that fighting spirit. This is why you have that book my dear. You have a knack for the art of fighting." The leopard leans back and sighs, looking his student square in the eyes, "I don't just train you because you show up. I must train you, Ms. Perch, but I can't do that if you fail your other classes."

The sergal's anger melts away; she widens her eyes and opens her muzzle in shock, but then finally speaks, "Mr. Tarkway... I don't know what to say. You and your training are the only things I enjoy here. I..."

"It's Reginald," the leopard interrupts, and then sips his coffee. Therrin's eyes widen and emits a slight gasp of surprise.

"The fact that you'd rather be leaping about and testing your mettle instead of hobnobbing with The Cross's upper

crust, is the most obvious part about you Ms. Perch.” Giving a warm knowing smile and maintaining eye contact, the leopard continues, “You weren’t meant for that life. I can provide you with the skills you were born to have.”

*85th day of the Season of Fire*

Dear Mrs. Perch,

*Per your request, Mr. Tarkway will no longer teach at House Sobelain for the culturally gifted. I've personally seen to it that he was escorted off the premises, and will also never be permitted to set foot on our grounds in the future. I assure you we did everything in our power to keep Ms. Perch's curriculum strictly academic as you instructed. We are extremely sorry for any hardship this has caused you or your family, and will strive to set the young Perch on the right track from here on in.*

*Sincerest apologies.*

*Humbly,*

*Camille Durand III  
Headmistress*

*House Sobelain for the culturally gifted  
~Where nobility begins~*

**Tack... Tack... Tack...**

Therrin opens her window to the gorgeous breaking waves that string across the shoreline. Dusk paints the rocky cliffs and beach in an orange glow. The sergal's attention is briefly drawn to the beautiful landscape, before following through with investigating the sound of something at her windowsill. One story below, a dashing leopard dressed tip to tail in dark leather, looks up for a sign of recognition. A smirk grows on the leopard's muzzle when his eyes meet Therrin's.

“Reginald!”

Reginald removes his wide brimmed hat and bows. “Apologies Ms. Perch, no doubt you noticed I had to miss the last few sessions,” the leopard says, hushed but playfully, as he rests his paws on his hips.

“What happened?!” the sergal yelps in a hushed tone as well.

“You happened.”

“What?”

“Well, as a couple of roguish brutes were taking it upon themselves to move all my effects to a waiting carriage, the Headmistress informed me that I, Sir Reginald, would not be allowed on the premises any longer. In fact, she promised to summon the local authorities if I ever set a paw within a hundred feet of the estate.”

Therrin's claws dig into the windowsill, her brow furrowing. Reginald continues.

“Yes yes you see, the headmistress lobbed a lot of questions about my favorite student. She apparently was not aware of how much training we'd been doing, and despite my countless praise for you and your skills, she seemed none too pleased about the whole affair.”

Therrin closes her eyes, lowers her head and after a sigh, says, “I'm sorry, Reg.”

“Sorry?! Sorry for what? My dear, you've graced me with being able to teach someone with such natural ability. Your poise, your technique, your form is a delight to behold. I've never seen anyone as talented as you in my line of work.”

“Well, I can't be that great. It's because of... me that you have to find a new school!” The sergal says through gritted teeth while tears well up in the corners of her eyes.

Reginald smirks and holds a paw to his chest, “Miss Perch, do not fret. I believe you have a misconception about my line of work. Please come down so we can cease this whispering nonsense.” The leopard holds out a paw and looks up at the window. Therrin leaps down effortlessly, approaches her teacher, bypasses his paw and hugs the leopard instead.

Therrin mutters into his cloak, “I'm so sorry!” The student leans back out of the hug with a look of concern and a bit of matted fur under her eyes. She meets Reginald's gaze, “So, you're not a teacher?”

With a warm smile the leopard wipes a tear away from one of his students eyes, “I'm your teacher as far as I'm concerned. I want to show you the life you were meant to live. Would you consider continuing our training in Crestfall, Ms. Perch?”

Therrin's eyes light up and a toothy grin grows on her muzzle. “Let's go with Therrin now.”



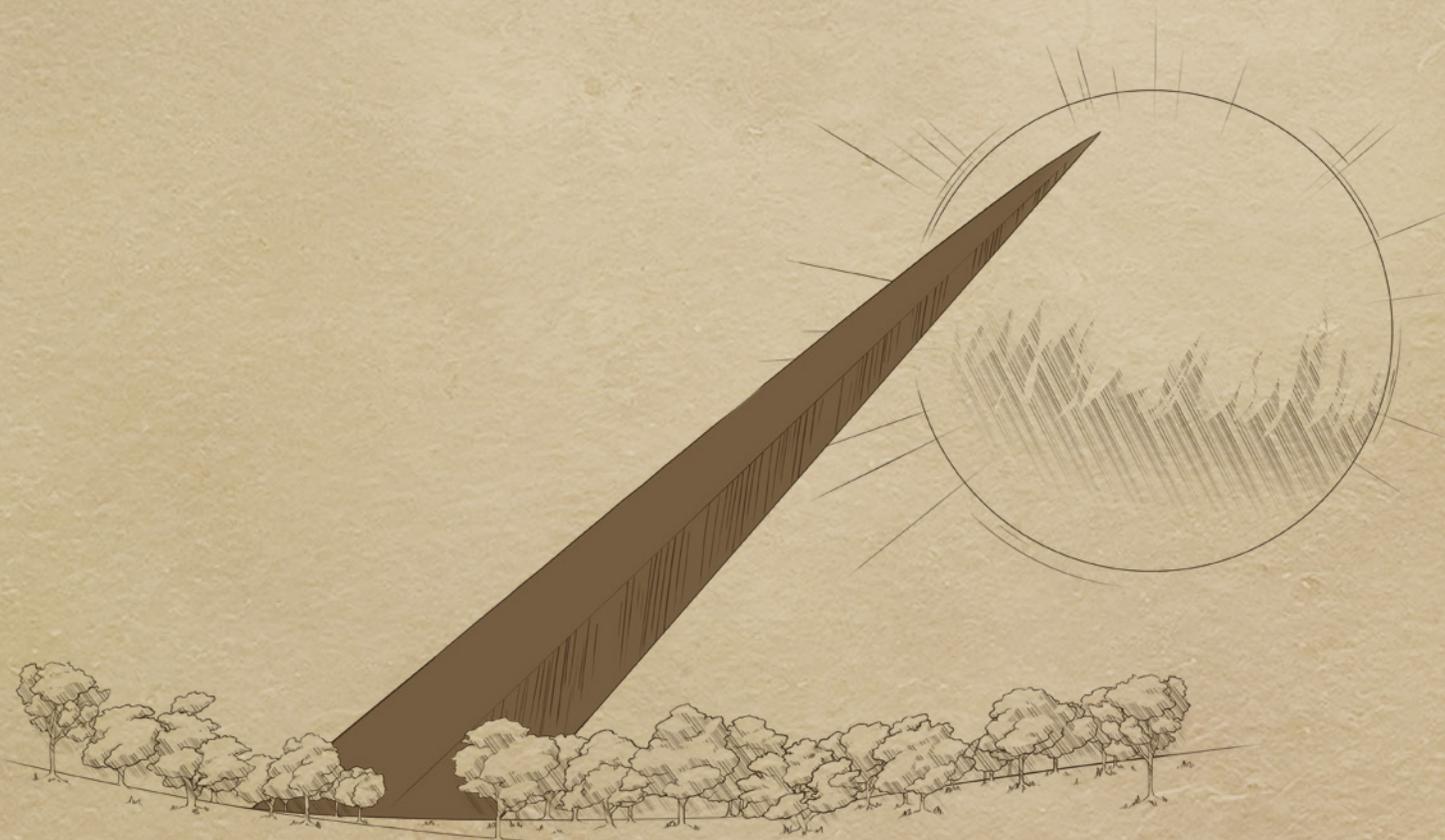
# World Features

## Dragon's Teeth/Spires

Dragon's Teeth are gigantic, black spikes that pierce the sky with forgotten purpose. They all angle to point directly at Coeurasa with their tapered tips, sides coming together at the top in an impossibly sharp point. Composed of a dark, black stone across their surface, the Teeth can be seen against any daytime horizon, but from how far depends on just how tall they are. The height of the Teeth can vary from location to location, some being as short as a hundred feet off the ground, contrasted against the staggering lofts of spires that reach thousands of feet above the surface. Many of the inhabitants of The Cross refer to these structures as Spires, a vernacular made for

convenience. Legends abound that the Dragon's Teeth hoard lost treasures, but those foolhardy enough to plunder them are cursed unto their death, perhaps even cursing the entire region around a Spire. There are rumors that some Spires even contain the coveted and extremely valuable crystals known as Dragon's Tears.

These towering structures have dotted the landscape of The Cross for all of history. Even the most ancient stories consider them an immutable fixture of the landscape. Travelers from afar report likewise in familiar regions, giving rise to the idea that they cover the whole world. There is debate what the Spires do and what they look like amongst different regions of The Cross, as some Spires have a beautiful golden glimmer hidden amongst the



## GM Notes: The Origins and Purpose of the Spires

The Dragon's Teeth, or Spires, are relics of a long dead civilization, one that was very near traversing the stars themselves. Using their incredibly advanced technology, the Spires were constructed immediately after the Calamity of Coeurasa, where the rogue planetoid was abruptly and violently captured by the planet. The upheaval of stable orbits, climate, seasons, tectonic stability, and geothermal energy was enough to doom that civilization from the start. However, these ancients knew that it would be a long, slow process for their existence to fade; but also knew that any surviving societies weren't safe either. They knew they had to keep future generations safe by ensuring Coeurasa could not achieve the end of its new orbit. It had fallen into a sub-orbital trajectory that would inevitably result in a collision that would likely exterminate all life on the planet. The doomed ancients then mustered every resource that they could, determined to engineer a solution that would preserve life on the planet.

So, the Spires were conceived, components and protocols were designed to maintain them, and a vast planetary information network linked their systems together in a hopefully uninterrupted feed that would ensure the Spires would always fulfill their task. Hundreds if not thousands of Spires were constructed. If one Spire was deactivated, the network would immediately activate another as a backup. As many failsafes and redundant systems were created as reasonably possible. These culminate in an effect that any given Spire can't be shut down by protocol or request, either within the Spire or among the network. They have to be physically disabled on-site, and doing so results in its own series of dire consequences. Each Spire alone is merely a drop in the ocean of the toil that is required to keep a whole celestial object in space, but all together they manage to hold the extinction of their planet at bay.

The feat is achieved by the last breakthrough technology of that dead civilization, the ilanephrite crystal. A tiny amount, barely a pound, is housed very near the bottom of each Spire within its reactor core. This crystal is key to the Spire's main function of holding Coeurasa away from the planet. Each crystal is shaped with nearly impossible accuracy to focus its interactions along the Spire. When a Spire is first activated, it aligns the many internal pylons that are protected by the outer shell, such that circuits of Moonweave form a single, unbroken pathway from the reactor core to the tip of the Spire. This is all to assist in transporting the product of the crystal interactions to their target. The ilanephrite crystal is stimulated in active Spires by a focused beam of neutrons through its quantum structure. This charging of the particles allows them to react with neutrinos. The neutrinos are essentially captured, altered, and redirected along the crystal's focus to be transmitted along the Moonwave circuits. It is a very intensive process that quickly destabilizes the ilanephrite crystal without the use of protective energy fields. Thus, the containment field around the reactor core is typically powered using geothermal and tidal forces that are present at the core's depth in the planet. Coeurasa's very presence gives aid to the system, as its close-range gravitational effects drastically heighten the tidal forces being visited upon the core of the planet.

Once the altered neutrinos are funneled into the Spire's extensive system of conduits, they slowly decay from their energized state. This decay is not quite radiation, but not quite anything else either, and its reactions with the surface of the Spire result in a soft golden glow along these conduits. Very few attempts were made to mask this glow or radiation, as it was deemed harmless. Once the Spires were activated, this radiation permeated the planet, and somehow managed to affect the internal working of the Dragon's Tears, producing that same golden glow. Again, it was deemed that there were no derogatory affects to the Tears. The decayed or decaying neutrinos are then channeled directly out of the tip of the Spire, aimed directly at Coeurasa. The atmosphere is too thin relative to the mass of the Spire or the density of Coeurasa to cause any significant effect to them. They shoot from the Spires, travel through space, and inevitably reach Coeurasa where they must penetrate its dense surface. This final interaction, after so much decay, completely destroys the structure of the neutrinos, releasing a host of other radiation and the final, intended form of these particles. Negative gravitons, created through such complicated means, were the only viable solution the ancient civilization could reasonably prepare. These special fluxes of energy impact the moon's matter and act opposite to normal gravitons. They push against its silvery, suspended form. The convergence of the beams from the Spires is carefully maintained to stop any excessive downward pull on the moon. An excess of this power was deemed far riskier than holding it in place, as the force generated by the Spire's fall off exponentially with distance. This would mean for even small pushes outward, the moon would orbit back around and be even harder to handle the next time. The careful balance allows Coeurasa to have a stable orbit at its size and distance. This process does not prevent Coeurasa's gravity from affecting the planet, ensuring the energy systems at play were not reduced, and destroying any hope of the ancients that they might reverse their catastrophic climate damage. In time, they knew, a new series of societies and life would prosper. So inspired, they met their deaths with dignity, leaving their legacies behind to quickly be forgotten by the struggling people of the world.



black stone. Some are entirely covered in runaway plant growth. Some are thick and some are thin, and the only real consensus amongst people is that they are mysterious, and often, ominous.

### External appearance

Closer inspection of the Dragon's Teeth reveals a patterned surface made of countless thin columns, smooth to the touch, faceted together to form the walls of the structure. The long rectangular sections are smooth to the touch. Each of these columns features a faceted spiral on its end, as if each column was rolled up from some great sheet by unknown forces.

The external appearance of a Dragon's Tooth hints at its internal condition. On active spires, the long rectangular

sections of the surface columns feature a repeating pattern that have a dim gold glow. The light emanating from the spires do attract Nocturn Alas, which can cover up and hide the glow of the spire, from a distance masking it as inactive or destroyed.

Dormant shrines and shrines missing their Tear do not feature an emanating glow. Dormant shrines are maintained by lesser **Guardians**, preserving the appearance of the exterior. Shrines missing their Tear are unmanaged by Guardians and are generally overgrown with flora. Despite the years of growth, plants tend to remain on the surface, with few known instances of roots causing internal structural damage.

On taller shrines, additional structures surround the area; they differ from shrine to shrine but are usually

fields of smaller spikes resembling Dragon's Teeth, a large forest of stone thorns, or a stone grid pattern on the ground covered in undecipherable glyphs. Closer to these taller shrines are tall slabs of stone covered in more undecipherable glyphs and a few recognizable pictograms of Coeurasa, Fate, and Dragon's Teeth.

## Internal appearance

Beyond the dark tones of the outer walls of a spire the structure proves to be a hollow vessel gleaming with multicolored radiance, warping light and gravity. Much like the coloration and multi-layered step pattern of a bismuth crystal, the inner walls brim with an otherworldly power that is present in more than one plane of existence at once. At times faint images can be made out in the walls that are often unseen by guests of a spire, giving the feeling of an observing presence. Crystalline structures float by the same enigmatic power that runs through the Dragon's Tooth, housing the spire guardians. Much to The Order's frustration, magic has not been determined to be the cause of the spire's oddities.

## Internal maps

Every Dragon's Tooth will be different from the last, from their shape to their contents. The most common traits for the content of a spire are structures levitated by some enigmatic force, composed of uneven terrain, unconnected and far removed from the walls of the spire itself.

The sections that make up this floating terrain are often separated by invisible walkways and drops in elevation. Mirror-like structures on the floating terrain act as doorways, transporting the visitor to another connected mirror. The location of a Dragon's Tear is well protected by both active Guardians and the terrain itself. The terrain is modified by the Guardians to better protect the Tear. Spire guardians ascertain the nature of their invaders and the path to the Tear is shaped with that in mind. Commonly the intent is to dwindle the invaders' resources and deplete their physical and mental health before the authority level guardians directly interfere.



**GM Notes:** If a party does attempt to use diplomacy to get through, then the priorities of the Guardians come first. Visitors trying to take the Tear is reason enough to eliminate them. In Bisemutum these traps and devices in a spire are used to test the highest communers and other people of importance; in some cases the spire could be used to produce truly life-altering experiences for these individuals.

## Internal traps

The majority of traps in a Dragon's Tooth take the form of psychological assaults. The mental conglomerate of the spire utilizes the traps to find weaknesses in the intruders' mind that can be superimposed into their physical senses to trick, disable, control, and separate intruders to optimize the chances for the guardians to eliminate the threats. These defenses need not be static systems set in place for all time and can be created quickly. More rarely, traps are physical so long as they do not inhibit the capabilities of the guardians or damage the spire; some examples include crystal spikes formed from a surface which could be laced with mineral poisons or illusory trap doors that conceal floors and doorways.

The most common mental traps are emotion spikes which disable intruders with emotional pain. These traps are triggered by proximity, and both their area of effect and the immediacy of their reaction is variable. Light manipulation, spire dust, and sonic tones can be used to create illusions that produce sound or conceal both visual presence and scent. They often occur in an area, selecting targets in a strategic manner such as prioritizing those that are more susceptible first. Another common mental trap is the Aurora Mind Prison where auditory and optical receptors of the targets are overloaded, forcing them into a mental recess. The victim of a Mind Prison will perceive themselves alone within their consciousness, while in reality, their physical mind is taxed beyond its limits. This can amount to a sudden comatose state, loss of mental capacities, hemorrhages in the brain and eventual death.

**GM Note:** All traps offer a threshold that a character can meet to resist or nullify some or all effects of the traps.

## Internal Guardians

A creative hand took much joy in the malleability of form and purpose for the guardians of each shrine. As such, they were created to be able to adapt to unexpected situations and challenges. In combat, the guardians become better at harming intruders with every moment that they focus on and observe them. The most common guardian formations are as follows:

**The Spire Hounds:** These beasts are made from living bubbles that cover an intruder with themselves. Once fully surrounded, a victim attacked by Spire Hounds will find themselves suddenly unable to breathe, shortly before the Hounds squeeze out what air they still possess in their lungs. Any attacks made against the Hound will also harm the victim. (Spire Hounds stats are on page 106.)

**The Constructs of Thought:** These creatures are adaptively shaped from the crystal of the spire by the hive mind to best deal with intruders. They are formed with abilities that are based on the observations of the intruders. Their abilities are focused on working with the environment to the guardians' advantage, such as being able to climb sheer surfaces to out maneuver a group or pull them off of stable ground. (Stats are on page 106.)

**GM Note:** These can come in any shape and size and can imitate any creature, being or object.

**The Umbral Wraiths:** Spectral entities projected from the hive mind that wish to do extreme harm to the living and planar interlopers; they often drain away a person's sense of self with their touch. (Stats are on page 107.)

## Sprites

Intelligent entities that exist on multiple planes and act as stewards that discern the intent of visitors. They appear three dimensional from one side and can alter their physical appearance in seconds. Sprites are highly resistant to magic, emanate auras that can warp the mind inducing extreme states of emotion or dulling emotions potentially to total complacency. They can also create pulses with various forms of elemental energy if pressed to defend themselves; these pulses do not harm Spire Guardians. (Stats are on page 107.)

## The Spire Golem

Perhaps the most well known entity in a spire, though not for their commonality but in their presence in every active spire. These crystalline Golems often tower over an ordinary person, are generally bipedal, have a vaguely humanoid appearance, and are capable of fine manipulation. They guide the actions of other guardians, seem to always possess more information than is comfortable about the world outside the spire and about intruders, particularly after they have been through some of the spire's traps and creatures. Spire Golems usually hold off contact with intruders until the Tear is in danger, opting to observe, plan, and send tactical recommendations to other guardians. They themselves possess monstrous strength, resistance to magic, and interact with the machinations of the spire as if a living part of the structure; they also possess additional abilities developed from their experiences acting as stewards of their spires. Displaced Spire Golems seek out other active spires to take up residence, forming partnerships or conclaves with other Spire Golems. (Stats are on page 108.)

## Tech/Devices

The machinations of the Dragon's Teeth have long escaped the understanding of even the greatest scholars of The Order proper. So far, The Order has been able to only hypothesize that the spire's functions are not accessible by any device or set of devices and requires some sort of alternative connection or input to produce an observable response.

The walls of a spire contain a concentrated network of egos and passing through exposes travelers to the danger of losing who they are from the foundations up. Attempts to enter through means other than a physical entrance often causes mental damage that some never recover from on their own. This effect is both a defense and a necessity for the functionality of the spire.

Strange things take place within a Dragon's Tooth, ranging from invisible paths, to uneven gravity, or even the transmission of whole groups of people from one space to a completely different part of the spire. There have been tales of terrain moving on its own to form new paths presumably for varied defensive purposes. The guardians of a spire have a hive mind that imparts various levels of tasks and authority. Accessible information has

only been rumored to be exchanged with the guardians residing in Bisemutum. No member of The Order has had definitive investigations on this matter.

**GM Notes:** This is a situation you can be creative in ways that are meaningful to the campaign; look to offer the players ways of examining their characters, push them to do their best (challenge all their capabilities), and make the journey through memorable. This is not a sign to go nuts and introduce elements that would break the game or giving the GM a free pass to do minimal evaluation of the impact these advanced systems can have on a game.

## Loot

Dragon's Teeth traditionally contain a myriad of strange tools, crystal-based relics, unusual weapons, as well as objects whose creation process has been long lost to the world. For those that do enter the spires, locating the remains of other formerly aspiring adventurers and their gear is the most common sort of loot to be found. Guardians of the spire are proficient in the use of magical objects and equipment, and some even utilize the gear left behind by adventurers to enhance their natural abilities. Each spire that has suffered intrusion often creates a stockpile of goods that can be used to lure intruders into compromised positions or used directly against the intruders.

## Destroyed Spires

Spires that have had their Tear removed can start to fall into disrepair. In such Spires, Guardians are either



deactivated, lingering or have moved on to a new spire. Larger traps are inactive but there may be enough attentive residents for smaller traps. Fractures in the outer shell allow for flora and fauna to enter and inhabit, eventually causing the collapse of the spire. These destroyed spires can make wonderful bases of operation for illicit organizations or powerful individuals. In many cases the hard unusable material that composes the outer shell becomes trinkets for collectors.

## Activation Event

Upon the activation of a Spire, there is no obvious or immediate change in its appearance as seen from afar. Nearby, careful observers may note a sudden shifting of the barely exposed inner layers of stair-step crystals. Specific relays are connected and pathways are created to channel energy that is beyond current understanding. Some of the surface pillars adjoin while others separate for this occasion. The tiniest of dull hums can be heard as Guardians either suddenly become active or change their behavior to purge the Spire's surface of all physical attachments. Most non-Spire entities in the immediate area around the activating Spire are also cleansed. The final occurrence in an activation sequence to an observer is the slow "filling" of the golden glow up the Spire's form, indicating the Spire has started performing its mysterious duty.

**GM Notes:** When the activation signal is processed, the Spire begins the sequence to realign its Moonweave circuits within the structure to establish a single, unbroken series of conduits that lead from the ilanephrite core to the tip of the spire. This may require a readjustment of the support pylons. Once the long conduits are completed, the ilanephrite reactor is activated and energy swells through the Spire conduits, imbuing them with a particular radiation that appears to the naked eye as a golden glow.

## Deactivation Event

In the event a Spire is deactivated, the first effect usually is that the golden glow of the Spire fades away over a very brief period. Depending on how the Spire is deactivated, the inner layers of the stair-step structure

may separate to reverse any changes from activation and protect the relays from degradation; more often than not, however, the method of deactivation simply terminates the Spire's ability to function properly and leaves the Spire in its activated form without any method to operate. Very few people in the world have ever observed or made the correlation that through some unknown means, whenever a Spire is deactivated another one elsewhere is immediately activated if it is able.

**GM Notes:** Whenever power is interrupted or the processor maintaining the reactor becomes unresponsive, failsafes immediately engage to quench the reactions within the ilanephrite core. Runaway activity is dangerous to an extreme degree, but the integrity of the orbit stabilization is paramount. These failsafes therefore trigger a network ping that requests the immediate activation of a dormant Spire to replace their own failed emissions quota. To protect the vital Moonweave conduits and as another backup, the Spire structure disengages its relay ability by the physical separation of conduit leads along its length.

## Nocturn Alas Attraction

The glow of active enormous spires attracts the nocturn alas. From spire to spire they travel during certain nights, following a migratory path that sends them through all parts of The Cross. When a spire is visited by numerous of these creatures, the dark wings of the nocturn alas engulf the glow of the shrine, giving it the appearance of a dormant shrine. (Nocturn Alas stats are on page 108.)

## Dragon's Tears

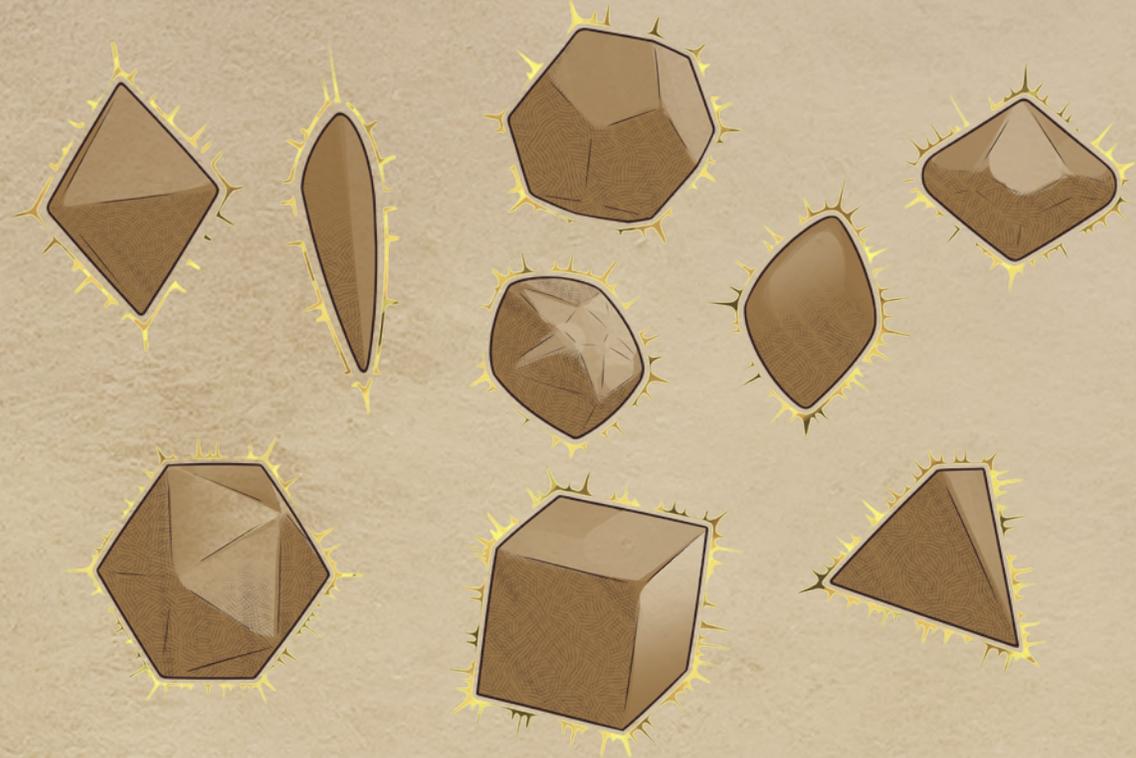
Precious, brilliant gems that refract light with intensity like no other mineral can. Smaller pieces, polished or not, are coveted as a luxury currency. These "Shards" are traded with a value given much greater than that of gold. Most pieces are shaped smaller than even a common copper piece, but larger fragments can be found in the most affluent heights of society. Fully intact Dragon's Tears are smooth, brilliantly refracting gemstones, about the size of a cantaloupe. Such marvels were clearly shaped by masters of their craft, and yet neither tool markings nor natural blemishes have ever been found on a complete Dragon's

## DRAGON'S TEARS

Gems of grand worth and beauty.

Shards of these gems are a luxury currency on The Cross, but rumors abound about the power that a complete Gem holds.

Whatever magical and mythical properties these gems may have, has long been forgotten.



Tear. Certain sects of society deal in the trade, shattering, and refinement of these sources of beauty. Such business is highly secretive, but rumor has spread that a Tear can only be found unscathed in the depths of a Dragon's Tooth. Some whispers even claim that a Dragon's Tear glows with a golden and warm inner light, that emanates through the Tear's majestic and unparalleled patterns.

### Coeurasa

A familiar and unmoving resident of the sky as seen from The Cross, Coeurasa is the primary fixture of the celestial sphere aside from the sun. It is large enough to maybe even be considered a planetoid if it orbited the star instead of the planet. Its orbit makes it both tidally locked and fixed in a geosynchronous pattern. As such, the surface of Coeurasa seems unmoving on its own accord, and the moon always sits in the same place in the sky no matter the time of day or season. Coeurasa is as familiar

and permanent in its part of the sky as any other landmark or ocean feature.

Each night Coeurasa slowly comes into view as daylight fades, appearing as a waxing half-moon at the moment of sundown. As the night progresses, Coeurasa's phase shifts with it, changing from a half-moon to a full moon. The moment of full moon is the exact time between dusk and dawn, and as the moon passes this moment, it will begin to wane back into the opposite half-moon from the one it started as. As the sun rises, the half-moon Coeurasa will begin to fade from view, its silver light overtaken by the sun. Only special lenses and optics allow certain scholars to see the great moon during the day, observing a period where its light fades totally from existence as the brilliance of the sun directly behind it suppresses her beauty. Some cultures revere these phases and the moon itself as a guiding deity, the ever-present watcher in their lives.

## Blink

Every year at the coming of Season of Earth, the impending fall solstice brings an end to the shortening of days and lengthening of nights, cooler weather, and the changing of the leaves; it also brings a marked change in the appearance of Coeurasa. At her zenith when she shines fullest and brightest, a massive curved shadow slowly starts to spread up Coeurasa's surface from below, like a great closing eyelid. Starting about a month before the solstice, the shadow reaches further and further up Coeurasa's full face each night until, just two days before the solstice, it completely overtakes the silver glow of the moon. When the silver fades, Coeurasa dully luminesces a great muted red color, akin to staring at torch light through a closed eye. For the few longest nights of the year, she looks this way during her zenith, engaged in her massive blink. The red is barely visible to only the most trained eyes when Coeurasa is not at zenith, the fledgling silver light growing at the same time it gets consumed by the Dragon's Shadow. Festivals celebrating the end of the year, certain religious observations, and scholars fastidiously studying are all abound to mark the event. Then the shadow slowly recedes over another month, Coeurasa's soft silver ambience at her zenith returning to her face and bathing the night world once again in a new year.

## Fate

The smaller sister to Coeurasa, a second moon of the world, is known as Fate. She is far more coy than her primary sibling, and only appears to The Cross for brief moments in the night at the very edge of the southern sky. Stranger still is that the pattern is not consistent from night to night like Coeurasa's. Fate's appearance is not marked at any specific time of year or season, but appears for merely an hour or so in Fate's Nights. She can show all the same phases as Coeurasa can, but only one on any given night. These phases appear to follow the same order as Coeurasa's do, confirming their relationship to one another. The time of her appearance is never the same from night to night, with her first peek into the world happening just before dawn and slowly transitioning over a week and a half or so to vanish into the setting sun. Few residents of The Cross regularly get to observe this behavior. Coeurasa's silvery glow is comforting to most people, but many find the orange-tinted Fate to be

disturbing in its timing and appearance. This has led to many residents believing that the appearance of Fate at any given significant moment to be a sign of disaster or cursed portent. Others see her brief entrance into the world as a sign of good fortune and tidings to come, as the timing required can only be explained by turns of good luck.

The scholars of The Order of Arcane Sages have kept detailed records of her travels and have compiled a rudimentary foretelling of her appearances. Mathematics, they say, can predict Fate just as easily as the turning of the seasons. Their calculations are not perfect, and for many years have either ended up falling short or overshooting. The common person has no inkling of such predictions at all and find trying to predict her exact behavior is impossible. In extremely rare circumstances, detailed in progressively older and older tomes of the Great Library, Coeurasa can completely fill the area of the sky where Fate would be seen. The mages see it as a natural occurrence and think little of it, but documented history shows that the more superstitious members of society believed Coeurasa was shielding the world from Fate's influence, averting great natural disasters or society's end. One such scroll details the account of a mage seeing a massive, infinitely intricate arcane emblem upon the surface of Coeurasa during one such celestial apex, though they all dismiss it as the ravings of a madman.



Verse

# The Tale of Bagras the Bad

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Oh, let me tell you 'bout Bagras the Bad,  
Most forgotten canine The Cross ever had.  
A sheepdog from Roqueport, shaggy haired, blue of eye,  
There wasn't a challenge that he wouldn't try.

Oh, let's now remember great Bagras the Bad,  
With exploits so varied that most thought him mad.  
He braved Dragon's Teeth, scaled Coeurasa's Reach,  
And between adventures? Swordplay he'd teach!

Oh, let history weep for Bagras the Bad;  
Became accursed - a story so sad.  
Hunted the Umbra, as legends would say.  
Let's bow our heads. Silence now. All pray....

OH! But, don't you feel down for Bagras the Bad!  
The curse couldn't kill him. Let's now just add  
He dodged death, arrows, lawsuits, and more  
As he continued his 'ventures on Tartaran's shores.

Oh, pity! Feel pity for Bagras the Bad!  
Found the most pathetic end of any nomad.  
He met his fate in a Bellowport field  
When he found how much lightning a silkie could yield!

by Myth H. Wolfe (mythwolfe@gmail.com)



EPHRAIM '15

REWARD  
10,000

# Locations

## Roqueport

Located on the coast facing the Karban Sea, this towering city is built on and around an enormous Dragon's Tooth shrine. The giant black spire juts out of Roque Ridge, looming over the lapping sea waves, and is a marvel to behold. The more affluent residents along with city officials have constructed lofty and magnificent manors on the actual spire itself. The other buildings in Roqueport radiate out around the spire, all built tall and impressive like the spire that inspires the city's growth.

For centuries, Roqueport has been known as the center of commerce for The Cross. This is due in part to its central location on the Karban Sea and an ample natural harbor, as well, as its impressive and questionably contemptuous feat of building a metropolis on a Dragon's Tooth. Many companies from The Cross have their headquarters located somewhere in Roqueport's business district.

Houses make up the ruling class of Roqueport. Houses are primarily comprised of magnates, capitalists, and trading companies. It is rumored that the governor's palace even has a rare and intact Dragon's Tear on display, but only for the most well-connected and powerful to enjoy.



# KARBAN SEA

## THE GOUGE



- ★ CAPITAL
- ◎ CITY
- TOWN
- VILLAGE
- .... ROAD
- ~ RIVER
- ⚔ DRAGON'S TOOTH
- ⚔ DRAGON'S TOOTH (RANSACKED)
- ⚒ MINES
- 🏠 OBSERVATORY
- 🗼 LIGHTHOUSE

## Atlas

Located on the western shore of Tartaran, Atlas is the seat of power in The Cross. The city is a sprawling hub of trade, industry, and science known the world around. One can discover information within the near limitless number of books at The Order of Arcane Sages Grand Library. There is always work to be found at the countless guild halls, a wide array of goods to trade at The Kalzar Market District, and adventure in every nook and cranny of this maze-like metropolis.

The remnant of a warring age long past, Atlas was once the seat of power to a mighty emperor who conquered the three small nations that used to inhabit Tartaran. The proper name of Atlas is 'The Holy Empire of The Crystal Fangs' named after the three spires that reside upon the island. Most refer to it in the current era as simply Atlas, which was the name of the first emperor to reign over this mighty city.

Many generations have come and gone, but The Emperor's bloodline exists to this day. While mostly a figurehead position, Empress Kai the Fourteenth sits upon the imperial throne. The young rhino has guided The Imperial Senate with grace and wisdom in her short years since her father's death, and aims to better their society through a progressive and modern approach.

The Imperial Senate is comprised of a number of notable figures throughout Atlas. Most infamous is Senator Mazak, the representative of The Order, who's said to have used the wide-reaching hand of the organization to manipulate votes into his favor on some issues. Other senators of note are the extravagant crane Herald Demeaux of Perch Trading Company's Eastern Branch, the staunch and rigid bear Jonas Nevron who leads The Clergy of Fate's Light, and a famous equine guild master simply known as Mr. Edward.

With the Empress' guidance, the senate discusses and enacts many laws and policies that arise within the capital of The Cross. The ideal is that among the thirty representatives they strive to improve and protect the people within their walls, but can often at times get lost in the arguments, discussions, and personal vendettas

against their fellow senators. Despite these delays and disagreements, they manage to keep Atlas in good shape.

Atlas enjoys a robust trade district with its massive port, second only to Roqueport in size and structure. Its goods and services extend from the most common to the most obscure, and with the right connections, one can find anything they want, regardless of its legality. Apart from trade goods, the mountains and foothills to the east of Atlas are home to the Einhart Silver Mines which have served as a strong source of labor and industry for hundreds of years.

The people of Atlas come from all walks of life. From the upper echelon noble to the lowly beggar in the filthiest gutter, one can find it all here. Culturally, Atlas has been a very large melting pot of many beliefs and practices from the very start of the imperial unification. This doctrine has drawn people from the world over, and has developed into a truly unique blend unlike any other place in The Cross.



## Bisemutum

Bisemutum is a small region set in the northeastern part of Cross. It is isolated from the rest of the land by Coeurasa's Reach to its east, the high cliffs and rough seas to the south, and The Withered Wastes to the north. With no sea access and only one small land entrance, Bisemutum has been well protected from outside influences. The region is home to four Dragon's Tooth shrines that are active and well preserved.

A set of five communities reside in this land; four of these travel from Dragon's Tooth to Dragon's Tooth as the seasons change. When each of the traveling four communities arrives to their next region, they use the land and provide their specific services to the area before they move on to their next region when the season ends. The communities provide services for each other by leaving behind tools, materials and food and maintaining the land or structures.

### Tribes

**Pater:** The Pater focus on construction and maintenance of the region's structures along with the fabrication of tools and armor. As architects, fixers, and creators, some of their greatest accomplishments include the Crescent Forge, where Moonweave metal is produced and forged, and the hanging homes on the cliffsides to the east. Their most skilled artisans reside either at A'Mond where they maintain the fort or at A'Paz where they work the Crescent Forge. Most smiths from A'Paz begin their education as leather armorers in Pater.

**Mater:** The Mater focus on farming with the cultivation of plants and fungi; they maintain the soil of the region. They are farmers, cooks, and herbalists, they teach and provide medicine, helping keep the communities strong. Work tasks are generally harvesting and planting of new seeds. Their greatest challenge is overcoming the sickness from those who spend too much time in The Withered Wastes, a feat they have been unable to accomplish for thousands of years even with the help of shrine Guardians. They work their hardest and are at their



greatest during the Blood Nights, where they cook the festival feasts. Their greater herbalists reside at A'Mond and with the Amans tribe, where they learn ancient techniques from Guardians and where their medicines are in great need.

**Amica:** The Amica focus on herding and land tending along with the training and raising of livestock. They are ranchers, foragers, and providers. Their typical work tasks include maintenance of the rivers and aqueducts of the region and leather tanning. They provide war beetles to the Amans, food for the Mater and materials for the Pater. Their rarest feats are training manipedes for war and riding Nocturn Alas. Their greatest tamers move on to help the Amans, assessing which beasts will be useful as mounts or prey.



**Amans:** The Amans focus on hunting and gathering resources. Hunters, miners, and lumberjacks, their work relies on obtaining food and materials from animals and the woods in the region. Hunting for animals in the region not only helps provide food and armor but also keeps the population of harmful wildlife under control, keeping the communities safe from beastly attacks. Their greatest accomplishments are the Sunset Tunnels to the west of Bisemutum. Their greatest hunters tend to become warriors, choosing to move frequently to do guard duty in A'Mond.

**A'Paz:** The residents of A'Paz do not travel and are located between the southernmost three Dragon's Tooth shrines. It is maintained by a small group composed of smiths, elderly, people who can no longer endure the seasonal travel, and a small support group of clerics, guards, and other experts. The elders teach spiritual communion with the shrine Guardians and Whisperstones, pass down folklore, teach literature, and perform rites of passing. While the community here relies the most on the other four, they provide the great service of maintaining the gathering spot for the Blood Nights festival and teaching advanced smithing in the Crescent Forge.



# THE WITHERED WASTES



KARBAN  
SEA

THE GOUGE

- ★ CAPITAL
- ⊙ CITY
- TOWN
- VILLAGE
- .... ROAD
- ~ RIVER
- ┆ DRAGON'S TOOTH
- ┆ DRAGON'S TOOTH (RANSACKED)
- ⚡ MINES
- 🏠 OBSERVATORY
- 🗼 LIGHTHOUSE

## History

Bisemutum has lived the same for thousands of years with long periods of stability. A valley surrounded by mountains with a single treacherous entrance has provided them with ease in the prevention of invasion. Their location has proven to be a strategic wonder. Their communion with Guardians has provided them with a unique advantage as they have been guided on how to survive natural disasters, plague, famine and taught resource management and medicine. Among the Guardian's gifts, Moonweave alloy stands out, allowing the creation of advanced tools, weapons and armor.

Before their self-imposed seclusion, the Bisemutum performed expeditions to push for the preservation of Dragon's Teeth outside their lands. The first few sent out were treated with great regard, almost as royalty because of how they displayed their Whisperstones as jewelry to be seen and admired. It did not take long for these missionaries to realize why they were treated with such admiration; the value of their Whisperstones was coveted more than their friendship. A few managed to make their way back to Bisemutum in the dead of night, but most were not so fortunate. The Bisemutum tried other peaceful methods to teach other cultures their reverence for the Dragon's Teeth, but overall, they found little success. Bisemutum's influence did not reach much farther than the Bipusmarsh and even then, it was questionable. The locals altered Bisemutum preservation methods, but at least the missionaries rested easy knowing that the Tooth in that land would be protected.

Spreading their ideology to the outside world proved too difficult. The dependence on Tear shards was strong and deeply rooted into the economic system of the outside world. Asking for such a change would alter the operations of many organizations and companies, bring poverty to many who were rich, and would bring the ire of the more secular governments, who dismissed the Bisemutum's ideals. Bisemutum garnered the envy of other nations of The Cross. These nations killed emissaries, attempted to trespass into Bisemutum, and even made efforts to invade AMond. After enduring such hostile acts, The Bisemutum closed their land to the outside world. They accepted that spreading their ideals would be too costly a task and a losing battle.

Despite all this, the Bisemutum maintain a small relationship with the outside, participating in trade with

some of the nearby villages to maintain some positive influence with their neighbors.

## Economics

While economically independent and able to rely on itself for stability, imports to Bisemutum are desirable and what others consider mundane are exotic to them. Requests from the Guardians have turned Moonstone into a highly sought-after import. Since Bisemutum has little use for silver or gold, they commonly trade these metals for their imports. Moonstone is a common enough mineral outside of Bisemutum that importing it is cheap. Bisemutum never uses shards as outgoing trade or as currency, but will accept them as incoming trade.

## Relationship with Guardians

The Bisemutum's relation with Guardians is a positive one. In part because of the actions of the first Percus, but mostly because the Bisemutum show no interest in vandalizing the Dragon's Tooth shrines.

Though entrance to a Dragon's Tooth is still restricted, exceptions are sometimes made for elders or those showing high capability in communing with the Guardians.

## Advanced techniques

The positive relationship with the Guardians has yielded great benefits to the Bisemutum, their cohabitation proving to be beneficial for each other. Over time the Guardians have granted knowledge to the tribes, including advanced techniques in agriculture, medicine, tools, and weapon manufacturing. Some of this knowledge has proven to be too advanced for the Bisemutum people to utilize, or too difficult for the Guardians to disseminate.

## Crescent Forge

**Moonstone** is a strange clay-like rust-colored rock, coated in spherical shapes that non-Bisemutum blacksmiths see no value in working with and commonly perceive as useless. However, Moonstone can be used through proper smelting techniques and special tools that Guardians have access to. The Bisemutum were gifted a great complex furnace by the Guardians, which came to be known as the Crescent Forge. It smelts Moonstone with other metals to create silvery alloys, in a process called **Moonweaving**. These names were given because the metal would shine much like Coeurasa's glow. The Bisemutum forge the Moonweave and in exchange for



Kingadee

## WHISPERSTONES

Whisperstones are decorated and well-shaped fragments of a Dragon's Tear. The stone holds a dim glow compared to a Dragon's Tear. They are believed to carry the souls, intentions, and path of the previous holders.



this knowledge provide the Guardians with as much of the mysterious substance they need.

### **Moonweave Alloy**

Moonweaving is a technique passed down from the Guardians to the Bisemutum. Moonweave, is light, hard, strong, and glistens a silvery gray like the light of Coeurasa. The operation of the furnace turned into a complex ritual taught to most skilled smiths. The Guardians are gifted most of the produced Moonweave as a sign of reverence and excess is left behind for the Bisemutum to make use of.

Moonweave armor is styled to look like chitin armor, giving warriors agility and dexterity unheard of for how thick and hard the armor is. Spears and swords forged from this material slice even the heaviest plate clean open with ease. The Moonweave armor is reserved for elite guards and hunters of the community, turning them into far more formidable warriors able to keep trespassers out and able to hunt down the strongest of prey.

### **Whisperstones**

The stone marks the second gift Guardians provided to the Bisemutum. Whisperstones are decorated and well-shaped fragments of a Dragon's Tear, generally smoother and oval shaped with an intricate golden symbol inside the surface. The stone holds a dim glow compared to a Dragon's Tear. They are believed to carry the souls, intentions, and path of the previous holders.

Whisperstones are provided to newborns upon their first Blood Night. The stones are believed to provide Coeurasa's grace while the soul visits the land and is separated from Coeurasa. The Bisemutum keep hold of their Whisperstone and is a physical manifestation of their soul. Upon death, the Whisperstone is collected and passed down yet again to a new visiting soul.

Whisperstones can provide guidance and visions to their holder. Special training and discipline is required to have direct communion with the stone where the souls within answer the keeper. The success and type

of guidance provided by the stones vary as much as the souls contained within. During the Blood Nights, stones are particularly active and may bring their keepers into communion themselves. Practice and concentration must be used to maintain and interpret more lively conversations with the stones.

The Bisemutum are aware of the treatment of Dragon's Tears as currency outside their land. When travelling outside their land, they usually refer to Whisperstones as "tokens" to diminish their importance. They are kept safe and hidden away from view of others.

## Blood Nights

While regional and community-held festivals exist, the tribes have a festival they all celebrate together. Once a year the Bisemutum gather in A'Paz to celebrate the Blink, the nights when Coeurasa turns crimson. This celebration lasts for roughly fifteen nights before after the Blood Nights, consistently at the end of the Season of Fire and the beginning of the Season of Earth. The festival signifies the continuation of life and the cycle that comes with it,

celebrating the newborns of the year and remembering those that have passed.

The festival's activities run from sundown to sunrise; as such the Bisemutum alter their sleep cycle for the event, sleeping through most of the day to stay awake for the nights. Torches and large bonfires light up the region of A'Paz. The former ghost town fills with life and empty buildings are adorned with warm-colored decorations, banners, tapestries, and pennants. Homefronts are decorated with a more personal touch, featuring murals, colors or objects meaningful to the inhabitants.

A common sight at the Blood Nights festival are ambridis, crowns and necklaces of brilliant yellow, orange and red made from the leaves of fatidi trees. A person is expected to create their own ambridis, and a Bisemutum gifting an ambridis is considered a great show of affection or respect. Because new bloods frequently make and gift smaller ambridis for their teachers and leaders, these members are often adorned excessively. The mutual exchange of ambridis is often reserved for lovers



and partners and is used as a show of devotion or the beginnings of a vow to each other.

The festivities climax in the middle of the event to mark the Blink. At the first sundown, a small band of drummers make their way around the perimeter of A'Paz, marking the end of the Season of Fire and the end of the last day. The band collects whisperstones that belonged to the deceased, ferrying them to the center of A'Paz. Bonfires are kept extinguished during this time and ambridis made from the beginning of the festival are gathered onto the firepits.

For each of these four nights, when Coeurasa's eclipse occurs, all festivities come to a halt and are replaced with a drum routine. This routine starts slow and as the darkness of the night grows the drum routine picks up in rhythm and people are encouraged to sing and howl out for Coeurasa to help encourage her to come back and be reborn. The drums, singing and howling reach peak and end at the darkest point of night when the bonfires are lit again, burning brighter than before due to the fatidi leaves. The length of this routine is difficult for the drummers which encourages teamwork between the performers, with only the most experienced of them lasting the entire

session. The meaning behind this routine is to mark the end to Coeurasa's current life and welcome it anew. Each blink Coeurasa faces is a rejection of the Dragon that wishes to devour it. After, the festivities grow quieter, calming Coeurasa back to her normal state.

After the fourth night, a small band of drummers make their way around A'Paz, gifting whisperstones to newborns of the year.

## The Forsaken

While conversation with Whisperstones is common, there are rare occurrences of those who fail to communicate with their stones at no fault to their attempts. These people are known as The Forsaken. They are considered cursed by Coeurasa, their soul having been driven out of her in disgrace. Should this person not be capable of redeeming themselves, their soul is believed be devoured by the Dragon into the Howling Sea.

The A'Paz are quick to remind everyone that this is all speculation about the Forsaken and remind that they cannot truly understand how Coeurasa behaves and what her intentions are. However, the oddity of the situation does bring concern from those who can listen to their





whisperstones and they greet the unfortunate ones with solace. The few Forsaken from the current era believe that pilgrimage will bring them favor, but as to what spiritual significance will cause their awakening it is unknown, as it is unclear if a forsaken has ever been able to regain favor with Coeurasa.

## Places of Interest

**A'Mond:** A fort built into Coeurasa's Reach, located at the entrance passage of Biseumutum where the mesa meets the cliffside to the sea. The fort's walls have stood unharmed and unaged from years of attacks. The fort itself is mainly composed of Coeurasa's Reach, as if it were carved into the environment, with a few additions made to complete the fort. Biseumutums are assigned to guard the pass as part of their Rite of Night, keeping people from crossing into their lands.

Trade to the outside world is handled through the fort, featuring a small set of shops that are operational at certain times of the year when the tribes are expecting trade from their neighbors.

The fort features several defensive benefits, aside from the strength of its walls. Avalanches can be started that barrel down and cover the path to A'Mond. As a

last resort, the stationed guards have been instructed to destroy pillars supporting the ceiling of the fort, collapsing it over the entrance and, sealing Biseumutum from the rest of The Cross.

**A'Paz:** The location of the yearly Blood Nights festival, it is situated between three Dragon's Tooth shrines (Dahre, Vita, and Peperit). The area is a large flat field surrounded by a ring of woods with the many streams from Peperit flowing through it. This city is almost a ghost town for most of the year, featuring countless empty festival abodes and fire pits and paths overgrown with plant matter. The few permanent inhabitants reside closer to the center of the city, where they maintain their community and teach lessons at their small library. The designated Percus resides within A'Paz, helping strengthen the bond with Guardians and teaching future communers.

**The Withered Wastes:** The desert to the north of Biseumutum is accessed by passing through the Tempus shrine region. The land is a mixture of dark sands and a dead forest; decayed and burnt trees dot the landscape. A curse was placed upon the land, causing sickness and eventual death to those who wander through it. A thin trail known as Kromek's Pass avoids the curse and leads



to the Absolvo shrine, however the pass is poorly kept for fear of the curse.

## Dragon's Tooth Shrines

**Peperit:** Located to the southeast. It is the origin for many of the springs and rivers that flow through A'Paz. It is the highest point of the peninsula, the mountains appearing as if reaching towards Coeurasa.

**Dahre:** Located to the southwest. A notable feature of this area is a large cave with a tunnel that runs through the mountain. A forsaken attempted to please Coeurasa by digging a tunnel through a mining cave in the mountain, wishing to add beauty to the landscape by providing his homeland with a second sunset. These caves became to be known as the Sunset Caves. Whether this worked to help please Coeurasa no one knows, but the gesture has been appreciated by all who see it.

**Vita:** Located to the east, the Dragon's Tooth is nestled in a ravine. The mountainous region has complex cave formations that partially run down the cliff side, providing for cool shelter during the summer months and flora unique to that area. While most inhabitants reside within the cave formations, a few set their homes on the edges of the rising mountain face.

**Tempus:** Dragon's Tooth located to the north, hidden deep in a forest. The shrine marks the end of the woods and the entrance to the Withered Wastes. The shrine itself is overgrown with plant matter and hides well within the forest. Normally the Guardians would keep the shrine pristine, but the Guardians misunderstood a request from a forsaken. What began as graves and planted flowers to remember the dead became a large garden surrounding the Dragon's Tooth that eventually grew to cover the shrine.

**Vinculum:** Dragon's Tooth located in Coeurasa's Reach. This Dragon's Tooth is located near Coeurasa's Reach and rises toward the inside of Bisemutum. The normal shrine entrance to the inside is buried under snow and ice however the inside can still be accessed to those capable and who are not afraid of heights or getting lost in the maze-like interior. Years of water, ice and damage caused by flora have forced this shrine to an un-operational

status, however it is believed it's Tear still resides inside the shrine.

**Absolvo:** The Dragon's Tooth located deep in the Withered Wastes. Though only Guardians live here, there is a marked path, so the curse can be avoided on pilgrimage.

## Coeurasa's Reach

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From the outside, a long and steep white mesa that rises from the Karban Sea and stretches for hundreds of miles to the north. Several mountains run along the base of the mesa before it turns into a steep vertical cliff, earning it the nickname of **The Wall** or **Sky Reach**. It climbs far into the clouds, and it is believed that snow and ice cover the peaks of the Wall due to the constant water streams that combine into rivers that feed the Bipurmarsh. Avalanches are common during the season of water, proving it too difficult to maintain cities or roads along the length of the reach. The surface of Coeurasa's Reach shines brightly with the sunset from all the snow and ice runoff, however it also casts a great shadow in the morning, delaying sunrise.

On the opposite side of the reach lies the Withered Wastes. A mess of dark jagged spires and mountains run along the base, some reaching up towards the wall. They appear like giant lengths of decayed trees. There is no semblance of order amongst these spires and they are unlike the Dragon's Teeth. From this side the reach appears to have a slight inward bow. This is a dangerous piece of land during the Season of Water, as instead of avalanches, giant spikes of ice may randomly fall from the sky. During the Season of Fire, the fallen giant spikes of ice turn into pools of water which form a continuous thin waterfall that runs the length of Coeurasa's Reach. While ice spikes are far smaller and fewer in this season, they are just as dangerous. Travelers to this area carry large chitin shells over their heads to protect them from these spikes. The stream from this waterfall travels south to the fort of A'Mond and feeds into the Karban Sea. The only known passage through Coeurasa's Reach is through the fort of A'Mond, keeping Bisemutum separate from the rest of the world.



Therrin pulls Bata up out of the water. She turns her companion onto his back and straddles him, then beats on his chest and slaps him. The sergal looking down at the bear through dangling wet hair shrieks, "breathe, Goddamnit!"





LIMBURGER

EDAM

LANGRES Story

# Be Stilton My Beating Heart

by Djarums

## THE LITTLE DEMON

A black claw traces from one city to another. The sergal's eyes dart all over the map excitedly, her tail swinging back and forth.

"Miss Perch!"

She's so lost in thought that she's almost startled when she hears the voice outside. The sergal leaps on the chest next to the window and looks down to see her caretaker, a thin, well coiffed mountain goat, in a nicely tailored coat. The goat looks warmly up at the pointed snoot sticking out of the window.

"There you are. We're set to go to Maieisor, lil miss. I've made sure to tie most of the crates to-"

The tiny snoot disappears before he can continue and within seconds the young eastern sergal has her velvet coat on and bursts out of the way station's door. She approaches the carriage that's still being loaded up with crates all labeled with her family's distinct "PTC" logo. A gruff looking polar bear pulls at a rope securing the cargo as the eager sergal reaches for the handle on the carriage door.

"Ahem... lil miss."

The sergal turns to see the goat holding another crate.

"We did try to get everything on the roof but..." The goat shrugs, smirks and ever-so-slightly gestures with the crate in his paws, "if you wouldn't mind a riding companion."

"But of course, Mr. Satu." The sergal says playfully. "He better not smell like the last one though!"

Miss Perch smiles a big toothy grin and opens the carriage door for Mr. Satu, who then proceeds to stow the crate on one of the benches inside.

"How does this stuff not go bad? Doesn't this trip take weeks?" The sergal asks loudly and boisterously over the wagon rolling on the frozen ground.

"Only six days actually, but it's the cold that does it lil miss. Heck, we could transport these bad boys to Burn-wurth if we had to. Now THAT would take weeks." Mr. Satu replies to the squeaky voice coming from behind him.

"Wow, and we pay people to do this?"

"That we do."

"So cool..." The sergal mutters to herself as holds onto the window frame, her muzzle agape with a slight smile, watching the frozen landscape pass her by.

"Are we going to Burn-wurth? I've nev-"

"WOAH!"

The sergal's sentence is cut short as she loses her balance when the carriage comes to a stop.

"Sorry to interrupt Miss Perch, there is..." The goat's eyes strain to look at a lump in the road about 20 meters ahead, "something in the road. Just sit tight and keep your head inside"

Mr. Satu secures the bugaloo reins and disembarks the carriage. The only sound is of wind rustling the evergreens and bushes that line the road. The goat's eyes narrow as he tries to focus on the lump barring his path. With a determined huff he begins to make his way over and investigate.

"Quite a cold one isn't it?" A voice pierces the silence from behind a tree at the side of the road, only a couple meters away. A white fox in studded leather casually steps out from behind a tree, his paws behind his back. He turns to face the goat, a confident smirk on his face "but you seem to have a pretty nice coat, so I guess it doesn't bother you!"

Startled, Mr. Satu turns to regard the fox; simultaneously his paw reaches for his sword at his hip. Before the paw even gets to the grip-

**THOK, THOK, THOK**

Three daggers fly past his horns, sticking into the side of the wagon. Mr. Satu freezes right where he stands as his eyes scour the treeline looking for where the attack came from.

“Woah, hey buddy! Eyes on me, okay?” The fox says in an assertive but charming tone as he slightly leans forward and waves getting the mountain goat’s attention again. Meanwhile the lump in the road moves and stands up revealing itself to be a leather clad white rabbit, who confidently makes her way over to the wagon, her paws on the daggers at her hips.

Mr. Satu huffs a cloud of breath in the cold mountain air as he returns his attention to the fox, he runs the options he has left through his head and bares his teeth just a bit before finally gripping his sword.

**THUNK**

The mountain goat howls as a dagger strikes his shoulder. He collapses against the carriage as the fox saunters closer.

“Tsk tsk tsk. Now why’d ya gotta go and do something like that my horned friend? Now that beautiful coat has a hole.” He says with a hint of regret but oozing with an unsettling amount of composed confidence.

The fox stops right at the injured mountain goat and crouches down till the two are almost muzzle to muzzle. Mr. Satu is huffing large clouds of vapor and furrowing his brow, looking angry, but not exactly threatening anymore. The two stare at one another for a few seconds. A self assured and charming smile grows on the white fox’s muzzle.

“Good, this is how I like ya. Scared, on the ground. Your paws off that sword of mine.” The fox leans down and reaches for the goat’s sword, pulling it out of its sheath. “I think I’ll keep this while my companions here relieve you of your cargo.”

A couple more ruffians emerge from the brush at the side of the road and help the rabbit up to the top of the carriage. She then begins to hand down the crates one by one to the fox and the other thieves.

“Looks like it’s all just cheese, boss.”

The fox snerks and remarks “Well, I thought it’d be fancier, but our bellies sure will appreciate it!”

The roof rack is emptied in less than a few minutes. The rabbit hops down, looks inside the cabin and mutters to herself, “oopsie, almost missed one!”

The long eared vagabond barely opens the carriage door when it’s pushed open by a streak of black and white. The sergal swipes at the rabbit’s muzzle and then leaps off her back at the carriage and over to Mr. Satu. Her eyes meet his for a brief second, the goat is about as surprised as everyone else around the wagon. The sergal’s eyes dart all over her caretaker till they furrow as they find the dagger in his shoulder.

“What in The Cross?! Sharlize! Are you okay?” The fox yelps in surprise, pushing back through the brush.

The rabbit growls and scrambles back onto her feet “There was... a demon... a something in the carriage,” she says as she holds a paw to her freshly scratched muzzle.

As the fox emerges from the foliage he sees a small sergal attending to the downed mountain goat, he then emits a sharp high pitched whistle. More of his band rush out of the brush drawing their weapons, and the bunny, still cradling her muzzle, rushes around the carriage.

The sergal turns around to see the three vagabonds’ attention on her. She bares her teeth and pulls the dagger





from Mr. Satu's shoulder, making him yelp with pain. Lil miss Perch clambors up the wagon up to the driver's seat right above her fallen comrade. She brandishes the bloody dagger toward their assailants with one paw, the other paw open and ready to strike with long black claws. She stands as if she is ready to pounce at a moments notice, her tail is up and attentive, her neck and head fur is standing up, the rest is matted and haphazardly sticking out of her velvet coat. Through the most vicious snarl she can muster, a slightly trembling voice erupts.

"I AM THERRIN PERCH OF THE PERCH TRADING COMPANY AND YOU MESSED WITH THE WRONG SERGAL! I DEMAND YOU FILTHY SILKIE LOVERS RETURN OUR CRATES THIS INSTANT!"

Therrin spits as she hollars at the ruffians. Large puffs of steam pour out of the scared and agitated sergal, her eyes full of rage, her body shaking from the cold and adrenaline.

#### THOK

The air parts right under her muzzle for a brief moment as a dagger whizzes by and sticks into the wagon next to the other three daggers that are already there. Therrin loses her composure and her snarl for only a second then returns to being menacing and furrows her brow.

The fox holds up a paw in the direction the dagger came from. "Well, aren't you a fearsome little demon." The fox says with a little smirk, cocking an eyebrow. Therrin

purses her lips and narrows her eyes at the fox pointing her dagger at him. The bunny with the three scratches on her muzzle walks over to the fox and whispers in his ear. Upon hearing the whisper, the fox chuckles.

"It seems you have us, Therrin Perch. Your other cargo is already long gone, but I mean, how can we take the last crate with such a valiant defender in our midst? C'mon guys, we better get out of here while we still have our hides!"

He gestures to his two confused party members who momentarily tilt their heads at the command but lower their weapons and start to retreat into the brush at the side of the road.

"BUT!" Therrin yelps as the thieves leave.

"Miss Therrin, it's been a pleasure to be in your fearsome presence," The fox complements with a bow. Within seconds he's gone, leaving the sergal still trembling and pointing the dagger toward the side of the road.

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The thieves make their way through the forest with their ill-gotten goods when the bunny asks the leather clad fox.

"We coulda sold that chief, what's the deal?"

"Pfft, the cheddar and swiss will be just fine, and I mean c'mon, no one likes stilton in these parts."

# Economic Systems

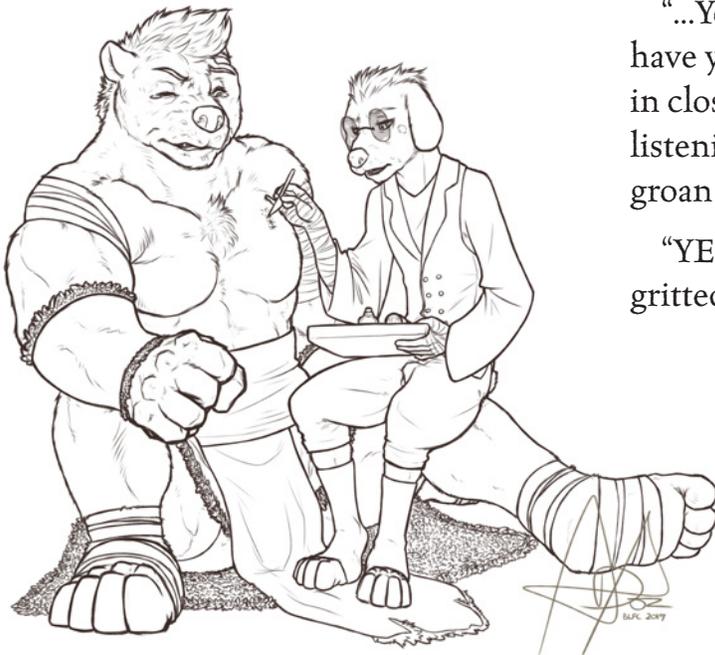
## Sea Trade

From the imposing silhouette of the Roque Tower, clear past the edge of Tartaran and out to the Fang of the Sea, ocean traveling vessels ebb and flow like the blood of The Cross. They carry, the trade that feeds every town and government from one edge of the land to the other. Sea trade is what keeps The Cross flourishing, as it has for untold ages. All of this trade must pass over the mass of water that straddles every shore of The Cross, the Karban Sea.

The Karban Sea fills the interior space of the various lands of The Cross, touching upon the swamps of the north, the plains and forest of the west, the mountains

of the south, and the imperial island and sheer cliffs of Bisemutum to the east. While this provides easy access for The Cross' shores to each other, only two pathways exist to the outer world at large from this sea. In the north sits the channel called the Dragon's Maw, named so as the Fang of the Sea sits like a beacon, warning of the narrower passage between Bisemutum's natural barriers that sit like great teeth, and the island of Tartaran. To the south, lies The Gouge. The Gouge sits south of Tartaran's southern edge, sunken beneath the sheer cliffs of the island that gently taper inward to Snootport. To its own south lies the rapidly rising Dragon's Spine Mountains, permanently donning bright white snow on their slopes. The shape of The Gouge is thus immortalized, a giant scrape affixed the middle of





“...You haven’t had stitches before, have you?” Arden asks, leaning in closer to the bear’s bare chest listening to the bear twitch and groan in pain, “Are you okay?”

“YES,” declares the bear through gritted teeth.



two imposing sides, with the Snooty Bay providing a large refuge from the rocks. With such features abound and the great dependence of the people on sea trade, there were few who could truly understand or appreciate the scale of the sea’s material wealth, and most of those lived in Roqueport.

Blessed with a natural harbor and near the center of the Karban Sea, Roqueport is uniquely capable of handling the vast majority of the sea trade that passes through The Cross. A safe harbor and some of the most developed docks in the region have also made Roqueport the port of call for many of the international shipping routes that come into The Cross from beyond Dragon’s Maw and The Gouge, far out past the Great North Ocean. While some Cross vessels can indeed be impressive, these titans from across the world shatter the ideas of what most believe is possible. With few exceptions, they can only be maintained by the largest cooperative ventures of massive trade companies. The Perch Trading Company itself even has only one of these vessels, sailing lands afar.

Even the smallest town relies on the vessels that call varied ports their home. The movement of goods between The Cross is vital to fill the lacking needs of each region, as it’s rare for any one place to contain every commodity.

In the case of massive trade deals, say the procurement of a good for a whole city over a year’s time, Dragon’s Tear shards are invaluable. Confirmation of their existence is enough to cement such deals past most suspicion right away, or cause immediate subterfuge and espionage. It’s a dynamic that is carefully danced around as shards are traded for goods and services on industrial scales. Of course, the more affluent members of society also trade shards, but usually for more esoteric goods, the kind of things that get tucked away into the dark corners of the other massive shipments that sail the seas.

The most well-traveled route on the Karban Sea is the relatively straight path between Roqueport and Atlas. The two jewels of The Cross maintain regular, well-tracked shipments of commodities, the luxury items of the upper class of Roqueport being traded for Atlas’s magical and material goods. Spreading out from these two massive ports like two great trees growing opposite each other are the trade lanes to the smaller cities and regions. Some intersect, cross over each other, run parallel and even join up to create bigger trade routes. Of course, this draws the attention of those who seek to gain their wealth by taking it from others. Piracy is of great concern to The Cross, as it harms all involved.

Story

# A Venture Into Shadow

by Myth H. Wolfe ([mythwolfe@gmail.com](mailto:mythwolfe@gmail.com))

Danath glanced over at Kathas. The light of the nearby fire illuminated the look of impatience on the badger's white- and black-furred face.

Kathas held two colorful polyhedral stones in her right paw. Her left was poised above the set-up before them. Three pewter figurines sat upon a large, worn map that drooped over the edges of the tree stump that served as their camp's table. She gazed upon the figurines. The first was of herself - a wolf wearing a cloak and hood, paw extended as if casting a spell. The next was of Danath, a stout badger with a breast plate and brandishing a two-handed sword. The last was much larger, a slightly curved metal spire looming over the others.

"Can we get on with it? Roll the dice already," Danath said as he leaned on his sword.

"No," she said, deep wrinkles of irritation forming on her muzzle. "Divination isn't some tavern game. There's a process to follow."

Kathas sighed. Given how perilous entering a Dragon's Tooth shrine could be, she wanted every additional piece of intelligence she could get before proceeding.

She finished mentally weaving the energies needed for the spell. She ran her open paw slowly over the map and the figures upon it. Her fingers tingled as the threads of magic interlaced with that of the map. The figurines slid slowly across the parchment's surface, tracing the steps that they were going to take - from their camp, then up the trail into the forest. Then, a sudden resistance pushed back against her paw.

The two adventurer figurines stopped a distance away from the Spire. That foretold that their quest would end before they even got to the shrine. Kathas tried to move her paw further over the map, but only met stronger resistance.

Kathas frowned and decided to move to the next step - the dice roll that would tell them the nature of their adventure's end. She held her breath as she released the dice. Both landed on the number one.

"Ones." Danath peered down at the dice. "Is that good or bad?"

"The scrolls said that one is the worst omen you can get."

Danath let out a grunt and swiftly kicked the stump. The dice shifted under the force of impact. "Look! Twelve and twenty."

"Come on, Danath. We both saw it. If we take the divination's advice, we should just go home."

"If," said Danath. "My gut still says we're getting a stone tonight. We've got skill and we've got grit. I say we continue."

Grit. That was Danath's favorite word for desperation-driven stubbornness. Though, they both knew they were desperate and stubborn. They needed a small fortune to clear gambling debts and adventuring expenses. They couldn't afford to fail. One run-in at sword point with so-called debt collectors was all the warning she needed. An intact Dragon's Tear could only be found in a Spire, and just one could clear the record and let them retire.

Kathas glanced up at the Dragon's Tooth that towered above the nearby woods. Coeurasa - one of two moons - shone her silver light upon it, casting an ominous sheen across the Spire's ebon surface. Even at this distance, half a day's trek, the dark stone of the Spire was imposing. She looked over at Danath, who went back to sharpening his blade. Though she was still uncertain, she trusted his instincts. And, there was no one she trusted more to have her back in the face of danger.

A sudden shout from the woods shook Kathas from her thoughts. She raised her paws and conjured five glowing

mystical arrows, ready to strike at the sign of danger. Danath spun, his two-hander already raised.

The pair scanned the shadows. Kathas sniffed the air. She noted the distant odor of pine and the acrid smoke of their campfire. Then, the scent of something else. Someone.

"A hare," she said after a moment. She sniffed again. "It smells like he is, or was, on fire."

"I smell it now," Danath said, grimacing. "Lovely."

A second yell sounded – much closer this time. There was a moment of silence. Kathas caught the sound of footsteps padding down the path toward them.

Within moments, a shadowy figure crested the nearby hilltop. Kathas confirmed that it was a hare. His garb was entirely black and was in tatters. As he approached, Kathas noticed that his clothing was burnt and his exposed fur was scorched.

"Hey!" Danath shouted, his sword still ready. "Do you need help?"

The hare glared at Danath and Kathas. His wild, blood shot eyes flashed with a strange golden sheen. Froth formed at the edges of his mouth. "It wants it!" he said. "Now you want it! You can't have it!"

A long dagger appeared in the hare's paw as he bolted forward toward Danath. The badger slapped the wicked blade out of the hare's grasp and slammed the hare with the hilt of his sword. The attacker stumbled forward, then spun suddenly. Danath parried a second blow, then grimaced when he saw that it was a from a weighted chain, swinging around his blade and hooking rapidly toward his head. He narrowly avoided the attack.

"Look out!" Kathas shouted. She pointed and fired her magical arrows at the hare. The missiles struck him in the chest and head. Three silver darts fell out of his grasp as he collapsed.

Danath and Kathas waited for a moment. The hare lay on the ground, unmoving. There were also no signs of pursuit. No unknown scents, no unusual sounds.

Danath lowered his blade and searched the hare's body. "Dead." He found two daggers, three additional darts, and a satchel. "Huh," he said. "No provisions."

Kathas muttered a quick incantation and blinked her eyes twice. The world took on a blue cast. The hare's weapons glowed blue beneath her magical gaze. The satchel shone with an brilliant, golden glow. "The weapons

are magical. Might be useful. The bag – what's inside is special."

Danath stabbed at the bag with his sword while Kathas dismissed the detection spell. They watched as a spherical object rolled out, onto the ground.

"Well, by Coeurasa herself," Kathas said.

"It's a Dragon's Tear!" Danath said. "Look at the size of it."

The hare had left the very object they sought. It was the highly coveted stone, the size of an adventurer's helm, golden in hue and brilliantly reflecting the light of the nearby fire.

"He must have made it through the Spire," Kathas said. "Maybe the Guardians drove him mad."

"Who cares? His loss, our gain. I told you we'd get a stone tonight!"

Kathas picked up the Dragon's Tear. It glowed dimly from within and its surface was warm to the touch. No wonder it was so sought after. The stone carried so much inherent magic. Even without her magical sight, she could almost see the power radiating from it.

Then, from the woods, a harsh whisper called their names. Her ears fell back. The voice's call grated against her consciousness, making her suddenly want to retch. She steadied herself, then glanced over at her companion. Danath grasped his head, then stood oddly rigid. He slowly stepped onto the path. He faced the distant Spire, sword in paw.

Kathas shook her head, hoping to regain some clarity, but the pain and fogginess lingered. She followed Danath's gaze and saw a hulking shadow drift over the path on the nearby hilltop. At first, it looked like a roiling cloud of smoke. But, as it approached, the shadows grew darker and appeared almost solid. A crisp odor struck Kathas – like the scent of air just after a lightning strike. The wolf stumbled backward. Light flashed from within the mass of shadow, followed by countless eyes and maws opening and closing.

"Kathaaaaa," the creature rasped. None of its mouths spoke, yet the wolf heard its speech. It repeated her name over and over. Each time, she felt drawn to stare at it, at the numerous mismatched eyes. She turned her gaze. The effort of simply looking away made the pain worse. She gripped her head, the Tear falling to the ground at her feet.

From the corner of her vision, she saw the creature float closer. Kathas suddenly felt hot. Unbearably hot.

Her breath came quick and her tongue lolled out of her mouth. She tried to speak the words of power that would help shield her mind. But, she couldn't remember them through the pain. She felt like staring at the creature, and at the same time, a furious rage flared within her. She saw Danath, staring blankly at the monster. If she did nothing, they would both be lost.

Latching onto her anger, she growled in defiance. She shouted the first incantation that came to her mind and thrust a paw toward the monster. A cone of ice blasted forth. It engulfed the creature's mass, but dissipated with no visible effect. The creature's eyes shone with malice.

"Danath, kill her," it said.

Danath turned toward her, sword gripped tightly in one paw. He strode toward her, eyes glowing with an eerie golden light. Kathas cursed and glanced about quickly. The spell had chilled the air and caused the campfire to sputter, the shadows in the clearing deepening. The Dragon's Tear's golden glow was more pronounced in the reduced light.

*The stone.* She recalled a tale of a relentless creature that would hunt down thieves to recover stolen Dragon's

Tears. Kathas gritted her teeth. She fought the voices that continued to assault her and scooped the Dragon's Tear into her arms. She thought to offer the stone to the monster, but Danath swung his blade at her, forcing her to retreat. She backpedaled, then ran forward into the woods, toward the Spire. *Run, regroup, return the stone.*

Kathas dashed through the underbrush and dodged fallen limbs. The canopy grew thick as she made her way deeper, and she quickly lost sight of the towering Dragon's Tooth. Her legs and lungs burned with exhaustion.

She ran until eventually her legs gave out and she lay on the ground for a moment, engulfed by pain. Her breath was ragged. Her pulse pounded in her chest.

Then, she smelled the horrible, sharp odor again. It filled the clearing, gagging her.

Kathas forced herself onto her feet and took a few wobbly steps forward. A wave of warmth washed over her, like standing with one's back to the sun. She felt the hair on her neck rising.

The wolf's ears fell back. She heard the whispering voices rising again, like the growing wind howling



through the branches above her. She willed herself to run, but her body would not listen. She tried to steady her breathing, to clear her mind of panic. But, a sudden cascade of worry took her breath away. *Where's Danath? His footsteps did not accompany the creature. Did it kill him? Is this the end the divination predicted?*

She bared her fangs. No. Despite the exhaustion and pain, the tendrils of magic still responded to her will. Just barely. Perhaps, just enough.

"I'm trying to return the Tear," she said. As she found her words, she found her strength returning to her.

"Please, take it. Let us go."

Kathas felt the heat behind her grow hotter.

She winced. She felt like she was on fire. She could smell the stink of singed fur mingling with burning cloth. She screamed and summoned all of the arcane energy that she could muster. She pushed the power into the Dragon's Tear. For a moment, she felt strong enough to move.

"Want it?" she yelled. "Take it!" She turned and threw the stone into the center of the smoky mass of shadow behind her.

The woods exploded in a flash of light, bright as daylight. The searing heat continued for a moment. Then, Kathas felt the breeze blowing across her. It was cool and carried the scent of pine and wildflowers. The creature was gone. Along with it, the stone.

Kathas took a few moments to catch her breath. Her body ached and she stunk of burnt cloth and fur. In the distance, she heard the rattle of plate armor and footsteps. Danath. She had no magic left, so she slipped her dagger from its sheathe at the small of her back, just in case.

Danath appeared moments later. He panted and waved as he approached.

"I'll never speak badly about divination again," he said. Kathas chuckled in response.

Danath helped Kathas back to camp. They recounted the night's events and decided it would be safest to give up on raiding Spires. After burying the hare and saying a prayer, they sorted through their gear. Danath gestured to the assortment of weapons left behind by their attacker.

"Do you think we can get some coin for these magic weapons?"

"Yeah, they should be worth a lot, actually." Kathas smirked. "You know, it also gives me an idea for a new venture. What do you think about, 'Kathas and Danath: Treasure Hunting and Fortunetelling?'"

Danath laughed heartily. "Make it 'Danath and Kathas,' and it sounds like a pretty good idea."

They finished packing their gear and began the journey home.

# Organizations

## Couriers Guild

Officially titled as the “**Courier Express Coalition**,” the C.E.C. exists as a barebones confederation of local offices, trade routes, carriage and mantis travel services, and other loosely affiliated package storing and handoff groups that handle the majority of the land-based delivery needs of The Cross. Central management exists primarily as an auditing service that ensures that C.E.C. approved businesses, individuals, and locations conform to the high standard of practice and trust that defines the level of quality people expect from the Couriers. Rarely anyone uses the official name of the Coalition anymore, collectively using “Couriers” or “Courier’s Guild” to refer to the entity and its affiliates.

Many of the subsidiary entities operate independently, performing their own business with their own management and their own clients, but in exchange for their affiliation, they get to display the coveted Signet of the Couriers. This signifies to all potential clients that the

business is trusted, successful, and will endeavor to the last to satisfy customers. Of course, the C.E.C. takes its dues in certain fees, cuts of profits, and demands for compliance involving requests from Couriers themselves. Room and board, safety from offended individuals, supplies that are desperately needed - a Courier must always provide these things to any other Courier in need. Individual Couriers that forgo operating under another entity, electing instead to be a traveling representative of the C.E.C. are considered the true Couriers of the realm. They carry their own Signets in ring form that detail their trustworthiness and effectiveness in delivering.

Couriers themselves are held to even higher standards than affiliated businesses, undergoing trials and tests that determine their ability to handle many different situations and problems that arise on the road. Anyone hiring a Courier will know without a doubt that their business will be handled with the utmost professionalism and their intent upheld as much as possible, perhaps sometimes even to the very last breath.



The physical headquarters of the C.E.C. at one time resided in Roqueport, but political and physical incidents required the group to relocate to Camemport some twenty years ago. From there they maintain a set of offices that hire the auditors, money collectors, trainers, investigators, mages, and security for their enterprise. Not surprisingly, they clash often with the Perch Trading Company in all these departments ever since P.T.C. expanded into the land division. The C.E.C. maintains a cordial relationship with The Order of Arcane Sages and regularly recruits their magical talent from them.

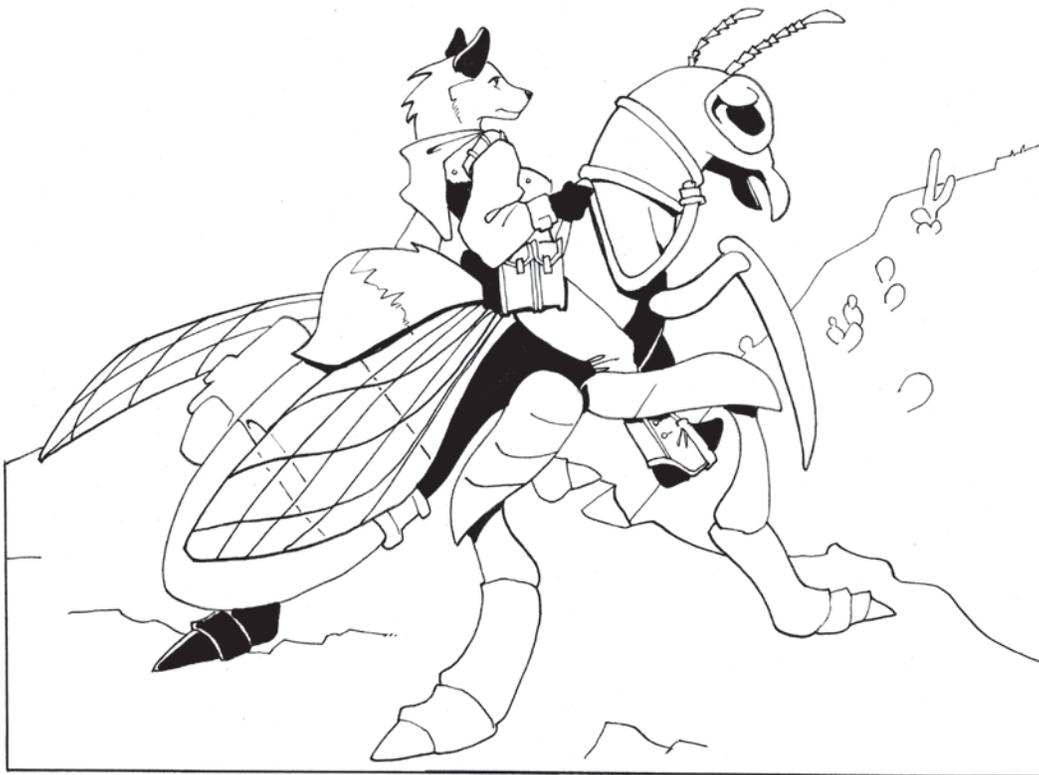
Due to P.T.C.'s ocean dominance, many of the long-distance orders and business dealings of the Couriers are handled by mages through scrying and other means that allow the Central office to delegate and track the complex issue of mail in The Cross without relying on sea travel. They still get packages delivered by sea quite often but avoid sending sensitive information that way. Most of the larger cities have a C.E.C. approved office that will contain a magical nexus just for communication with the C.E.C. headquarters, which distributes information out to smaller towns by land where P.T.C. is weak.

## Perch Trading Company

Founded by the Perchello family countless generations ago, this massive trading company started off as an organized group of fishmongers. Their prowess on the sea, and success with delivering the finest fish in all The Cross led to more and more business opportunities with various transport and trade other than fish.

Currently, the P.T.C. has been focused on marine trade and is generally considered the go-to place to ship goods on the Karban Sea. Roughly eight out of ten merchant ships carry the "P.T.C." logo. Just recently, Perch has begun leveraging trade deals and their vast wealth to expand their empire into land trade as well, much to the dismay of well-established courier organizations throughout The Cross.

Many towns greet the new trade company waystations and shiny new carriages with open arms. Other places don't exactly appreciate the rumored strongarm tactics used by the company to move into their areas.





## The Order of Arcane Sages

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The Order is The Cross's leading authority on all things related to the Dragon's Teeth, magic, history, and many other academic fields. It boasts the largest library in the region, and contains an archive of information that has been maintained since the founding of the college 300 years ago. It is most well known for its archeological exploits regarding the Dragon's Teeth, though this is often met with heavy criticism for The Order's secrecy and control over their findings in many of these projects. Being the forefront of information and history in the region, many still look to them for their expertise in scholarly pursuits.

Another reputable trait of The Order is their mage college. Many bright and upcoming students, and financially endowed nobles, enroll to refine their skills in the arcane craft. Though rare, natural spellcasters such as sorcerers and warlocks are admitted as well to build the groundwork to realize their innate potential. Classes are available in all schools of magic except necromancy, as it is seen as a profane violation of the boundaries of life and death.

Founded by a council of six scholars over three centuries ago, The Order is currently led by Headmaster Okuma, an aging crow mage. He strives to hold true to the principles of the founders in being "A beacon of knowledge and wisdom to The Cross" and does so with a well-structured and time-tested curriculum.

Members of The Order are identified by their cloaks which come in five colors to represent which role they play within the organization.

Those that don the red cloak are part of the archival cloister and are given the title of Scribe. Scribes are responsible for the recording, storing, and distribution of all documentation and information within The Order. In addition to their archival duties, this branch is also tasked with many of the educational aspects of The Order, in both magical and mundane pursuits. Their branch is known as The Lexicon.

Members that wear the blue cloak are part of the support division and known as Makers. Makers head the Craftsmen League which manufactures nearly all of The Order's goods and equipment, both mundane and magical. In addition to their production services, they also specialize in medical and magical services where needed to fulfill all The Order's needs.

The most cunning mages in the ranks of The Order are granted green cloaks and known as Shepherds. The Shepherds are a tactically minded group versed in strategy and combat magic, working alongside generals, mercenaries, and whomever needs their aid through their division – The Strategem. While the demands for talented mages in this field are high, The Order uses heavy discretion when assigning these personnel to external activities.

Members assigned the purple cloak are responsible for research, study, and surveillance. They are known as Seers and operate out of a group called The Hidden Eye. Seers are most well-known for their ability to monitor and track people through magical means, leaving most wary of their presence and dealings. In addition to this primary function, they are also responsible for nearly all of The Order's field research, spell crafting, and internal affairs.

Those that bear the white cloaks are of the highest echelon of The Order. Serving as their administration, The Magistrate is the governing body, managing all its divisions through a council of sages lead by Headmaster Okuma. Its rumored that the Magistrate holds an unending amount of dark secrets they have hidden from the world to serve their own goals, but most dismiss these rumors as the mad ravings of a conspiracy theorist.

Okuma, the current generation's headmaster, has led his craft in the arcane arts while maintaining the academic legacy of The Order with grace and dignity. He

inherited this position from his mother, who inherited it from her father before her. He was taught the ways of wizardry from a young age and grew up on the grounds. He was groomed for most of his natural life to be a worthy successor as headmaster. Since Okuma has no child of his own, he seeks to break the tradition and groom a student of significant promise to take his place when he eventually passes.

The Order typically studies a subject in three phases – Observation, interaction, and dissection.

During the observation phase, everything is monitored and recorded as best to not disturb their subject in its natural state. This phase often includes behavioral studies in the case of a living creature, but with spires this often includes observation of the local flora and fauna as well as studies on any operational devices or interfaces present.

The interaction phase is typically the most dangerous to the research team. At this stage, cautious engagement of the subject begins. In the case of a living creature, this is often done through attempting to communicate, herd, or even attack their subject. In the case of an inanimate object, this is often where doors get opened, devices are activated, and interfaces are manipulated. If something is deemed too hazardous by this phase, The Order often recalls their teams to preserve their findings.

Lastly is the dissection phase, where they extract and disassemble items of note. In the case of a formerly living creature, they are often dissected with full recordings of all their anatomy and any sort of species-specific findings complete with drawings and samples. In the case of an inorganic subject, devices are removed by mechanical or magical means and then very delicately analyzed and disassembled in a laboratory in The Order's research cloister back in Atlas.

Once the process is complete, all the research is compiled and submitted to the headmaster, and any applicable administrators for review before it is sent to the scribes to be put into books or scrolls for the archive. If deemed for open distribution to the public, said research is then submitted to the library or wordsmith guild for publishing.

## The Pirates of Secret Cove

The Pirates of Secret Cove are unofficially the ruling party in Secret Cove and the nearby port city of Crestfall. All of Crestfall's politicians are either placed by or are



directly affiliated with the infamous pirate clan. This large assemblage of ruffians not only rule the cove but the next most powerful entity on the Karban Sea, after the Perch Trading Company.

A major part of their business practice is the offering of protection from themselves. The sea trade of The Cross is bustling and rife with opportunity, but only because the Pirates of Secret Cove allow it. The other major tactic this group employs is pillaging. Ever since the disparate pirate clans came together under one banner, the ransacking of villages and port towns has become an unstoppable, and absolutely devastating experience. Their targets tend to be older less equipped bergs that don't have the ability to withstand this force of organized villainy.

**GM Notes:** The Pirates of Secret Cove are in cahoots with the Perch Trading Company. The pirates come in, ransack towns, and then P.T.C. comes in as a financial force. P.T.C. does hire the pirates to sabotage competitors' ships.

## Crestfallen

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The Crestfallen are a disenchanting collection of vagabonds splintered off from the Pirates of Secret Cove. As the Pirates of Secret Cove grew in power and influence, rules had to be imposed so that the power and inherent relationships that became part of it could be maintained. The Crestfallen would have none of this.

Years prior, the world of piracy was without restriction, without politics, and without figureheads. This is what the Crestfallen stand for. Their motto is “No leaders, no rules, no boundaries”. What motivates a Crestfallen is entirely on the individual but generally consists of goals that go against the actions of larger more financially established groups.

What stops a Crestfallen from hurting one of their own is little to nothing. So long as they don't interfere with each other, they have no reason to distrust within their group.

As an organization, they only support their brethren in their scandalous endeavors and never disallow anything for the sake of status quo or maintaining order. Depending

on the situation, they rarely affiliate themselves with any major bodies of government or houses. The group's penchant for avoiding political relationships does isolate them from having much of any influence. The only sway they can be said to have is that they are considered a formidable wild card in any engagement due to having no ties to any ruling entity.

## Bisemutum

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The Bisemutum are an ancient people that reside in the lands that bear their namesake. They are protectors of the Dragon's Tooth shrines beyond Coeurasa's Reach, keeping outsiders from entering the lands. Most Bisemutum are born into the society; outsiders becoming accepted into the Bisemutum is a difficult and heavily scrutinized process. They are wary of letting outsiders in, but they aren't afraid to leave their land. They consider themselves close to Coeurasa and see the moon as a deity; ancient interpretations of her behavior in the sky were seen as communication and omens.





“Bartender - “You’ve been a good patron, so here, have some of the good stuff. This is my honey whiskey. You simply can’t leave town before you’ve had this.”

Bata grabs the cup and takes a little whiff before taking a sip. It’s strong. Bata’s head spins as he puts the drink back down.

Bata - “Oh! That is deliciously strong, sir.”



## Origins

Bisemutum’s tradition is derived from the teachings and warnings of the Guardians of the Dragon’s Tooth shrines. Their relationship began long before recorded history and teachings were passed down through the generations by word of mouth.

“Long ago, Guardians descended from Vinculum, the tattered shrine, weary and uncomfortable with the presence of outsiders. They spoke no tongue but their birdsong was faster than any bird could sing, they bled darkness but cried not, they gleamed with magic but none we understood. We were afraid, for the presence of such a being would make any monster yield. But Percus put away

her spear, extended her hand, and mused clearly of pure intentions. She led the fallen constructs to Vita, where they were accepted by their brethren. The bond between Bisemutum and Guardians began.” - Bodh’ran

The Guardians presented a simple divine law, to treat Dragon’s Tooth shrines with respect as they are sacred and dangerous places. Disturbing a shrine would mean disturbing Coeurasa herself. Over time, teachings have been passed down and to this day the Guardians continue to teach new lessons for the Bisemutum to add to their doctrine. The Bisemutum ideology is strengthened by the relationship with the Guardians and in gratitude they passionately defend the shrines.

## Goals

Their focus is to protect and help the shrine Guardians maintain the Dragon's Tooth shrines. Long ago they aspired to spread their ideals and protect more shrines outside of their land; however this proved to be too costly and a difficult a task. The use of shards further impeded their progress, and organizations and corporations showed no interest in helping aid their endeavors. As more and more shrines outside the lands of Bisemutum perished, their goal to spread their ideals perished with them.

## Beliefs

At the core of their religious practices is the worship of the deceased. The deceased commune through Whisperstones and assist the living with the corporeal and supernatural realm. They believe in an eternal life cycle through the form of reincarnation. They believe this cycle begins when a person's soul falls from Coeurasa, travels through the living realm and returns to Coeurasa upon their death.

Coeurasa is the deity associated with the soul and the continuous life cycle. She takes the physical manifestation of the stationary moon. She is an everlasting presence that guides and protects others, keeping the darkness at bay by providing her moonlight during the dark of night. Coeurasa is seen as a guiding light, her presence always watching and comforting for her subjects, a reminder that her subjects are not alone. She is a symbol to help those that find themselves lost, physically or spiritually, providing an example of altruism, sharing with others just as she shares her light with everyone. Coeurasa is the embracer of souls, ushering them to and from the afterlife. She ascertains whether a person is worthy of entering her embrace or must be sent back to the Dragon to be given another chance.

Dragon is the deity associated with mortal needs and the corporeal. He takes the physical manifestation of the land and is the presence that provides for souls during their stay in the living realm. He is seen as a forlorn lover, displaying wonders of nature, providing life of his own and feeding Coeurasa's children in the attempt to court Coeurasa. The Dragon longs to become one with Coeurasa, his Teeth ever hungrily reaching towards her. But Coeurasa already bears scars of a previous encounter, darkness spreading across her visage, she fears of further darkness that may come from such an encounter. Thus,

the Dragon must be kept satiated with proper care and nurturing to keep Coeurasa safe.

The Howling Sea is the realm reserved for those whose souls have been deemed unable to ever reach Coeurasa's embrace. These people are denied existence after death, their souls left to sink under the deep waters of the sea, perhaps to feed the Dragon or perhaps to be trapped forever in the waters. Few are condemned by Coeurasa to receive such a fate and it is deemed shocking for such a soul to have been rejected as much as they must have been. Being a Foresaken is treading at the edge of the sea with one last chance at redemption.

Razard and Bizard are sibling deities that guide wanderers away from curses within the Withered Wastes. Bizard, the three-headed bighorn sibling, is usually heard before they are seen, emitting a continuous wavering cry warning those that come near them to stay away. Razard, the three headed sergal sibling, is short tempered, often choosing combat after little discourse.

## Rite of Night

On their fourteenth year, a member is considered a New Blood and must proceed to learn from elders and leaders in the different communities. New Bloods are brought together at A'Paz during the Blood Nights and are introduced to their communal family whom they will spend the next six years with. Their communal family



consists of the students for the year, members who are still finishing their Rite of Night, teachers and leaders. This expansion of family helps bond the Bisemutum; family is not blood exclusive and terms of brother and sister are used freely between members.

The first two years are spent with the Mater and Amica communities. Here they learn how to tend to the land and animals that the communities raise. From the Amica, they learn the importance of listening to and caring for others, the land and the animals they care for. It is common for New Bloods to find an animal partner to look after for their next few years. From the Mater, self-reliance is taught, learning how to cook and take care of themselves, find appropriate herbs and learn medicine to help the ill.

On their third year they join the A'Paz community, where teachers instruct on communion with Guardians, respect of the Dragon Tooth shrines, folklore, and how to conduct rituals tied to their beliefs. New Bloods help conduct the Blood Nights festival, using the skills learned from the Mater and Amica, and some also learning how to play the drums. The Blood Nights festival serves as a movement from community to community; drummers pass down their instruments to interested New Bloods, a



parallel to the eventual passing of their Whisperstone after death to a newborn.

Their fourth year New Bloods join the Pater community, where they learn the importance of protecting and defending their communities. They learn to create tools, erect structures and how to sustain themselves in the wilderness in preparation for the Amans. Their fifth year is spent with the Amans community, who put their lessons to the test. The communities are broken up into smaller groups to perform a variety of hunts and resource gathering out in the wilds. Teachers must teach their students in proper hunting etiquette while still exposing them to dangerous situations, so they may understand the risks of the task. Even with precautions, venturing groups may lose members, serving as warnings to others to quickly better themselves.

On their sixth year, they are stationed at A'Mond for a few months at a time; they learn how to interact with the outside world and keep Bisemutum closed off to outsiders.

After the Rite of Night, New Bloods choose a community to join, usually one they favor performing tasks for, at which point they assume the community's name as their surname. From there they begin their apprenticeship with their chosen community, after a few years they are expected to lead and teach other New Bloods. Members can change communities, conducting themselves as someone who just finished their Rite of Night when entering the new community.

It is not expected for New Bloods to retain all the intricacies of what they learned from the Rite, but rather to understand the difficulties that each community and each member must face day to day to provide for each other. They learn that communal success is a strong accomplishment and that individual success is not without the support of others. Most of all, they learn that each community is invaluable, and that each one needs the others to thrive.

## Joining

The Bisemutum have faced a high number of fanatics in the past that have caused problems upon joining the community, ranging from disruptions of practices, defiling the shrines, attempts at strange communion practices, or having standards of belief that go well beyond what Bisemutum consider to be normal. Bisemutum closed their open community; however, the community is

Therrin moves closer to Arden and as she does, she doesn't look right. Parts of her look blurred and a bit blocky as she moves, and she also has all her hair back.

Arden – “Well I'm going to be frank with you here, I don't know who the hell you are or what you are, but obviously you're going to try something here, but if it comes to blows I will destroy you.”



aware of their need to develop and obtain knowledge and relationships with the outside.

Instead of open admittance, members of the community may extend an offer to outsiders that display certain values. The offer is an 'Invitation to Become.' This offer is not indoctrination; members of Bisemutum are instructed to not push their ideals as it is not their place to convert others. Members are instructed to downplay their beliefs in the presence of outsiders and are instead taught to observe, accept others as they are and offer admittance to new members they deem worthy. Since very

few Bisemutum journey outside their lands, this task is generally accomplished by members stationed in AMond or those on the trading routes near AMond.

Bisemutums looks for outsiders who display certain traits that fall in line with their teachings. Persons showing non-financial interest in the shrines or Tears, specifically people interested in learning more about their purpose without the intent to cause harm or defile them. Persons assisting others outside of their community with no regard to harm that may come to them for their actions. Persons conscious of their dependency on what others

provide and give freely with little or no intent to gain. Persons respectful of what the land and nature provide or those who tend to the land as more than a means of survival. Persons willing to abandon personal gain or goals for the benefit of others.

Should some of the traits be present and the Bisemutum member approves of the nature of the

person, then will the Invitation to Become be extended. Should the person be interested, they are treated as New Bloods and are provided a Whisperstone following their Rite of Night. Persons accepted into the community by this method are not expected to follow the doctrine of Bisemutum and may live a life different or outside from the rest of the community.

Mama Noms looks over Therrin. “I haven’t seen something this bad since Dad fell into the mixing house. You’re going to feel this for a few days. In fact, I’ll have to ask you to sleep outside.”

Over the next seven days our two adventurers contracted several different problems. They can’t process liquids properly, are stricken with cramps, fever that goes in and out, their mucus goes nuts, toenails fall off, and hair falls out.



“Dagger, I wish my fur would grow back. This is just awful.”

Surprisingly the dagger responds, “I’d be happy to keep my eyes open for an opportunity. As long as you listen to me when I ask you for things.”



# Notable NPCs



## Therrin Perch

*Female Sergal Swashbuckler*

Therrin is a dark grey sergal with white chest fluff. She stands roughly five feet six inches and is clad in flashy leather garments for ease of movement. Her particular outfit looks to be better quality than what most adventurers usually wear. Aside from the leather, the sergal dons a loose-fitting shirt of the finest silk to keep some of her movements hidden from her would-be opponents. Tucked into her shirt is a necklace with a signet ring that she keeps hidden most of the time. At her side is her rapier, which she's named Stilton, that rests in a modest scabbard when not in action. Its hilt is ornate and elaborate to the point that it inherently has a story all its own. Overall her attire is functional, but most importantly, it looks amazing.

Therrin loves adventure and looking cool while doing it. This swashbuckling lass will be the first to jump at any occasion to deal the final blow in battle. While in action, this sergal is a force to be reckoned with, but all other times she is reserved, has something to hide, and always wants to keep moving. You can depend on her in any battle, but not so much for conversation. She will be the first to accept any challenge or job with the hopes it will lead to her next amazing feat.

As a child, the only thing Therrin enjoyed about the family business was the travel. Months at a time she would spend out in the countryside seeing new vistas and new cities to the point where this little girl saw every part of The Cross by her mid-teens.

Aside from seeing the world, young Therrin saw little else interesting about the successful family business, the Perch Trading Company. As she grew older Therrin's mother, Dominique Perch, tried time and again to show her offspring the ways of the family business. All the





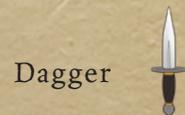
attempts to learn business, etiquette, logistics, and bureaucracy felt stifling to Therrin, who only wanted to travel more and seek adventure. Eventually, Therrin grew to hate the company and her mother. The two butted heads on practically everything, culminating to the point where Therrin was sent away.

After a brief stint at an illustrious finishing school, Therrin disappeared for several years. Many rumors circulated, some speculating she'd become a pirate queen ruling Secret Cove, while others had her cavorting with the nefarious Crestfallen, robbing carriages in the middle of nowhere. Others said she'd gone to a Dragon's Tooth shrine and succumbed to the curse.

At the age of twenty-one, the heiress finally reappears at the family estate but the return is cut short. All at once Roqueport's crown jewel, their very own Dragon's Tear, is stolen and Therrin Perch goes missing again. Assuming the thieves also took the heiress along with the priceless artifact, posters are plastered from one end of The Cross to the other searching for the sergal's abductors.



Stilton



Dagger

# Arden Renshaw

*Male Puppo Abjurer*

Fifth Scribe and Apprentice Abjurer to The Holy Empire of The Crystal Fang's Order of Arcane Sages.

Mr. Arden Renshaw is a short and thin white dog, no more than five feet tall and one-hundred and twenty pounds with a single black dot on his left cheek. His head is covered by the hood of a wide cloak that drapes over his floppy ears and large round glasses. Seen from underneath those glasses are a pair of wide, deep blue eyes that constantly scan and analyze the world around him.

His deep red cloak is held in place by a cloak pin of a small scroll, that hides a seemingly new and slightly oversized deep navy waistcoat with brass buttons. It's held at the waist with a belt that carries a similarly new looking mace, potions, and a very worn and dog-eared book on a chain with a rusty clasp keeping it shut. His

small paws, adorned with linen bandages, tap upon the book

at his side as he thinks and strategizes his moves. He quickly flips the clasp open and draws the book when he needs to take notes or study his craft. Beneath his coat is a close-fitting linen tunic, matched by a pair of spotless deep navy breeches and riding boots seeing their first trot through the mud of the world.



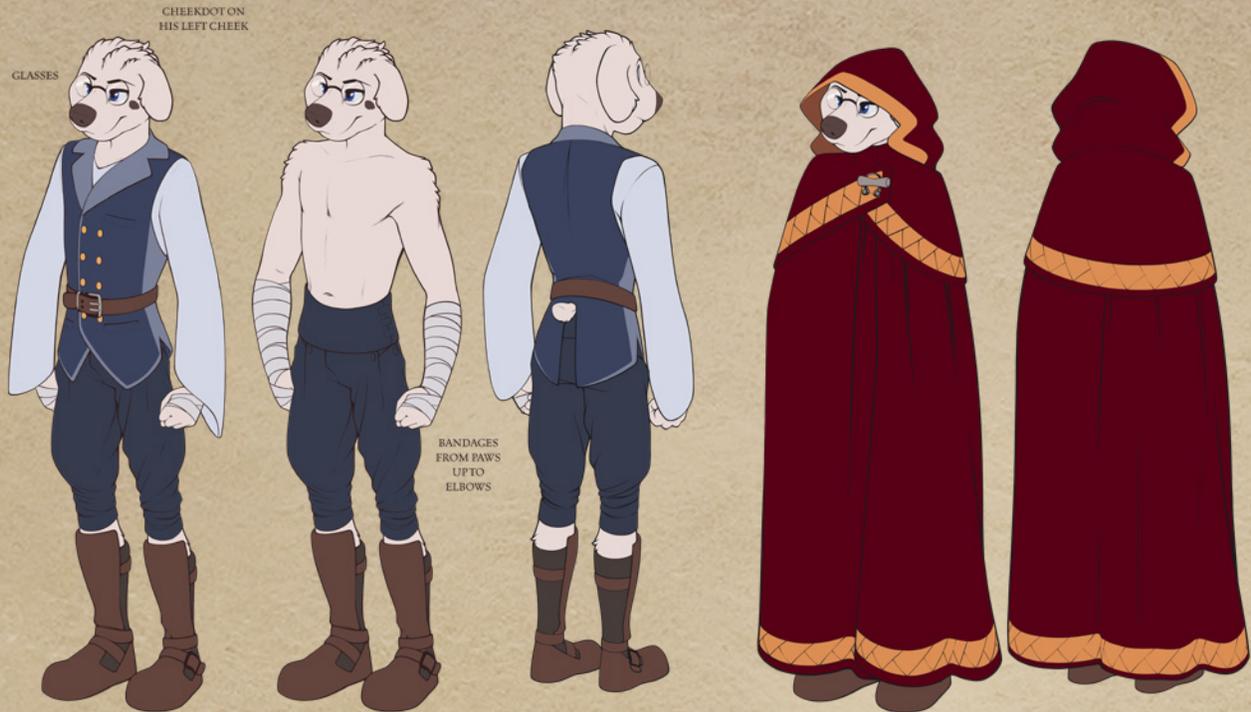
Mr. Renshaw is a Scribe of The Order's Lexicon faction. He is a refined, studious, and very particular young mage with a heavily academic background. His stuffy, untrusting, and often cold demeanor is a barrier to keep away those that would betray his feelings. At his core, he is a very loyal and caring person for those he holds dear.

Arden's dedication to The Order is strong, and he believes his sole purpose in life is to serve it. He is driven to prove himself and rise in the ranks through whatever means he believes are necessary. Strategy and planning are his greatest assets. Mixed with a rigid moral code of always doing what he believes right, he strives toward the greater good of the world.

Arden was inducted into The Order at a very young age. While he was born on the frozen peninsula city of Kaoleensos, he calls the shining capital of The Cross, Atlas, his home. He works in the archival cloister of The Order where he fastidiously copies, records, and studies every bit of information coming through their doors.

His peers treat him as a child, as most are twice his age. After an accident that nearly killed Arden some years ago, he feels sorely guilty





and inadequate for the second chance he received by the Headmaster of The Order, Okuma. Arden strives every day to prove himself worthy of Okuma's praise.

Arden enjoys discovery above all else. Having a near encyclopedic knowledge of most of the world's documented information, he wants to discover something that will change the world or shed light on one of the great mysteries of the universe. Despite this eager drive, his accident left him mostly working in the cloister, with seldom the field task.

Tactics: Arden thrives on a good plan and strategy, even if he has to think of it on the fly. He tries to talk down most encounters where he can, though his cold demeanor doesn't always save him. When conflict arises, he considers every tool at his disposal. He often barks orders expecting blind compliance, and tends to use his spells and equipment in unconventional ways to keep a solid control of any situation. In situations where people he considers true allies are in danger, he is prepared to give everything to protect them.



# Bata Amica

## Male Bear Barbarian

Bata is a towering Bear Barbarian, he's built strong and covered in lush white fur. His attire is mostly armor made from the large shells of Bupreparda. Namely a pauldron over his right shoulder and vambraces over his forearms, both held in place by large dark belts and shell buckles. Below that he wears rough leather garments that have seen some wear, the edges of which are fringed with dark fur. While his chest is bare, a large garment wraps around his midsection, followed by a long loincloth and kilt. A large cloak covers his back, featuring a large but simple burnt-in symbol that some whisper is from the lands of Bisemutum. He rests a large war hammer at his side, one side of the head has a blunt face while the other has a chiseled end, a weapon suited for fighting beasts. On his



left arm is a chitin shield, suitable for a person of his size and perhaps too large for others.

Bata Amica is a member of the Bisemutum. His physical appearance is betrayed by his behavior; he fumbles his manners and is unfamiliar with social queues from outside his homeland. However, he is good hearted, curious, chivalrous, and tends to help others to a fault. Others may rely on him to assist in any way. Members of his community are rarely given permission to leave his homeland. He claims that he is on pilgrimage to explore the world and assist someone who needs aide, but he doesn't know who that is. His reason for leaving his home may sound deceptive, but who will question someone who simply wishes to help and drink some mead?

Bata comes from a ranching community within Bisemutum known as Amica, where Bata herded Bupreparda and helped with maintaining farm lands. He has a respect for creatures of the land, finding it easier to have a mutual relationship with beasts rather than people. His respect reaches to the point where he won't ride an animal without asking for its permission first.

Bata likes to explore the lands and communities outside of his own, but is wary of adventurers seeking treasures as he assumes that they are likely after Dragon's Tears. As a result, he can be often found bouncing from



farmland to farmland assisting ranchers who are in need of temporary help. As he travels, he cuts a bit of a flag from each city or village that he visits which he uses to adorn his belt. He keeps them as a memento of the locations he has visited.

Tactics: Despite being a barbarian, Bata prefers to avoid physical combat. He puts great effort into suppressing his natural rage, but mistreatment of his friends, beliefs, or being told that he doesn't belong are a quick way to anger the bear. He will try his best not to rage against a beast unless the situation desperately calls for it, and after defeating a beast he will make proper use of the remains of the creature, preparing the hide or chitin for use or sale. Bata sometimes even attempts to heal an assailant once he's eliminated their threat.





“What did you take?” Bata asks as he presses Therrin harder into the floor of the wagon.

“What did I take?” Therrin repeats gingerly.

Therrin turns her head to Arden who is leaned up against the wagon wall and gives her a heavy sigh. “Did you take something from the spire that would send that thing after you?” The young mage asks with a curt tone.

“Umm, well... I took the only thing worth taking.” Therrin responds timidly.



## Samuel M. Horstrom

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*Male, Capuchin Monkey, Courier*

Samuel M. Horstrom, or Sam, is a white-throated capuchin monkey standing at approximately five foot eight inches. Most of his body is colored an earthy brown, but it fades to white upon his chest and shoulders, spilling slightly down his arms, and wrapping around his face to his forehead. His hair is brown, long, and wavy. His face features a light tan color and his eyes are a dark but intense brown in their own. He wears traveler's garb, well weathered and worn from use. Simple but sturdy brown leather boots and rough tan cloth pants sit under a tight, well-made but aged light blue cloth shirt, topped by a leather traveling jacket.

Samuel is a Courier, first and foremost, and as such displays a high standard of accountability when it comes to protecting a package or ensuring delivery of a customer's assets. Unless something jeopardizes his mission as a Courier, Sam tends to be pretty easygoing, enjoying the travels of the world and the sights he sees on his missions. He can be quiet and pensive at times, thinking about life, and energetic and outspoken at others when the troubles of his past are momentarily forgotten. Sam has no particular ethical or moral drive, carefully weighing economic and personal factors in all things. He cares for others he knows, but unless there's a crisis he typically does not engage in hasty decisions that could lose business; such is the life of a Courier.

He's traveled to almost every part of The Cross for his Courier duty, and as such has seen and experienced many of its roads and wonders. From A'Mond to Lorrnville, Sam has walked the breadth of the earth and is comfortable in all its nooks. He has recently taken to favoring the more rural region in the North, closer to Bisemutum and the swamp, as Perch Trading Company's influence there is still weak and payments are still prime for the Couriers. He also finds the people there tend to be less stiff than in the southern regions.

Sam has a certain fondness for the arts that stems from a life of traveling, learning from sailors singing, travelers with hobbies, and performers in caravans. Through the years he's learned to sing, learned to paint, learned to survive, dance and, most of all, learned how to charm people. Being a Courier was only half the process, he's



met hundreds of associates, clients, hagglers, tradesmen trying to get their way; but most of all it was meeting the travelers. Travelers with hopes, with dreams, destinations, desires, wants, passions. Sam has spent his life listening to them speak, beg, get angry, be romantic, and simply be themselves. Words are their own language to him, hidden beneath the common speak.

Which was probably why Sam's favorite thing to have learned and replicate were songs. Sea shanties, traveling tunes, nursery rhymes, poems, ballads, sagas; he loved listening to them all. He loved learning them even more, and sings to himself often on long journeys, particularly when there is nobody he knows around him. Some find it entertaining, others don't, but through it all Sam has always felt that song had a strange power to it. Powers of emotion and thought, resplendent in the melody and meaning of the sound. He prefers sadder tones, though acknowledges the beauty of all types of music.

## Mama Noms

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*Female Rat Farmer, Rancher, and Entrepreneur*

Nomanya Cobble, known by her trademark name Mama Noms or Nomsy to some of the locals, has been a part of the Bellowport community since she was a wee lass. A rather tall rat-kin woman, large boned, voluptuous as the rolling hills, with warm, piercing eyes, a welcoming and deliberate tone of voice, and often wearing layered colorful clothing, she watches over her farm. Deep familial ties run from her children into the surrounding communities, ensuring she always has a market for her farm and her scented soap side hustle. She loves all her children deeply, teaches them similar to how one would teach a classroom, and sometimes her kids will bring their friends from town to learn with them. Being a well-read lady who gets interesting news/gossip from her family web has earned her additional notoriety.

Currently a single parent having lost her third husband to sickness, she has been more strapped for time and more willing to bring on travelers to work the farm during busy seasons or troubleshooters if there is an issue she can't handle on her own. A particularly independent child, Kassie Cobble has taken to pointing her mother out to adventurers that seem of good spirit when Mama is in need of help. Kassie herself lives in the alleys of Bellowport, doing her best to survive as a vagabond while never showing her face at home; she has a deal with the Rat Bucket Inn to exchange food and information. Thanks to her mother's tutelage, Kassie is rather good at finding herbs and other flavor enhancers that helps to keep the Inn on top of its game, and in return they inform her of adventurers who may be an asset to the farm's operations. Once a group meeting her mother's needs has been screened through the bar or her own observations, she will approach them with the suggestion and path to her old family farm where Mama has become accustomed to surprise guests and the housing/working of them.

Kassie's current state of living does concern her mother but as someone who firmly believes in the importance of personal agency, she does not try to force herself back into her daughter's life. Mama is often times a kind, wisdom-leaking spigot, keenly aware of what is going on around her (a few dozen children made that skill a necessity), but when it comes to business, she is a shrewd operator, often startling adventurers when they think they might be able to squeeze excessive compensation from her. Recently,



with special groups of travelers who treat the kids well, she has developed the strategy of fostering them, so her children can learn from experiences on the road what they cannot learn at home. She wants the best possible future for her kids and is not afraid to encourage them to take calculated risks.

It should be noted she her farm is a woolly silkie farm, that also collects herbs for food and medicine, and produces a fair amount of vegetables on the side. Her head rancher is her eldest son who only accepts being referred to as Herd Lord; he never leaves the flock and is brought food by one of his siblings each day.

## Zaus Cobble

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*Male Rat Bundle of Cunning Energy*

Zaus is an aspiring young rat-kin teenager trying to shape his place in the world. Growing quickly like his brothers and compounding his father's lankiness and his mother's thickness, he stands a little under five feet. His outer fur is mostly dark grey, complemented with lighter gray inner fur and faintly pink paws and ears. Excitable and clever, he has spent a fair amount of time during the farm's off season sneaking into town, gambling with locals in small games of chance, often wagering information he heard from Mama or promised labor as opposed to actual coin. Apart from the social contest in games of chance he would look for Kassie (though has never found her), do odd jobs in town, particularly if they piqued his interest, and listened to travelers when possible. Once he turned thirteen, the Rat Bucket Inn let him work during the busy weeks in the kitchen and judge games of chance for a little coin. Though he is sharply intuitive for his age, he lacks experience with tighter-lipped groups, and also tends to

openly speak his feelings, often leaving other listeners aghast.

One of dozens of Cobble children, standing out from the rest was a necessity growing up giving him common ground with Therrin in terms of their showmanship. Zaus felt a need to leave home in part because there wasn't a lot of room for growth in town, especially after defeating Arden in a game of strategy and wit. He could have been a rancher, entrepreneur, or something safe but those didn't speak to his adventurous spirit. The opportunity to become a mage at The Order through Arden was inspiring and lucrative; he could take care of and elevate his entire family if he became a success through The Order. That reasoning was enough to convince his mother (particularly after she came to know the people Zaus proposed traveling with), though deep down the idea of becoming a freelancer like his traveling companions feels an even more lucrative and exciting life to live in his mind. Bata reminds him of his mother—though perhaps a dose purer—but considers him a good source of advice even so.



Recently he started to experience periods of extended sleep where magic seeps from his body as if he were a natural font in the world and has begun to harness this ability with the assistance of Arden and Sam, trusting in them to steer him right.

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## Jade

*Female Hyena, Traveling Songstress*

Jade is an aged hyena-kin, former passenger of a dubiously named vessel sailing through the Bipusmarsh operated by Captain Tumbles (Bumbles). Standing at a commanding height of six feet she carries her lithe frame with confidence, defying the lifetime of grueling experience that shows in her face until she loses herself in her songs coming fully to life; ballads and epics of old. Jade is a wonder to hear perform and has taught interested travelers some of her songs through the years, though few can keep up with the layers of language she calls on.

She often travels to the Gomphus festival, an event she never misses. They had even been so gracious as to provide immediate transportation and a complimentary garment woven from the finest of marshland silks to herself, as well as most of the ship's above-deck passengers.

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## Dau B. Burrus

*Male Tiger, Flashy Before Functional*

This mysterious figure is known throughout the land by many a name. Dau the Strong, Dau the Wise, Dau the Brave, and in some parts even Dau the Seductive. This white tiger began his life as a street urchin on the labyrinthine streets of Altas. As a cub, Dau would only steal what he needed to get by: a piece of bread here, an apple there, living barely a whisper of a life, destined to be forgotten. But, on one fateful encounter, the tiger cub came upon a dying haggard hyena on the outskirts of town. Dau feared the vagrant, seeing in the hyena the future that he was destined for, but before Dau could turn tail, the hyena withdrew a large polished rock that gleamed through the tattered clothes of the disheveled man, a Dragon's Tear shard so large that Dau could barely even wrap his arms around it. With the yeen's dying breath he ordained to Dau that his destiny was to take this Tear shard and make the world a better place.

Immediately Dau started chipping off pieces of the shard and selling it for his own gain. By the time he was an adult, Dau had purchased a fine estate for himself with



many people in his employ, but... when he had all the comforts he could think of, he grew bored of his life of luxury. When he could stand no more of the boredom, the tiger bought the most gorgeous traveling gear one could find. With his leather cavalier hat, crushed velvet topcoat, and silk breeches, Dau set off for any sort of adventure to satiate the monotony his lavish existence had made for him.

Dau crossed the Karban sea and traveled from town to town offering his services to people in need. His adventures only led to a pretense of success, by quelling or masking people's problems using his seemingly vast unending wealth rather than actually solving them. Yet still, he was successful enough to gain some notoriety across the land. Dau would usually ask to be regarded by the titles of "wise", "strong", or "brave" rather than "generous" if anyone were to tell his tales of "adventure".

The tiger's adventures eventually led him to Bopusmarsh, where he was tasked with retrieving treasure from a boat lost somewhere in the Pinicola Swamp. He was never heard from again. Some say he died in the belly of a water spider, some say he succumbed to the spores and is one with the land, others say the curse of the spires finally caught up with him... more say he drowned due to his adventuring gear being more flashy than functional.

Ultimately no one missed the ambitious wanderer, but he did become part of the legends and tales that fill

many rowdy taverns. Denizens spread the rumors of what remains of his Dragon's Tear and the dangers of the swamp that guards it.

## Reginald Quod Tarkway

*Male Leopard, Fencing Instructor Extraordinaire*

Reginald Q. Tarkway was born and raised in Crestfall to a lowly family. The leopard was taken in during his formative years by one of the many powerful and influential pirate bands that seemingly rule the grungy but lucrative port town. He was quick to pick up a rapier and even faster on his feet, becoming skilled in both fighting and running away, whatever garnered the best outcome. Reginald flourished as an outlaw and relished in the endless challenge and adventure he encountered everyday as a care-free scoundrel.

As time passed, the pirate bands grew along with him and eventually all the disparate groups became a much larger and more influential force to be reckoned with. As the Pirates of Secret Cove became more powerful, politics began to creep into the once free-wheeling band of scallywags Reginald had grown to love. Reginald started to become disenchanted with his chosen family after being chastised for raiding a Perch Trading Company vessel for no other reason beyond "it was not allowed."

The leopard soon found he was not alone in being disappointed by the new constraints imposed by the

leadership within the Pirates of Secret Cove. He helped form a new band of outlaws, the Crestfallen, a collection of bandits and scoundrels that didn't want to be told what to do by anyone, even within their own group. As the Crestfallen's notoriety grew, Reginald was tasked with finding new "talent" before the Pirates of Secret Cove could scoop them up. He found the most success as a recruiter by posing as a fencing instructor for an illustrious finishing school in Atlas, due to his skills and his former compatriots having little to no influence there.

## Erasmus Okuma

*Male Crow, Headmaster of the Arcane Order of Sages*

Erasmus Okuma is a slender crowkin that stands five and a half feet tall, with a noble and upright posture. His deep brown eyes are ringed with lines from decades of reading text and studying the world around him, matched by his unkempt feathers from long days and nights of managing The Order.

Okuma is often seen wearing a very well worn but deceptively pristine grey robe, and the white cloak that shows him to be a member of the Magisters, overseers of The Order. Those with the ability to perceive magic would notice these robes are made with very powerful, very unconventional magic. He inherited these robes from his mother when she passed, giving him the title of Headmaster of The Order and this symbol of his rank within their powerful organization.

As the seventh generation of both Headmaster and Okuma family name, Erasmus was raised within the walls of The Order, nestled in the heart of Atlas. He was educated by the finest instructors in magic, literature, science, leadership, and a number of other topics, preparing him to eventually bear the mantle his mother carried.

Okuma is a very well-read man, with a very strong understanding of process, procedure, and etiquette within The Order and the world around him. While formality in most places is the proper route, he prefers to be casual wherever appropriate. His relationship with his mother was very professional and not very maternal, so he hopes to be a more warm and caring leader, instead of a strict authoritarian. That being said, he is not afraid to dispense discipline to deserving parties.

Apart from his administrative capabilities, he is also a very well versed and highly revered wizard. He has few

equals in his magical skill, but his humble nature rarely leaves him to truly flex his power. In his days as a student, he wrote a number of theories and formulas that still hold regard even in his advanced age.

**Tactics:** Okuma prefers a modest, but effective approach to conflict. He will use spells to probe his adversary for weaknesses and vulnerabilities and strike when the time is right. He strays from immediately lethal spells, but when he believes a situation cannot be resolved without taking a life, he will do so swiftly and concisely.

**GM Notes:** Okuma is a puppet to Jade, so she can use The Order to control information and silence people that know more than they should. He does not like this one bit but cannot act against them, because he is incapable of fighting her organization directly. Him being one of the few people alive to know every dark secret The Order has tucked away in their forbidden vault, he uses that knowledge to encourage those that have the potential to bring light to the secrets he's been ordered to hide through subtle manipulation and research projects that would fringe into uncovering the truth. He has also chosen to not produce an heir to take his place upon his passing, so that nobody should ever take the burden of Headmaster and the secrets it carries.

## Dominique Perch

*Female Sergal, Ruthless Magnate of Trade*

Dominique is the true ruthless economic genius behind the Perch Trading Company for this generation. Age has barely touched her as if her drive simply shrugs the reaper off; she commands a presence when this towering Sergal enters the room, dressed to the nines. Eyes so unempathetic and piercing one might think she appraises a person's material value when looking them over, her mind is always spinning, and that shows, giving herself no moments to breathe or let her hair down. Though political officials, rival governments and failing business owners frequently decry Perch's methods and often go as far to accuse them of wrongdoing, none of these accusations have ever survived court proceedings. Politicians and businesses not sufficiently guarded against undue influence find themselves becoming affordable tools for a large trading organization such as Perch.



Dominique retains the same mindset of most others in business and politics, that infiltration and influence are the most powerful means to ensure her family's success.

In early life her husband was a delight, a truly good man, but he was not a business-proficient individual. After his family saw what Dominique could accomplish with a few small business ventures of her own, she became the inheritor of the family business while her husband did public relations campaigns for the company through a charity. Truth be told, the charity primarily worked as a way to mask family assets from taxation while gathering money from unfamiliar people. However, it has also done some good in the world, like adding roads to towns Perch plan to start selling services to, or donations to public protection in high-crime areas where Perch does business.

Dominique has also gone above and beyond for The Order in terms of assisting with special requests, materials and aid, stabilizing trade networks over the sea. Through her direction, Perch has created a large network of informants who keep her apprised of the world state, her opponents, pirates, bandits, political theater, allies, and business practices she can utilize to maximize profit. She has spent little of her time with her family, particularly Therrin, for whom her frustration knows no bounds. Her other children were so much more moldable and desperate for mother's approval. In her mind, someday all of The Cross, and eventually the world, will be held tight within the paw of Perch.

## Meunice

*Male Fox, The Shifting Element*

Meunice is an ever-enthusiastic fox-kin mage of The Order primarily operating in the region northwest of Atlas. He is always well dressed and well kempt, fur lush, and rarely at a loss for words; this red fox is never without a scheme in the works. He is methodical and plans for the long term by forging relationships to further his goals or the goals of The Order that may not bear fruit for years, and has the stomach to carry out horrific acts that would leave others firmly unhinged. He would prefer to get others to do the actions that might show his hand or expose his intentions; in more dire cases they would take the blame for an act in his stead while he maintains the

full support of The Order behind him. With the abilities of an accomplished mage, control of elemental spirits from planes of existence far from here, and acute charismatic ability to convince, fool, and extract information from others, he has been an invaluable asset in subterfuge with a network of his own spanning his designated territory.

**GM Notes:** His mind is warped with layers of depth and will to the best of his ability survive to bend the world toward his personal goals, still far off. If you decide to utilize him as a villain, he is quite capable of faking his own death and prioritizes a Xanatos Gambit against threats. He is most readily used as a schemer using the PCs to complete some end. If they don't catch onto him, he generally won't feel a need for revenge against the PCs he works with, even if his sociopathic tendencies showed in his communication. He does not have plot armor.

## Mr. Moonsea

*Non-Binary Umbra, The Pale Moon Schemer*

Mr. Moonsea is an advanced umbra serving as a chief mastermind on behalf of an elder being, ensuring drastic change to come. They have spent centuries assisting and abetting in the slow societal manipulations that have shaped the world as it is now through information control, impersonation, and the construction and dissolution of key organizations big and small. They are wholly dedicated to their cause, their own survival, and their own pleasure; being as long-lived as they are, they understand people as a matter of second nature, how to hurt, hinder, and break small souls. They possess a massive arsenal of magical equipment to choose from as well as strange technology to augment their natural abilities as an umbra and true to the life of a scoundrel they have delved deep into the art of sleight of hand. Using this character should be done with caution as they are a dangerous figure and would most often deal with a party diplomatically using the system in place in the world to choke compliance out of a party (law enforcement, courts, willing assassins, taking custody of loved ones, etc.).

Story

# Arden's Letters to Okuma

by Hawkfeather

## Day 47 of the Season of Wind

Headmaster Okuma,

I write to you on this fine evening in deep appreciation of your approval to pursue my research on the function of the spires. My youth has been a severe hindrance on my capacity to accomplish anything of substance among my peers, so by allowing me to personally handle this myself I may finally garner the respect for my efforts that I am long overdue to receive.

I had stumbled upon this topic by an odd serendipity. I was scribing some information on the founders of our Order written by your great grandfather, Headmaster Fanuc, whom quoted one of them referring the spires as "A Spear Unto The Heavens". I didn't think much of the writing at the time, and continued with my transcription of the document.

It was later that evening when I was walking from the historical archives to the dormitory, when I saw that old and worn statue in the courtyard - the one with the lizard in the ceremonial armor with his spear pointing to the moon - when it struck me. A Spear Unto The Heavens! How had I not noticed this sooner?

I remembered it from my classes on the original crystal sages that formed our Order, this was a rare depiction of Founder Hardinge, who was written to have been the first person to unlock the mystery behind the spire's purpose. He theorized that they were vaults and residences of a lost era, long before our time on The Cross. His placard at the foot of this tall statue, told little more than that but his role in founding our Order.

But it didn't seem right. Why the Spear? The man was a scholar, not a warrior. That dissociation with his role and his portrayal in this aging sculpture seemed odd. Being

after hours, I thought it would be inappropriate of me to talk to one of the administrators about this odd finding as they already seem to be agitated by my frequent visits. So I decided to take this project into my own hands.

I returned to the historical archives. Luckily they tend not to lock the doors at night being behind the tall walls of the research cloister, and that night was no exception. I worked by candlelight through the night pouring through every tome, scroll, and ledger I could find in regards to Hardinge, but found oddly little more than stray quotations and nothing detailing what exactly he found past the engraving at that statues base. There wasn't even a recount present of his findings with spires at all.

This simply could not stand, and I need a good thesis if I am ever to move beyond my position as scribe and become a professor. I need this to finally gain the respect I have so richly sought from my peers, and as such I wrote my proposal the next morning after some rest which you so wisely approved.

Across the gulf is Roqueport, which holds one of the few remaining active spires accessible to the world. I will be departing in the coming days when I finish the travel preparations, and my requisitioned supplies come in. I have already sent advance word to their local council requesting access to their spire vault. I hope that I will find the root of Hardinge's research and uncover the information that has been lost to time.

I promise I will not disappoint you Headmaster.

Your loyal pupil,  
Arden Renshaw

## Day 13 of the Season of Fire

Headmaster Okuma,

By the time you receive this letter, I have likely already abandoned my escorts and am travelling north via ship to Bellowport. I know this is very unorthodox, and likely against procedure but something happened here in Roqueport a number of days before I arrived.

When speaking with a council representative to access the spire located at the town's center, I learned something unexpected had happened. The spire's core had vanished some nights ago along with the heiress to the Perch Trading Company, Therrin. Popular rumor suggests that she was kidnapped along with the stolen core and held hostage by an unknown organization.

I was still granted access to the spire's inner chambers to investigate it, but it unfortunately seems to be fully deactivated without its core. I was unable to glean much useful data at that site, and with the unexpectedly hostile air about, the otter twins you had assigned to escort me instructed me to leave on the next ship back to Atlas.

Garr and Hertel were strangely insistent upon my return to The Order, and seemed utterly uninterested in investigating what happened here, or even travelling to another spire that is still intact. I know you worry about me because of my age and... stature. I was given approval to perform my first field research project, and I am going to complete it.

I will complete the lost work of Hardinge as I set out to do. I mean no disrespect to you sir, but I can't simply turn around and go home when there is such significant knowledge to be gained. I know you are one of the few within The Order that have shown me unwavering respect and treated me with fairness like no other. You must have faith in me Okuma. I have waited so long for this chance, and I will not fail.

With the fate at hand, I decided to have a drink. I went to a tavern to drown my sorrows in glass of brandy down by the docks. I don't normally drink but I was tired and defeated. But serendipity had once again shone its face upon my circumstance.

The tavern was abuzz with the story from one of their dockhand patrons. She had been paid a large sack of gold to smuggle a curly haired sergal wearing a signet ring onto a ship headed north. This could only be Therrin, the missing noble I heard of before, but she was alone and

on the run from the city. That didn't add up; she wasn't kidnapped or in danger, just trying to leave town as fast as she could.

I paid that dockhand half of my remaining funds to get the name of the boat and where it was headed, then immediately got myself passage on the next ship to Bellowport. I know she has something to do with the missing core for her hometown's spire, and I will get to the bottom of it.

I ask you again to please overlook this breach of protocol and consider what I could uncover here Headmaster Okuma. Please.

Your vigilant pupil,  
Arden Renshaw

PS - The quartermaster stated that my uniform was special ordered to "Child Sized" and I was given a mace instead of the dagger I had requested at the time because they wanted to see if I was strong enough to even swing it right. I would ask that you chastise appropriately for their unprofessional behavior.

## Day 5 of the Season of Earth

Headmaster Okuma,

First of all, I would like to apologize for the lack of correspondence in the recent weeks. It's been a long journey keeping on the trail of Ms. Perch. I spent the last twenty days on a ship, plus a number of days canvassing the city of Bellowport trying to get a lead on the heiress.

Rumor pointed me toward Burnwirth. Being a debutant, I doubt she'd settle for trail rations so I marched for The Rat Bucket Inn, the only apparent establishment in town that sold food after sunset. While I waited for the curly haired sergal to appear, I had an encounter with a stray bear by the name of Bata.

He was quite clearly from the isolated Bisemutum tribes to the northeast, and seemed a bit... new to the world. From what I recall on the scant documentation on his kind, Mr. Bata's people worship spires rather fervently as some sort of religious icon. I believe they call them 'Dragon's Teeth', though I do not understand the reference to dragons at all.

I caught Ms. Perch as she was leaving the bar, confronting her with her missing poster, which raised some attention by the locals. Once that was resolved, I was able to convince her to join me in finding a way into an active spire on the condition I did not turn her in. The Bear invited himself along too, but I intend to use his muscle and religious beliefs of the spire to my advantage in completing my task at hand.

My budget was running low, and for some inane reason The Rat Bucket Inn has no rooms so we took up temporary residence at a local farm owned by the recently widowed Ms. Cobble in exchange for some help with chores.

With a combination of bad luck, bad decisions, and rampant fur loss we were waylaid there for over two weeks. The other two are quite the unique individuals, but they proved themselves capable in their own ways. Once they recovered, we departed The Cobble Farm with a particularly unpleasant courier by the name of Samuel, and young rat boy by the name of Zaus.

The courier will serve as a guide towards Gomphus. Out in the marshlands eastward from there is an active spire I intend to enter and study. He's well travelled and seems to know the roads, so hopefully he can get us to the marshland city in an expeditious manner.

The child however is a bit of a unique case. The additional document sent with this report explains his circumstance. I have promised to do my best to prepare the young Mr. Cobble for induction to The Order, and while he will need quite the education I believe he will be a fine addition to our ranks with time.

This is where I must end my report, we are soon to depart into town to gather traveling supplies for the long journey north. I hope you are well Headmaster, and I hope that my unscheduled absence hasn't caused too much disruption back in Atlas. Take care sir.

Your determined pupil,  
Arden Renshaw.



## Day 12 of the Season of Earth

Headmaster Okuma,

I will preface this letter with saying that I am injured, but healing. My injuries are superficial, but its sting still lingers.

While in the town of Burnwirth, gathering supplies I was presented with a spellbook that had been recovered from a fire some time ago. I let my guard down and gave into my curiosities by opening the book without properly examining it first. It was trapped with fire and exploded once I opened it.

Through quick action, I was able to contain the fire before it got out of hand. I believe I was the only one burned too, luckily. The locals assumed it was me who cast a spell to attack the shopkeep, and the locals banded together to drive me from town, where we were quickly whisked away by Samuel and Therrin.

I was so reckless Okuma. I choked through my emotions and did what needed to be done, but I nearly broke down with all the memories of the accident that welled up once I saw the fire as we were leaving town. I know that as a Shepherd, we were trained to bury our emotions deep so that we could act rationally and maintain the upper hand, but... I was weak.

I'm still weak, but I will continue to strive to earn what you gave me sir. I don't think I deserved the second chance you gave me, but I am forever grateful for what you've done. So thank you Okuma, I owe you everything.

After our hasty retreat to Allendauv, we were tended to by a costly surgeon by the name of Indigo. His methods left me alarmed, but he did good work. My wounds are nearly healed as I write this letter some days later. He even changed my arm bandages, which I can appreciate.

Samuel had a rendezvous with a fellow courier in town wherein he met Gordon to mix some sort of package they were carrying and deliver it to a festival happening south



of Gomphus. Though, due to the odd instructions and suspicious nature of situation, I advised them to perform the act outside of town in the event of a reaction.

With that, we gathered ourselves together and headed a few miles outside of town. The unlabelled compounds were mixed together to form an alien looking black liquid. I took a small sample for myself should I happen to have time to perform an alchemical analysis on the substance to figure out its properties.

Shortly after we finished the mixture, I went with Gordon back to town to resupply. We had to quickly turn around because the group was under attack by an alien creature that Bata referred to as an "Umbra". I was only able to get there at the last second, but it was taking blows at Therrin. Samuel was injured in the attack, but was able to get the young Mr. Cobble into Gordon's wagon. I used what magic I could to protect everyone there, but Therrin was unfortunately critically injured during the encounter. Luckily, Bata was able to thwart it with some well-aimed swings at the creature.

Once we regrouped at town, we once again paid Indigo an extravagant fee to heal my associated injured in the attack. And as before, he took good care of them. During their surgeries, I spoke with Bata who claimed this Umbra creature is the living guardian of a spire that exists to kill those who trespass on their grounds.

After Ms. Perch's recovery, she produced a dragon's tear. I have never been so sorely disappointed to be so right on my theories, Okuma. She stole as a slight against her family and nothing more. Bata warns me that in simply returning it, she could end up destroying Roqueport as did happen with one of the spires in Bisemutum ages ago.

So, we continue to the Spire in the swamp to see how these tears work so that we might be able to return the one we have in our possession safely to Roqueport. I have enclosed some rudimentary notes along with this letter detailing my observations of both the tear and the umbra. Please see to it that these make it to The Hidden Eye for proper analysis sir.

I will send you my next report when we reach the next city on our travels. I have a feeling we might be on the brink of a legendary breakthrough with where this is leading me to, so I hope I can do you proud.

Your ever-determined pupil,  
Arden Renshaw

## Day 16 of the Season of Earth

Headmaster Okuma,

It's happened again. The Umbra attacked us north of town, and nearly took the life of Ms. Perch. This time, it was very different. It first appeared as a facsimile of Ms. Perch and even spoke to me in a poor attempt to trick me into giving it the tear. It's also able to update its appearance once it lays eyes on the person it wants to impersonate.

In the ensuing battle it even began to truly flex its abilities as shapeshifter by molding its body to suit its needs. It was able to form itself into a large thin membrane and fully engulf Ms. Perch into itself, and then form into a winged creature in an attempt to fly away with her. I've never seen a creature with such a malleable form before; I would love to study it if I could.

Luckily, I was able to neutralize it with the proper application of spells and strategy, though it very nearly killed me when I tried to provoke its attention elsewhere. It was much closer a call than I'd prefer, but I managed to make it out unscathed.

I have an honest fear that I may be unable to protect Ms. Perch for much longer if this Umbra continues to grow and adapt as it has been. Bata is a sturdy fighter, and Samuel does alright, but it is difficult to protect them. I don't know what I would do if I was responsible for their deaths, especially if little Zaus were to fall.

After that encounter, we moved on to the city of Pinicola to rest and recover while Samuel met with his mysterious employer. After a short tussle we met an owl cleric by the name of Theodore, who also works for the couriers. He is very volatile, but his substance abuse seems to keep him in check to great benefit as his healing abilities are very useful.

With myself and Therrin in tow, we met a man by the name of Meunice, who holds the recipe for this black substance dear. It's apparently just waterproof body paint, but I have my doubts that such a substance would be so highly guarded. He is paying a substantial amount of money for this convoluted scheme to deliver it to a festival outside of Gomphus.

Doubts aside, the flamboyant mage returned to the wagons with us only to find poor Gordon had nearly killed himself with a drug overdose. We turned him over to the guards so that they could give him proper medical attention.

Zaus had fallen into a coma-like state; his body began to emit various magical effects. Meunice was able to help neutralize him despite his bizarre fixation with the child's condition. He tells me that people who survive this condition often grow to become Sorcerers or other varieties of natural spell casters, and that he should be taken to The Order to be studied.

Is that true? Do we really study and experiment with living people like that? I know The Hidden Eye has many secretive activities, but that can't be right can it?

I will have to wrap this letter up here it seems. We are leaving for the north soon, and I don't have time to go much further before we leave town. Take care Okuma, I feel my mission may be getting close to its end.

Your faithful pupil,  
Arden Renshaw

## Day 19 of the Season of Earth

Headmaster Okuma,

Sir, I fear for our safety.

We were aboard a smuggler's vessel sailing north through the swamp when I went to speak with Meunice, our mysterious benefactor. He regaled me with story of his experiments on live subjects while he was with The Order, and how much he enjoyed incinerating people with his personally crafted spells.

I know that after the accident, I've been fairly sensitive to these sort of things. But we don't really enlist people to do spell studies on live people, do we? I mean he could be lying to us, but I sincerely feel like what he said is real. I worry about our safety more and more with the umbra

pursuing us, and now that we are travelling with this sociopath it only grows deeper.

Promise me that The Order doesn't permit these sort of actions Okuma. Promise me. I know The Hidden Eye conducts a lot of unseen activities, but experimenting on living people is profanely wrong. If you get this letter, please investigate this and stop it before it goes on any longer.

I'm sorry, I've probably been exiled by now for being off assignment for so long. I've been doing my best to see my task through, and I know I am rogue as well. But I can't let this stand! People like Meunice can't be allowed to operate within The Order, or even society. This man should have his book burned and be punished.

Meunice aside, we were assailed by water spiders on our voyage to the festival. They took most of the crew, including Mr. Amica, Samuel, and Theodore. We were able to recover Samuel and Bata, but... we lost Theodore.

I didn't know Theodore that well, but despite his volatility he was an honest man and talented healer. I really wish I could have gotten to know him better, or do more to save him and the other crew members. I didn't really talk about it much to the others, but the guilt of his loss weighs heavily on me. The years of Shepherd training taught me to protect people and control a situation, but when things fall out of my hands like that I can't help but feel like a failure for what happened.

I haven't failed you have I?

We are pulling up to the docks now, so I will have to gather my things and get moving to the festival. Take care sir, I look forward to seeing you once this is all over with.

Your faithful student,  
Arden Renshaw.

# Animals

This chapter covers creatures that inhabit the world of The Cross. Every creature has a brief description and a stat block, but we welcome DMs to alter the stat block as necessary to fit their needs.

Beasts in this world are based on insects and arachnids. Larger beasts can be used for farming, travel, can be tamed, and some are still dangerous to travelers. The farther travelers get from civilization the more dangerous it becomes for them.

## Silkies

Silkies are two-foot-tall, six-foot-long larval insects with twelve legs tucked beneath mottled leathery carapaces. Atop their heads are a pair of fluffy prehensile antennae that are often used for simple grasping and manipulation. Their faces are rounded with beak-like mouths and deep black beady eyes glimmering with life. Their undersides are soft segmented portions which undulate as they skitter with their many feet.



WILD



CHUB SILKIE



WOOLLY SILKIE



PLATED SILKIE



Most silkies have an innate ability to discharge small amounts of electricity through their antennae by rubbing them together, though it is often fairly harmless in most varieties. The Woolly species is capable of discharging a lethal dose of energy by storing a charge in their shaggy fur from simple friction. Once fully charged they are capable of discharging an arc of energy nearly ten feet long, but are often unable to do so again for several minutes while rebuilding another charge.

Ranchers and herders tend to wear protective gear made of silkie hide utilizing their natural grounding capabilities that keep the insects safe from their own electrical charge. Little more than a vest or bracers is needed for everyday interaction, but full suits of silkie hide armor are used in particularly large herds, or during shearing season to keep workers safe from harm. While

relatively common to find, their hide is tough and hard to work with, making a full suit often come with a hefty price tag.

Silkies are omnivorous creatures, but tend to stick to vegetation when the option presents itself. They are often attracted to particularly sweet and fermented items, giving them preference to food-based compost, wines, and ciders. Because of this, many of these larval creatures are used to dispose of old food and household waste, as they will eat nearly anything they are presented with if it smells right. Additionally, it's suggested to keep one's drink of choice away from these creatures as well.

A number of breeds exist in The Cross. The most common is the woolly species, as their fur is used in most common textiles the world over. A common staple of food is the meat of the chub silkie, which has been bred

to have nearly no fur and soft supple carapaces making for the most tender steaks. The plated silkie carries tough carapaces that are used for leatherworking and armor smithing apart from their innate electrical resistance. Lastly, there are the spinner silkies that produce a fine but sturdy thread used in number of fashions and crafts.

**Tactics:** Silkies are typically docile creatures and tend to only attack when threatened. Singularly, they tend to rely solely upon their electrical attack, and secondarily upon their bites. In a herd, they tend to try to overrun their assailants and release numerous shocks upon their trampled victims. A herd of Woolly silkies tend to be particularly dangerous in large numbers, as they will rub against each other releasing numerous repeated ranged electrical attacks against their assailants.

## Bupreparda

A specific type of stag beetle found only in the mountains surrounding Bisemutum. The beetle's carapace has characteristics of jewel beetles' chitin, while maintaining the size and strength of the mighty giraffe

stag beetle. As such, their hard shells turn most colors into beautiful emerald and amethyst shades that seem to flow along the material. These behemoths stand at only three feet tall on their thin legs but have mandibles that extend over five feet long when they're fully grown. The rest of the beetle, arguably not quite as deadly as the mandibles, then stretches another twelve feet.

These beetles have the size and strength to down a veteran Bisemutum warrior in one blow just from concussive force, but luckily are rarely aggressive. This is good, because the end of each mandible is sharper than a spear and harder than steel. The beetles like to "boop" threats with the ends of their mandibles, generally resulting in great injury to the area. However, their carapaces and meat are great boons to the Bisemutum, who treat the creatures with reverence for the materials that the beetles provide.

Hunts for a Bupreparda can be deadly, but generations of experience have given Bisemutums extremely effective strategies for downing the majestic beetles. The hide is used to make very durable armor that can deflect all but

## Silkies

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod-Low	Mod-High	Mod	Null	Mod	Mod-Low

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (Full Rnd)	Atk (Grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init	Zapzap*
1	1	8	16/13/13	2/4/3	1	1	1	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	6	14
2	2	16	17/14/13	3/4/4	2	2	2	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	6	15
3	3	22	17/14/13	3/5/4	2	2	2	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	6	15
4	5	30	18/15/13	3/5/4	3	3	3	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	7	17
5	6	39	18/15/13	4/6/6	3	3	3	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	7	17
6	7	48	19/16/13	4/6/7	4	4	4	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	7	17
7	8	56	20/17/13	5/7/7	5	5	5	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	8	19
8	10	70	21/18/13	5/7/7	5	5	5	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	8	19
9	11	80	22/19/13	6/8/9	6	6	6	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	8	19
10	12	88	22/19/13	6/8/9	6	6	6	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	8	20

Attack	Damage (1-10)
Bite	1d3+1
Slam	1d4+1+*1 electric
Zapzap	1d8 electric dmg

**Special Abilities:** When multiple woolly silkie are together they can combine their electrical charges for one big shock. Non-wooly silkie do not possess an electrical charge and as such do not posses the zapzap ability. A single wooly silkie makes a ranged touch attack with zapzap up to 20 ft away. A group of wooly silkie however may use their collective charges to target a space and create massive discharge that must be dodged to be avoided (reducing damage by half)



the most devastating blows, or incredibly fashionable outfits that contain the iridescence of the beetle. The meat resource feeds tribes for days, supplementing their farmed produce.

The beetle itself actually consumes wood, either finding felled trees or knocking them down as it wanders around the mountain sides. While it has no natural predators that can threaten its size or strength, it displays particular prey behavior in that it attempts to hide or flee often. Conflict seems to be its least preferred activity. Most of the Bupreparada are found to be traveling alone, and despite all the time the tribes have had living in concert with these creatures, their breeding habits and gathering locations are still shrouded in mystery.

When it does need to fight, the Bupreparada employs simple scare tactics that ward off would be assailants. It brings its head up, waving its mandibles around, and extends its wings and carapace to appear larger, easily scaring anything that hasn't already learned to leave it alone. It's this behavior that allows the Bisumetum to complete their hunts at all, as the opening of the shell

leaves the beetle's soft interior vulnerable to flanking attacks.

## Bugalüs

Bugalüs, (BUG-uh-Looz) are eight foot long, five foot tall beetles with six strong and sturdy legs striding back and forth towards their destination with force. A pair of rich rust colored segmented eyes on both sides of their head rest at the beginning of their long-tapered snouts. These snouts are tipped with several small rounded mandibles designed for eating wood and other vegetation. Adorning these snouts are a pair of large probing antennae, often poking and prodding at creatures and object that are unfamiliar to them. Their bodies are slightly hunched with a pocked leathery carapace that runs the length of their of bodies to shield their soft undersides. Bugalüs come in a wide variety of colors ranging from various shades of black, brown, and greys following a solid color scheme, with the rare mottled variety.

Being natural herbivores, Bugalüs often forage for simple vegetation to sate their hunger. Their food of

## Bupreparada

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod	Low	Mod-High	Null	Mod-Low	Low

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init
1	2	16	15/12/13	5/3/3	4	4	4	40 ft	5/10 : 5 ft	3
2	3	24	15/12/13	6/3/4	5	5	5	40 ft	5/10 : 5 ft	3
3	5	42	16/13/13	6/4/4	6	6	6	40 ft	5/10 : 5 ft	3
4	6	49	16/13/13	7/4/5	7	7	7	40 ft	5/10 : 5 ft	3
5	8	62	17/14/12	7/4/5	9	9	8	50 ft	10/10 : 5 ft	2
6	9	71	17/14/12	8/4/6	10	10/5	16	50 ft	10/10 : 5 ft	2
7	11	98	18/15/12	8/4/6	11	11/6	17	50 ft	10/10 : 5 ft	2
8	12	109	19/16/11	9/4/7	12	12/7	18	60 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	1
9	14	132	20/17/11	9/5/7	13	13/8	19	60 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	1
10	15	141	22/19/10	10/5/8	14	14/9	20	60 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	0

Attack	Damage (m)	Damage (lrg)
Horn	1d8+3	2d6+8
Slam	1d6+1	1d10+4

Special Abilities: None.

choice is old dry wood, typically from old fallen trees and the like, but are known to eat treated woods such as those in a barrel or fence in times of hunger. Due to their hardy constitution, these insects are able to work quite some time on a single meal a day provided they are able to eat their fill of food and water.

After generations of domestication the modern Bugalü has become a relatively docile creature used as a means of pulling wagons, tills, and other heavy vehicles. Capable of pulling more than three times their own body weight, these beetles are a common sight on any farm, city, or village. Typically guided by a small leather loop around their snouts, Bugalüs are trained to move by reins just as easily as any stag or mantis would but are rarely used as mounts themselves.

Despite domestication, wild Bugalüs can still be found in the world. They are often times seen in mated pairs foraging together, or slightly larger families raising their

young before they strike out on their own. It is rare to see these beetles move in a herd together, but in regions with high amounts of predators they will often stick together out of necessity for survival. A wild Bugalü can typically be found in old growth forests feasting on the underbrush and any fallen trees or logs that may be present in their territory.

**Tactics:** A Bugalü is a very docile creature and would rather run from danger than confront it. When agitated, or left with no other options, they will retaliate. Their bites do a bit of damage, but their real threat lies in stomping on their prey by rising up on their hind legs and crashing down with feet onto their assailants using the full weight of their bodies. Ranchers have told stories of Bugalüs pulling wagons and carts to sometimes trample their attackers, or deliberately capsizing their load in an attempt to crush their opposition.





## Bugalüs

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod-Low	Low	Mod-High	Nil	Mod	Mod-Low

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init
1	2	18	12/10/12	4/2/3	2	2	2	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
2	4	32	13/11/12	5/2/4	3	3	3	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
3	6	54	13/11/12	5/3/4	3	3	3	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
4	8	66	14/12/12	6/3/5	4	4	4	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
5	9	72	14/12/12	6/3/5	6	6	10	40 ft	5/10 : 5 ft	2
6	11	94	15/13/12	7/4/6	7	7	11	40 ft	5/10 : 5 ft	2
7	13	113	16/14/12	7/5/6	7	7	11	40 ft	5/10 : 5 ft	2
8	14	122	16/14/12	8/5/7	9	9	10	60 ft	10/10 : 5 ft	2
9	15	134	16/14/12	9/5/8	9	9	13	60 ft	10/10 : 5 ft	2
10	17	162	17/15/12	11/5/9	10	10	14	60 ft	10/10 : 4 ft	2

Attack	Damage (m)	Damage (lrg)
Slam	1d6+2	1d8+6
Bite	1d3+1	1d4+3

Special Abilities: None.

## Roubles

A rouble (or rou) is a smaller domesticated animal having a mixture of a chitin exoskeleton and an endoskeleton. Their segmented exoskeleton provides protection for their softer ventral section. A rouble can roll into a ball to protect itself, and can still move while rolled up by undulating its exoskeletal plates. This ability gives them the appearance of rubble. They bond rapidly with people, and can be trained to perform many helpful tasks such as hunting, protection, herding and even simple companionship. Their herding skills are especially appreciated by silkie farmers, and even the most nervous of silkies are not spooked by roubles. Rous vary widely in size and color; certain sizes and colors attract the attention of breeders and collectors. They are a subspecies of their wilder untamed cousin, caranids.

## Water Spiders

Water spiders are as their name implies, large aquatic insects. These insects are roughly five feet long and three feet tall, though with their legs they can make themselves up to seven feet tall when fully extended. They are pale in color with sharp mandibles and an array of eight eyes placed upon their stubby heads. Six long segmented legs come to a near perfect point with small articulated membrane flaps that unfold downward to form flat flippers used for swimming and resting on the water's surface. Their bodies are slender and bristled with thick hairs that form to a taper on their end where the web weaving spinneret resides.

These particular insects are known for two things - their webs and their venom. Capable of firing their web from up to thirty feet away, a Water Spider has the ability to ensnare their victims in a sticky mass that is very difficult to escape before being dragged into a watery



grave. It is often at this time that they will proceed to bite their webbed captives and inject them with their potent venom that saps their strength, preventing them from ever escaping to breathe air again.

Water Spiders are a social creature. Most exist in a communal group anywhere from five to twenty, serving brood mothers in protecting eggs, looking after their young, and most notably hunting their prey in packs. They coordinate through a series of high-tension webs that run beneath the surface of the water in a network that extends from the nest to the furthest reaches of their territory. Through a series of vibrations on these webs, an entire swarm of water spiders can communicate from miles away and react swiftly to any danger that may arise.

Being spiders, these creatures are capable of climbing sheer surfaces, but are much stronger swimmers. Their streamlined bodies and long legs make them swift beneath the water's surface, allowing them to move nearly four times faster than the average swim speed of most kin. This aptitude with swimming hasn't hindered their abilities to move on land, so both above and below the surface a Water Spider is a nimble opponent.

These creatures are commonly found in areas of still, deep water such as lakes and marshlands. The lack of a current leaves for more opportunities to hide beneath the silt in wait for prey to ambush, as well as providing more opportunities for their web network to succeed. A more nomadic breed of Water Spider exists in the open sea, but these larger and tougher cousins stay in smaller packs. They are known for attacking smaller sea vessels on rare occasion, but mostly prey on poor souls that happen to fall overboard.

An antidote can be crafted for Water Spider venom by extracting their venom sacs and boiling its contents with horse flower extract and honey. An Alchemy check is required to succeed in making this syrupy substance. Failure renders the venom inert but does not produce a cure.

Tactics: Water Spiders tend to hunt in groups of five to ten. They will ambush vessels by firing their web from beneath the surface of the water to pull their unsuspecting prey off the deck. From there, they will climb the side of the ship and proceed to web and poison anybody left onboard. A similar tactic is used from the shoreline, though if the water is not deep enough where they claim

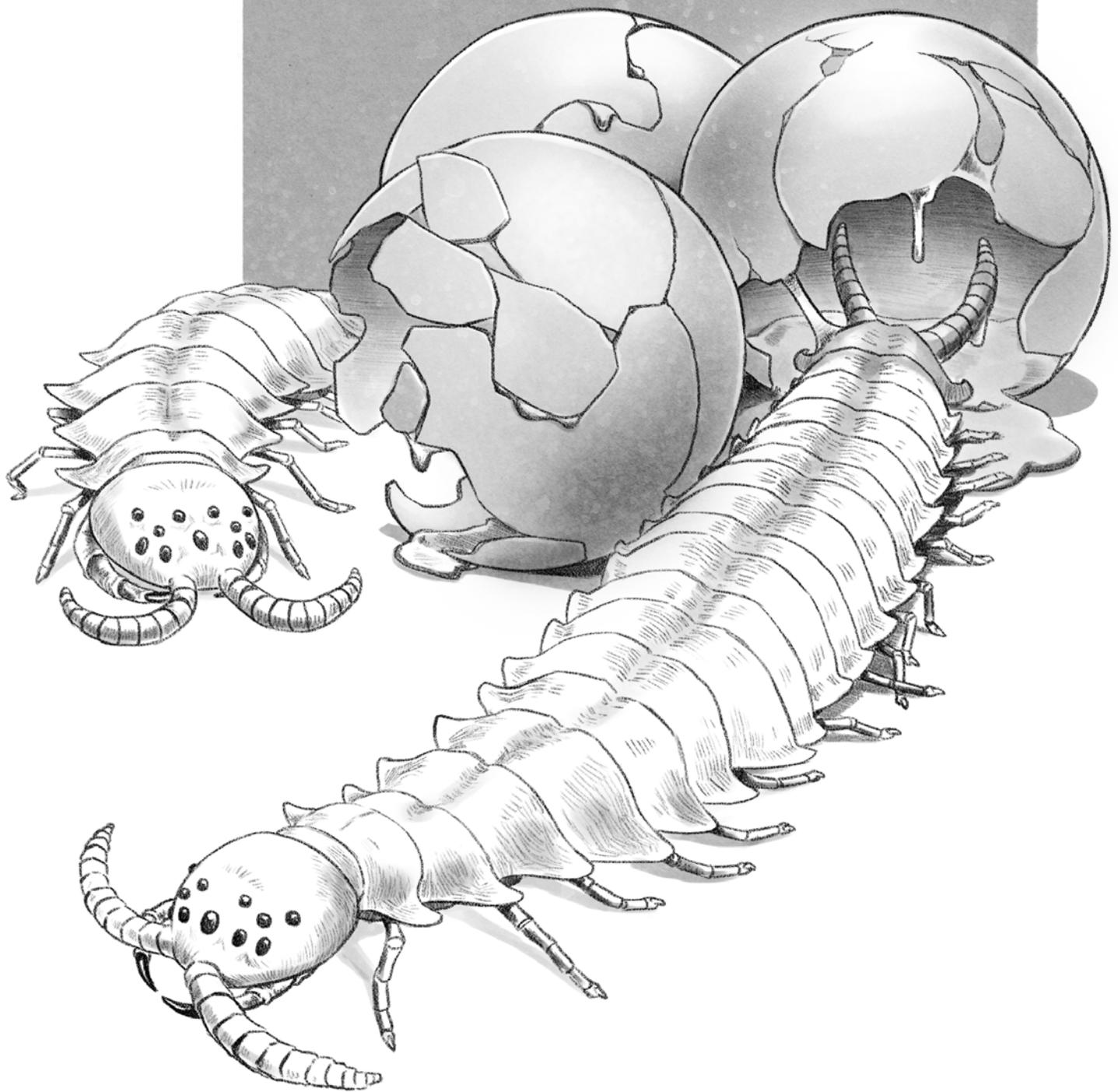
## Water Spiders

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod	Mod	Mod-High	Nill	Mod-High	Mod-High

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init	Poison	Web Break
1	1	12	14/11/13	4/3/3	3	3	7	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	12	14
2	2	22	14/11/13	5/3/4	4	4	8	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	13	15
3	4	43	15/12/13	5/4/4	6	6	10	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	14	16
4	5	55	16/13/13	6/4/5	6	6	10	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	15	18
5	6	64	17/14/13	6/5/5	7	7	11	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	16	19
6	8	86	18/15/13	7/5/6	8	8/1	16	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	17	20
7	9	92	18/15/13	7/5/6	9	9/2	17	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	18	22
8	10	108	19/16/13	8/6/7	10	10/3	18	60 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	3	19	23
9	12	132	19/16/13	9/6/8	11	11/4	19	60 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	3	20	24
10	13	150	20/17/13	11/7/9	12	12/5	20	60 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	3	21	26

Attack	Damage (Level 1-5)	Damage (Level 6-10)
Bite	1d6+2+poison	1d8+6+poison
Poison	1d3 Str/1d3 Str	1d4 Str/1d4 Str

**Special Abilities:** Can walk on water if desired. Swimming speed is the same as walking and climbing speed.



their victims, they will often times string their prey up in trees and poison them so that they can come back to them later once the excitement is over.

## Manipedes

Manipedes are large insectoid creatures with segmented bodies thirty feet in length and four feet wide. Their dark armored bodies protect their short and numerous legs. Upon its head is a cluster of a dozen yellow eyes in the center of its face situated above its two large sword-like mandibles positioned to cut its prey in half. While only three feet tall on its belly, these beasts can stand an intimidating twenty feet tall to strike.

Manipedes thrive in environments that allow them to swim and snake through the terrain. Their many legs and innate ability to bend and twist like no other creature allow them a great advantage in non-solid terrain. As such, they tend to populate regions of sand like deserts and areas

like marshlands where the water and mud allow them the maneuverability they desire.

Two primary breeds exist. Those indigenous to the desert are known as dry manipedes, noted for their rough, hard, brown carapace that looks akin to dried mud. On the other end of the spectrum, those native to marshlands are known as water manipedes. This breed has a dark blue carapace that is significantly softer than is desert cousin but makes up for it with the increased speed and dexterity it provides.

Being carnivorous creatures, the manipede is a solitary predator. They often burrow themselves beneath the sand or mud and lay in wait for their moment to strike, seeking out individual creatures to ambush by emerging and delivering a mortal blow swiftly with their large mandibles. While their prey are usually targets that won't fight back, manipedes have been known to attack small towns and villages when desperate.

Attempts to domesticate manipedes as warmounts have been made in the past, but the feat has been rarely

## Manipedes

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
High	Mod	High	Nil	Mod	Low

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init	Poison*
1	2	18	15/12/13	4/3/3	6	6	10	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	12
2	4	32	16/13/13	6/4/4	8	8	12	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	13
3	6	54	17/14/13	8/4/4	9	9	13	50 ft	10/5 : 5 ft	3	14
4	8	66	18/15/13	9/5/5	11	11/6	15	50 ft	10/5 : 5 ft	3	15
5	9	72	20/16/14	10/5/5	12	12/7	16	60 ft	15/5 : 5 ft	4	16
6	11	94	21/17/14	11/6/6	14	14/9	18	60 ft	15/5 : 10 ft	4	17
7	13	113	21/17/14	13/6/6	16	16/11/6	20	70 ft	20/5 : 10 ft	4	18
8	14	122	23/18/15	14/7/7	17	17/12/7	21	70 ft	20/5 : 10 ft	5	19
9	15	134	24/19/15	14/7/7	19	19/14/9	22	80 ft	25/5 : 10 ft	5	20
10	17	162	25/20/15	15/8/8	20	20/15/10	24	80 ft	25/5 : 10 ft	5	21

Attack	Damage (1-3)	Damage (4-7)	Damage (8-10)
Bite	1d6+4+Poison	1d8+6+poison	2d6+8+poison
Slam	1d4+4	1d6+6	1d8+8
Constrict	1d4+6	1d6+8	1d8+12
Poison	1d4/1d4 Str	1d6/1d6 Str	1d8/1d8 Str

**Special Abilities:** Desert: Walk/Burrow Speed (half speed in regular terrain). Swamp: Walk/Swim Speed.



accomplished. They can be managed from a small hatchling, but their predatory instincts often overtake any upbringing they receive once they become large enough to no longer fear their masters.

Tactics: Manipedes prefer ambush wherever possible. They will lay in wait for hours to days for a vulnerable creature to approach so it can strike. When attacking, they will prioritize any target they believe they can take

down with a single blow. If unable to do so, they will use the full length of their body to encircle and corner their prey so that it can kill it before it escapes. While it is rare that manipedes cooperate with each other, those that hunt together are fearsome beasts to contend with, singling out a target with coordinated attacks.



## Stags

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod-High	Mod-Low	Mod-High	Null	Mod	Low

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init
1	1	12	18/16/12	4/2/3	5	5	4	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
2	2	24	18/16/12	5/2/4	6	6	5	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
3	3	36	19/17/12	5/3/4	7	7	6	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
4	4	48	19/17/12	6/3/5	8	8	7	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
5	5	60	19/17/12	6/3/5	9	9	12	40 ft	5/10 : 5 ft	2
6	6	72	20/18/12	7/4/6	11	11/6	13	40 ft	5/10 : 10 ft	2
7	8	94	20/18/12	7/5/6	13	13/7	15	40 ft	5/10 : 10 ft	2
8	10	110	20/18/12	8/5/7	15	15/9	17	40 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	2
9	12	134	21/18/12	9/6/8	17	17/11/6	19	40 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	2
10	14	156	21/18/12	12/6/9	19	19/13/8	21	40 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	2

Attack	Damage (1-5)	Damage (6-10)	Special Abilities: None.
Horn	1d10+6	1d12+8	
Slam	1d8+4	1d10+5	

## Ants/Bees

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod-High	Mod	Mod	Mod-Low	Mod	Low

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init
1	1	12	18/16/12	4/2/3	5	5	4	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
2	2	24	18/16/12	5/2/4	6	6	5	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
3	3	36	19/17/12	5/3/4	7	7	6	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
4	4	48	19/17/12	6/3/5	8	8	7	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
5	5	60	19/17/12	6/3/5	9	9	12	40 ft	5/10 : 5 ft	2
6	6	72	20/18/12	7/4/6	11	11/6	13	40 ft	5/10 : 10 ft	2
7	8	94	20/18/12	7/5/6	13	13/7	15	40 ft	5/10 : 10 ft	2
8	10	110	20/18/12	8/5/7	15	15/9	17	40 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	2
9	12	134	21/18/12	9/6/8	17	17/11/6	19	40 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	2
10	14	156	21/18/12	12/6/9	19	19/13/8	21	40 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	2

Attack	Damage (1-3)	Damage (4-7)	Damage (8-10)	Special Abilities: Also include flying varieties that fly at the same speed they walk.
Bite	1d3+1	1d3+2	1d3+3	
Sting	1d4+1+poison	1d4+2+poison	1d4+3+poison	
Poison	1d3/1d3 con	1d4/1d4 con	1d6/1d6 con	

## Yearnbell [Plant]

The glitter of treasure warped and faded from your view and turned into a tall hollow trunk, the orifice dripping of sticky liquid. Massive vines of thorns slowly shift around you, blocking your exit and closing around you.

The yearnbell is a dormant plant that grows and can completely take over forests if kept unchecked. The center of the yearnbell is a hollow soft trunk that comes in a variety of bright colors. The trunk oozes a thick sweet syrup that it uses to digest its food. Around its center, the yearnbell grows and spreads a light number of thorny vines, preferring to hide them among other flora. The thorns secrete a poison that makes the person susceptible

to the smell of the yearnbell syrup. Once poisoned, the person begins to lose inhibitions and will begin to see and hear hallucinations of that person's desire. The length of the hallucinations vary, and the person should be so lucky as to avoid additional thorns as the yearnbell lures the victim to the center. As the victim moves closer to the center, the vines slowly constrict around the area, making it difficult for the victim to wander or escape out of the area without further poisoning. When the victim is fully engrossed in the hallucination, they are lead into the hollow soft trunk at the center. Digestion of the victim can take several weeks.

## Yearnbells

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod-Low	Mod-High	Mod	Null/Low (later)	High	Mod

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves E/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed (walk/swim)	Space/Reach	Init
1	1	8	16/13/13	2/3/3	4	4	8	20/40 ft.	5/5 : 5 ft	7
2	2	16	17/14/13	3/3/4	5	5	9	20/40 ft.	5/5 : 5 ft	7
3	3	24	17/14/13	3/4/4	6	6	10	30/40 ft.	5/5 : 5 ft	7
4	5	32	18/15/13	3/4/4	8	8	12	30/40 ft.	5/5 : 5 ft	7
5	6	40	18/15/13	4/4/6	9	9	13	30/40 ft.	5/5 : 5 ft	7
6	7	48	19/16/13	4/5/7	10	10/5	14	30/40 ft.	5/5 : 5 ft	7
7	8	56	20/17/13	5/6/7	11	11/6	15	40/40 ft.	5/5 : 5 ft	7
8	10	72	21/18/13	5/6/7	13	13/8	17	40/40 ft.	5/5 : 5 ft	7
9	11	80	22/19/13	6/6/9	14	14/9	18	40/50 ft.	5/5 : 5 ft	7
10	12	88	22/19/13	6/7/11	15	15/10	19	50/50 ft.	5/5 : 5 ft	7

Attack	Damage (1-5)	Damage (6-10)
Bite	1d8+3+1 Con	1d8+6+ 1 Con
Slam	1d6+2	1d6+4+ 1 Con

**Special Abilities:** Improved Grapple: Latch Onto. A Yearnbell may begin a grapple with a successful bite attack and continue to deal damage as a bite attack while in grapple without penalty. For each con drained they heal 5 hp up to their max hp and may have up to 15 temporary hp lasting an hour.

Story

# Ja'oa

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by Damek Critou

The last light of dusk, quickly being overtaken by the growing brightness of Coeurasa, was particularly dim after just peeking over the western mountains. A sentinel peak, Aenos, stood above the rest, its distinctive silhouette defining the Kephalen range. In the bright days, it could be seen that snow never left her stony face, even at the peak of summer. Aenos and her kin caressed the western edge of the plains, their taedabor packed in dense forests that survived summer and winter unfazed and unchanged. Where the pine wood trees met with grassland and the climate was more agreeable, grew a smattering of fatidi. Their leaves, normally just as green and passive as the pine needles they swayed with, were brilliantly displaying yellow, orange, and some brown hues. More importantly, many had adopted a blood red. Every year the prophet tree leaves changed as such when the seasons marched on their inevitable paths, fall ending summer, a prelude to winter. Every year the blood leaves fell from the trees, honoring the ones who fell before. In that way, even the fatidi honored their ancestors.

So mused a single bear warrior, crouched in some of the denser underbrush near a patch of fatidi, leaves arrayed all over the ground. The air was mostly still as the day ended gently, producing a quiet blanket on the cold forest. Only an occasional cricket or beetle call pierced the silence. The bear had found his cover a few feet away from one of countless taedabor, watching the fatidi grove intently. Behind him arose a quiet rustle, a separate patch of large ferns moving slightly as a spear was adjusted to a more relaxed position. Ja'oa had led his hunting party for two whole days already, tracking a single prey through the forests. Their mark had a taste for the bark of one of the fatidi trees, and the grove in front of him had several of them among its ranks. It was his hope that the party's

patience staking out that grove would be rewarded. That patience was wearing thin though.

"Ja'oa, must we wait forever?" was a silent whisper that emanated from behind.

A younger voice had whispered it, one of the juveniles that had chosen Ja'oa as their hunt master for their Rite of Blood. He, along with his two normal hunters, had charge of a whole group of no less than five juveniles to care for on this hunt. Care for; and teach. He simply held one his large paws up and out to the side, fingers angled back, a dismissal of the question and a reminder to them to keep quiet. He had tried to train the small ones that their quarry could hear very well and were more likely to never venture into an area that was home to unfamiliar sounds. The juveniles found it a hard lesson to remember it seemed.

The sounds of protest and bored younglings followed his gesture, but they held their tongues. Probably more due to the judgmental looks and touch of his hunt mates than his own dismissal. Keera and Poros crouched just behind the juveniles, keeping them in line physically. Literally in this case as they had drilled the proper technique for attacking their prey but for the weaker strength of the juveniles, they needed a coordinated assault. That was part of their Rite, learning how to come together to overcome a problem. Admittedly Ja'oa hoped that the process of taking down their target would present as little problems as possible. It was his duty to help guide the younglings to adulthood, but he would be in grave danger if the juveniles couldn't master fear or weakness. Assuming of course they ever managed to confront their prey. Ja'oa had known Keera and Poros for many years and knew he could entrust his life to them, as all hunters had to do with their party. He was anxious of his chances with the juveniles, even with those two near.

However, several more hours passed without incident. The cold became more intense and the light of the sun faded entirely behind the mountains. Coeurasa had only become brighter and more filled with her own light, painting the forest in silver. The younglings had ceased being bored and were huddled with each other for warmth. The larger bear hunters silently bore the temperature, as they had bore much worse in the winters of the land. Just as their ancestors had done for millennia. Just as the younglings would learn to bear.

Ja'oa was just going about a silent yawn in the moonlight when soft rustles pierced the air. The sound of weight on the red fatidi leaves. And yet it was muffled, as if great care was being taken to avoid the noise, despite the sheer amount of mass that was clear in each step. Ja'oa rolled his shoulders, anticipation rising in his blood. Their prey had arrived. His plan had worked. Now he had to survive the result. He knew that Keera and Poros were aware of it as well and had roused the younglings. He imagined that now the moment had come, they would be wide-eyed and deathly quiet. They had to be.

He gripped his spear tight and flexed his muscles. He had been sitting in the bush for what he estimated to be near ten hours and was sore and tense. He hoped it wouldn't affect the fight too badly, and his luck seemed good this night. Coeurasa blessed him with her light, as the large beast swung into view from around a group of fatidi. The silvery light washed the scene in a glow, helped by the incredibly reflective surface of a bupreparda. An astonishing array of greens and purples were hidden in the surface of its carapace that was as hard as the hardest mountain rocks, with jagged, sawtooth mandibles over three feet long each, the rest of its body extending out another seven. Six segmented legs kept the beetle up, head swaying from side to side to watch for threats. Antennae from its head flicked about in the air, feeling the trees and their state before it selected a single fatidi, one that had died this year. Apparently that made them tastier.

The gigantic beetle wrapped both of its mandibles around the base of the tree and with a single swift action pulled the whole trunk right out of the ground, but even with such strength available the beetle still laid it down on top of the leaf covered ground with relative grace and silence. It was always an impressive sight to see, and not very common for hunters. Bupreparda were not the easiest prey to hunt, but the usefulness of their materials in the

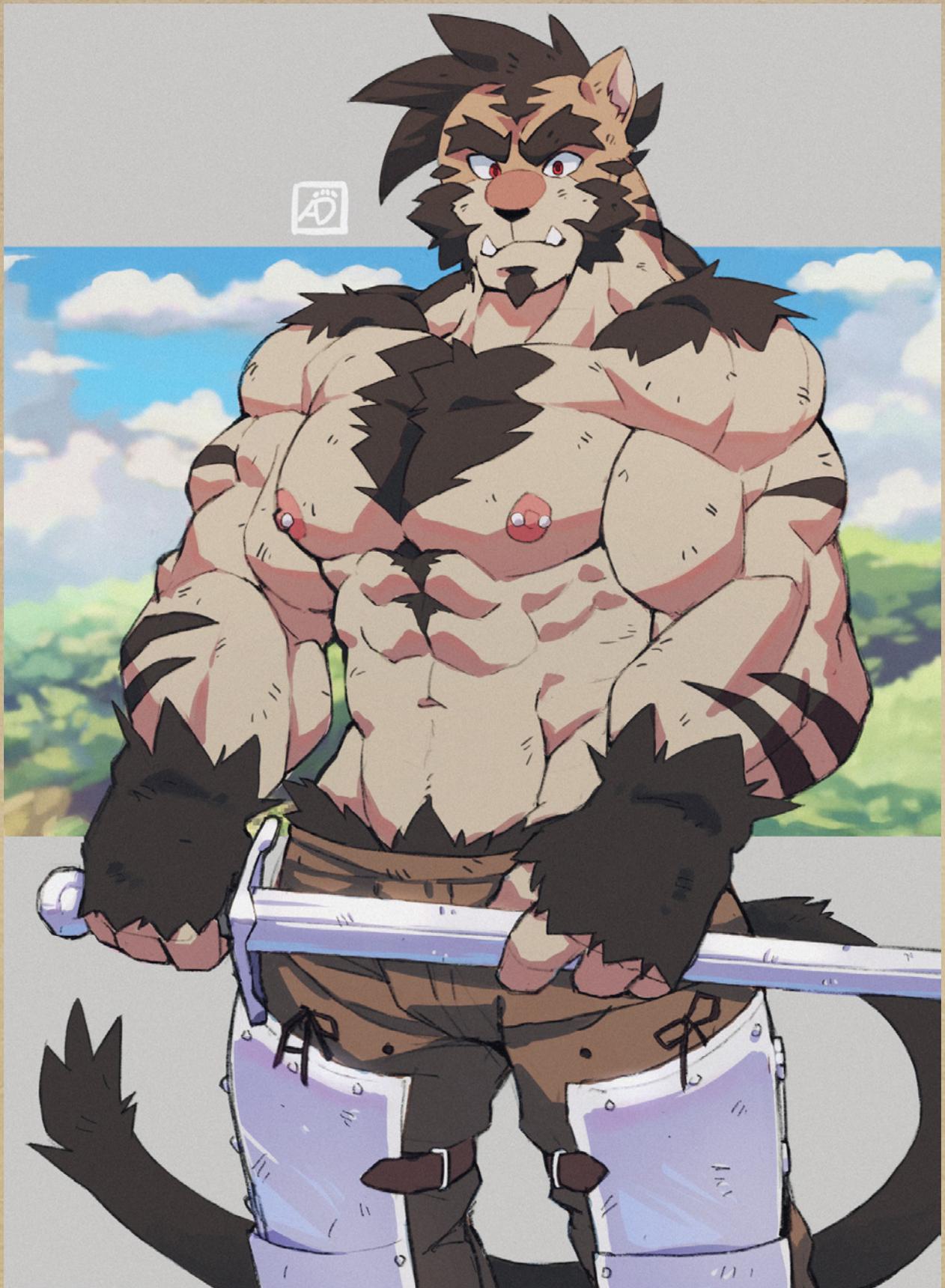
coming winter were too great to be ignored. As one of the toughest prey around, it was no wonder most juveniles elected to do their Rite of Blood with a bupreparda hunt. That also meant it would be tougher on Ja'oa.

He had waited for the beetle to start cracking and crushing the wood with the end of its mandibles. The sound was loud and cacophonous in the night, all pretense of stealth and caution dissolved. The work was fast as the beetle's mandibles had the strength equal to several bear warriors. It smashed the wood to pieces, much smaller antennae under its mandibles drawing in the fragments to its mouth. It only took a minute for about a quarter of the tree to be consumed, which is when Ja'oa inhaled sharply and stood from his bush.

He was angled a way off to the right and behind the creature and would probably not be spotted. Being such a large bear, one would think that Ja'oa would make quite a large amount of noise in his movements as he began shuffling toward it but had an ability to disguise his movements and noises that matched that of the beetle's. With spear in paw, he managed to get himself to within only a few feet of the beetle's back before he opened his jaw and let loose a loud roar at the creature. His duty as aega had begun, the shield against danger for his kin.

The reaction from the beetle was immediate and violent. Its legs propelled its body in a rapid rotation, sending leaves spraying from the ground to twist and tumble around in the air. The swaying backend of the beetle knocked over not just the rest of its meal, but a whole other tree trunk nearby that crashed down with a resounding crack. Two compound beetle eyes bore upon Ja'oa, who was the only visible creature around at the moment. Coeurasa's light gleamed from each facet of them as the bear ran his spear through his paws. He intimately knew the beetle would follow and track every single one of his movements, so he took a single step to the left. The beetle carefully matched to keep him directly in front of it. So, he took another step. It was a dance he had become quite familiar with, the careful and intentional half circle that took him to the other side of the beetle from his pack, beetle watching him intently. When the bush hiding the others was directly behind it, he stopped.

They both sat deathly still for a few moments before the bear gripped his spear tight and with one swift motion brought its tip up straight and jabbed the beetle directly in its left eye. The following screech was intense as the



beetle recoiled, green ooze dripping out of its pierced eye. It flailed a bit as its hemolymph, the blood of the insects, gleamed on Ja'oa's spear tip. As it regained its composure from surprise, the reaction the bear had hoped for was taken. The beetle snapped its hard, otherwise impregnable carapace open and extended its massive wings. With them stretched to their maximum size, the beetle appeared almost eight feet wide and six feet tall now. It was honestly quite intimidating, but bear hunters knew it was mostly for show. The kids would hopefully remember that too. He thought about trying to get the other eye, but the beetle was far too alert for that to work now. It flapped its wings strongly as it swayed, clearly in pain from the stab. The movement sent leaves flying everywhere, the blood red whooshing past the bear's form as he stood his ground. Leaves swayed through the air as they slowly tumbled back to the ground in an eerie quiet.

The beetle flapped again, trying to scare Ja'oa off with its apparent size. He scowled, as the next part of his dance should have begun by now. The children were freezing up, but he imagined that Keera and Poros were edging them on rather hurriedly. If the beetle decided to attack instead of just trying to scare him, he could be in great danger. He growled and flexed, puffing up a bit and matching the beetle's bravado, or at least tried to. It was only then that the first Rite-taker burst forth from his hiding place. It was Reese, an otter whose parents brought him into the plains just a few years back. Ja'oa had spoken to the couple several times while they gathered meat from the concilium. He hoped the boy would fare well here, but he was timid and shy. It was likely he was forced out first by the others. Luckily, being so lithe, he made very little noise in the night as he staggered forward from the force of another youngling more eagerly breaking free of hiding. A cougar, Toiya, came forward with her spear, holding it excitedly, aggressively. A snarl was on her face, lost in the adrenaline of the fight before her. Even so, she seemed particularly eager to complete her task. As if she believed the death of this creature was simply a badge of honor, disrespectfully so. He would have to sit down with her after and ensure she understood the necessity and respect of what they were doing, not the thrill or the boast of it.

A problem had arisen however, as those two were the only ones to appear. At least for the moment, Toiya was forcing Reese forward despite his clear reluctance to do so. He was clearly battling with the decision to

stay quiet as he had been taught or to protest Reese's reckless charge. Reckless in that they had been taught explicitly how to approach this assault on the beetle, and Reese was not following the rules. Ja'oa grunted and stretched slightly, preparing himself for the inevitable mistake of rookies and the inevitable consequence that would barrel into him. Toiya couldn't help herself and eked out a cacophonous cougar roar, quite impressive for her size, but still markedly juvenile. The beetle reacted immediately with a sharp snap of its carapace, wings vanishing, legs clicking. It didn't turn to face the noise, but instead launched itself towards Ja'oa. The fastest way it could escape, to its mind, was straight ahead. Ja'oa threw himself toward the beetle as well, fur spared barely inches from the jagged edge of the beetle's mandibles that could skewer him paws to head, before flinging himself at the ground and sliding under them, using the momentum of his body to swing the flat end of his spear tip as hard as he could right between the two massive prongs, straight into the beetle's face. The agility of such a maneuver strained every muscle in Ja'oa's body, and he was sure he heard several joints pop. He wished he didn't have to do this. The spear in his paws vibrated harshly, the force of the blow threatening to sunder the fatidi wood, but his ancestor's will held it together.

The resulting thud split the air with a resounding crack however, Ja'oa tumbling from under the suddenly rearing beetle and quickly reassuming a position in front of it. The beetle had recoiled harshly from the hit, though no damage was done to its hard hide. It was the pure concussive shock of the flat bludgeon that bears had relied on to stop the beetles in their tracks for generations. Thus it was that Ja'oa had succeeded, stunning and confusing the beetle. It swayed for a moment before returning its attention to him, now disheartened from attempting to barrel through again, and convinced that Ja'oa was more of a threat than whatever noises were happening behind it. At least, that's what Ja'oa hoped.

The beetle charge had surprised the enterprising younglings, causing them to stagger back. They looked rather vulnerable in the moonlight, with small spears and barely any armor coverings, just standing in a minor stunned way. They had to earn their real armor, pieces they'd honor for the rest of their lives. Some short scuffling, some crunched leaves, and a third youngling burst forth from the bushes, looking quite stressed and

anxious about how things had gone so far. Noyi, a very curious and inquisitive coyote teen. At this particular moment she seemed less interested in learning and more in the safety of all, her face was tense, movements stiff, and breath panting heavily out in the exposed air. Behind her came the final member of the Rite-takers, exasperated expression on his face as Labru, a bear-kin all his own, knew every moment spent uncoordinated put Ja'oa into more and more danger. The four teens came together in a group, stumbling and wiggling about themselves as Ja'oa watched the mandibles slowly spreading and then coming together again in front of him.

Ja'oa had to act once again, so the beetle would expose itself. He twirled his spear in one paw, creating a whooshing sound, the beetle tensing from the action. This in itself was just Ja'oa spending to think at where he should strike, before bringing down the bottom end of his spear against the inside of one of the mandibles threatening him. Another hearty thwap sounded, but the beetle only twisted its head and snapped the end of Ja'oa's spear between the hard projections. Intentional as it were, the beetle was inspired by the familiar sound of wood breaking, especially a piece held by the annoying bear warrior in front of it. The carapace snapped back open, extending the beetle wings again to twitch and flap at random, intending to intimidate Ja'oa. His eyes gleamed as the beetle did just as he had hoped.

The kids were suddenly presented with their target. Reese and Noyi tentatively hung back as Labru and Toiya surged forward with purpose. This wasn't ideal, but if the two in the back could act at the right time, they might find their own roles. As for Labru, he charged right when Toiya charged left. Both pulled their spears back and with as much strength as they could muster, thrust the tips down into the soft, exposed frame of the beetle. Labru's aim was true, and his spear sliced down into the part of the back that held the joint with one of the beetle's legs, but Toiya had less care with her strike. She only managed to cut a shallow swatch of flesh between two legs, doing minimal real damage and coating her spear with hemolymph, sending droplets of it spraying onto her fur.

Noyi and Reese hesitantly stepped forward behind the other two, and extended their spears helpfully, but rather weakly and aimlessly. The beetle had let out a loud screech as the first two spears cut its flesh, immediately attempting to fold its wings and close its shell. In a strike

of sheer luck, the movement caught the end of Reese's spear, easily piercing the wing and pulling it along with the closing carapace. The entire action pulled it right out of his grasp as the wing dragged it along the underside of the shell, lodging the point right at the wing joint before the pressure of it all snapped the spear into tiny pieces. The damage was done though, as the shell couldn't close all the way without causing immense pain to the beetle, which also stumbled along its right side, one of its legs now effectively unable to move with a spear lodged in its primary joint. It definitely tried to protect its vulnerable inner bits, but the pain must have been too great as it left its left covering dangling uselessly.

Ja'oa cringed a little at the relative ineffectiveness of most of his underlings. Labru showed promise, but a look of disgruntled indignation wasn't a good sign for the aspiring tribe brother. He realized it was mostly luck that Reese's spear had lodged itself in the wings, and from what Ja'oa had heard on the hunt so far, Labru would not be above criticizing his mates. The teen kept his mouth shut though as his spear was almost wrenched from his paws by a bucking beetle, still struggling to close its left side shell and stand on its rear right leg. Its entire balance was off, which was a great relief to Ja'oa, but he still had a very important job, and more dangerous with a stunted spear. In order to keep the beetle from just trashing about wildly, it needed a distraction. Which was him. Ja'oa roared loudly, much louder than the small cougar, before wiggling his away around the side of a mandible so he could jab the still oozing eye of the beetle from before. He missed on account of the beetle almost immediately swatting at him with the protrusion he had dodged, stumbling him sideways. In a split second, almost instinctual decision, Ja'oa used his free paw to grab the mandible and pull harshly. In spite of the size of the beetle, Ja'oa was also no small bear. His weight tugged the beetle's head down and to the side, the body going with it. The force of the pull let the mandible slice straight into Ja'oa's paw and palm, causing the bear to grimace and grunt, letting go as the beetle tried to right itself.

He could hear Toiya cry out in glee as her side of the beetle was not only pulled down slightly, but also still completely open to her spear from the lodged head in its carapace joint. She stabbed into the flesh eagerly, but still without much care. The spear bit deep this time though, lacerating wide bits of the beetle. It screeched and bucked

suddenly, its much larger and heavier back end flying sideways as it clipped Toiya and a formerly creeping Reese both right in the chest. The blow knocked both sequentially off their paws, lifting them a few inches but throwing them several feet out. Ja'oa heard his packmates cry out in alarm, their large bodies swiftly and expertly appearing as if from nowhere to shield the downed children. That was as far as they went though, intent to let the struggling hunters figure out how to end the beetle's threat.

Noyi had already found out it seemed, as she took Labru's lead and carefully aimed her spear down into another of the beetle's leg joints. She pushed with all her effort, just enough to lodge the spear down inside the complex nervous and muscle systems of that leg. The beetle wavered, its back-end slamming into the ground as it could no longer hold the weight of it up without extreme effort. Ja'oa tumbled himself back to standing, watching the beetle slowly succumb to the trickle of attacks. Ideally it would have all been done at once, incapacitating the legs in a coordinated strike. They were only teens though. Toiya struggled to stand, stunned by the blow she had received, but otherwise uninjured. Reese had used his luck on losing his spear it seemed, as he was thrown against a tree. He wasn't moving, crumpled on the ground, but Keera was positioned fiercely to guard him.

Ja'oa dearly wished to check on the boy, but the beetle was not out for the count yet. Despite having to drag its rear end around, it was able to move, and it had apparently decided to stop toying with Ja'oa. He barely had enough time to duck, fur bristling from the wind generated, as a massive pair of mandibles swung straight at him from the right, slamming so hard to into a fatidi that it snapped right in half. This is what he had been afraid of. The beetle was injured enough to be unable to run, but not enough to incapacitate. Cornered and angry, it would fight to the last now, and Ja'oa was the only immediately noticeable target. He had to tumble himself to the other side suddenly as the mandibles again swung, but this time down in the dirt. Its hind end was bobbing and jumping around, making Labru recoil with a yip, diving for safety, spear dislodging from the already useless leg joint and muscles. Toiya was slowly recovering herself as she stood, and the knock seemed to have put some sense into her. She approached much more cautiously again, spear held high with a determination in

her eye, having noticed Noyi's success. She drove it clean into one of the joints for a front leg.

Ja'oa had just recovered from his dodging, holding his spear out defensively when Toiya landed her attack. The result was yet another violent thrash of the mandibles, but this time Ja'oa was not quite quick enough. He managed to avoid a direct hit, but his position and stance when a mandible end fell upon his shoulder ensured that it dragged down the length of that arm. Mostly due to his own momentum, the sharp end cut deep across his body, sending waves of pain all through him as he violently recoiled, scrambling away from the front of the beetle as it collapsed its whole body, unable to move its own weight now with three useless legs. The head still wiggled around, trying to reach Ja'oa, who was crawling backwards away and out of reach, his spear dropped and forgotten, paw gripping his lacerated arm tight. It hang uselessly from his shoulder, bleeding profusely.

As soon as the beetle dropped, Poros sprinted for Ja'oa. Keera immediately turned and began to examine Reese. Toiya and Labru shuffled closer together, unsure of what to do. The beetle's good legs scrambled to try and lift itself but were unable. Its good carapace opened and the good wing under it flapped useless, leaves blown around chaotically. Ja'oa groaned and gritted his teeth through the pain, Poros in front of him, kneeling with some bandages and rapidly trying to stem the flow of blood with their thin fabric. He eyed the teens in the meantime, panting as they were, watching the flailing, pathetic beetle as it bled. Toiya looked like she was going to be sick. Maybe he didn't need to give her a talk after all. Keera verified that Reese had just been knocked out before turning

and instructing the Rite-takers in the completion of their second trial. The wounds of the beetle, while incapacitating, were more torturous than grave. It was a grim task that all hunters had to perform, but Keera guided the teens through the process of lifting away both wing carapaces and implanting their spears into the back of the beetle's head. It then died within a matter of minutes, rather than a slow bleed out of hours.





# Beasts

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## **Bork**

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A crowded group of small creatures resembling canines rush over each other towards the party, each holding weapons and armor crudely made from wood and stone. Their rambling is incohesive, resembling canine barks, but orders are being sent from one to another with no clear leader among them.

Borks are a tribal group of short statured canine-like creatures. While handling a lone Bork is an easy feat, they are a menace when they are in a group. They typically attack in groups of five to ten. They are intelligent creatures but speak to each other in an unknown tongue that seems to vary from region to region. Borks from different tribes have been known to fight each other or amongst themselves. They burrow underground and live in tunnels and are known to steal Silkies from farmers that they use as mounts.

## **Combat**

Their weapons typically consist of stone spears, wooden swords, and short distance bows. Their weapons and armor are crudely made and tend to break in battle, it is common for a Bork to carry more than one spear should the first one break in combat. When attacking in groups they are known to use formations and flank their prey with the goal of climbing onto and slowing their prey down. They fear fire.

## **Balbutio**

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A pale blue hunched over creature covered in feathers with a turned down beak picks at a downed traveler. It lifts its head, looking in your direction with its larger hollow sockets as it hears you approach. The figure slowly stands upright, its two pale spindly rough-skinned bird

legs looking broken with how they unfold. It looms over you by a good two or three feet; the frame of the creature is thin and coated in disheveled feathers. It looks around past you, its head twitching and rotating as it searched the environment.

Balbutio are a tall nightmarish bird-like creature. It searches for sounds using the numerous ear canals on its head, the front of its head featuring two larger canals with two beady eyes glossed over as if with cataracts. Adventurers must stay quiet around the beast. They generally perch and walk around hunched over, only extending themselves to their full height when calling or searching for prey. Should they find prey, Balbutio will shriek a single call for others as they usually hunt in groups of four. They will emit calls that are sharp and short ticking sounds to echolocate, and may even pretend to be unable to find their prey to make stalking easier. Should an adventurer fall to these beasts, their last words may be echoed by the monster for a few days, usually helping the Balbutio attract unsuspecting prey.

## **Umbra**

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### *Amorphous Aberration*

The Umbra is a special guardian of the Dragon's Tooth shrines that is grown when the Dragon's Tear is removed from its pedestal. This gestation may be immediate or may take several days, this variety is dependent on the condition of the shrines where dormant or inactive shrines have a delayed response and active shrines have an immediate response. Because so few shrines outside of Bisemutum still retain their Tear, Umbra have become an such an infrequent sighting that this guardian is generally considered a mythical creature or ramblings of mad men. The Bisemutum refer to the Umbra by their proper name but to everyone else the term "doppelganger" is commonly used.

## Life Cycle

When the Umbra is birthed it absorbs knowledge of those present in the chamber at the time of the disturbance. Its appearance begins as an amorphous blob that seeps from the ceiling of the Tear's chamber.

Should the Umbra have experience and be released right away, it will take the shape of a nightmarish creature and immediately begin combat.

Should treasure seekers be able to flee from an Umbra or should the Umbra have a delayed release, or be inexperienced, the guardian will begin a hunt. After the thieves abscond with the Tear, the guardian will adopt the form of the offender and begin a slow traversal towards the Tear, ignoring weather, land formations and time of day. If during this hunt the guardian faces opposition, it may attain the knowledge of the opposing creature. The longer an Umbra remains active, the more knowledge it absorbs, becoming capable of learning languages, spells, combat

tactics, and the ability to adopt more shapes that may grant it faster traversal or access to restricted environments. The guardian has vague knowledge of the location of its respective Tear, capable of narrowing it down to a small region.

The Umbra is an intelligent creature, capable of greater machinations the longer it lives, and thus prefers manipulation and tactics over outright brute force to obtain its Tear.

When its respective Tear is shattered, the Umbra's purpose is revoked; at that time it becomes aimless and it is unknown what they do.

When it attains its Tear, the Umbra will traverse to its shrine and may initiate a cleansing of the environment surrounding the shrine. The Umbra may enter a slumber and when summoned again, it will retain the experience it gained. As an Umbra gains more experience and knowledge, they may deviate methods from a fresh ling.

## Umbras

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod-High	Mod-High	Mod-High	High	High	High

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed (GM choice)	Space/Reach (GM choice)	Init	Communion*
1	2	18	16/13/13	4/4/4	5	5	9	30-90 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	6	18
2	3	29	17/14/13	4/4/4	6	6	10	30-90 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	6	19
3	4	42	17/14/13	5/5/5	7	7	11	30-90 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	6	19
4	6	58	18/15/13	6/6/6	9	9/4	13	30-90 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	7	20
5	8	74	18/15/13	7/7/7	11	11/6	15	30-90 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	7	21
6	10	92	19/16/13	8/8/8	13	13/8	17	30-90 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	7	22
7	11	104	20/17/13	8/9/8	14	14/9/4	18	30-90 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	8	22
8	12	122	21/18/13	9/10/9	15	15/10/5	19	30-90 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	8	23
9	14	148	22/19/13	10/11/11	17	17/11/6	21	30-90 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	8	24
10	16	172	22/19/13	12/12/12	19	19/13/8/3	23	30-90 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	8	25

**Special Abilities:** Speed based on form; GM choice. Size/Reach ranges from 5/5 : 5ft to 15/15 : 10 ft; GM choice. May decide to gain class/job levels over creature HD.

May speak directly to their targets through communion if they so choose; may imitate voices or prey other forms of manipulation based on their knowledge of the target.

Possesses a covert communion ability that allows them at first surface level thought access and then as deep as powerful life shaping moments given time for observation – targets might not know this is occurring if they fail their opposed check.

Attack	Damage (m)	Damage (lrg)
Horn	1d8+3	2d6+8
Slam	1d6+1	1d10+4

**Shape-shifter:** A Umbra can take on the shape of what or whom it has spent enough time studying; as they advance they might even selectively alter their form such as growing wings, growing large sharp claws, or warp their body in Lovecraftian ways to suit their needs.

## Combat

The Umbra will attempt a few subversive tactics prior to resorting to combat. The guardian will attempt to force fear and cause psychological trauma on those that impede it from completing its mission. It may take the shape of the Tear's thief or other people that the thief has interacted with depending on the amount of knowledge the guardian has attained. This may be used to attain the Tear through

manipulation or the creation of living nightmares, attempting to disturb the holders of the Tear.

Should combat be necessary, the guardian may use its amorphous form to attack or choose a shape of a creature it deems adequate for the situation. Juvenile Umbra have attacks that rely on its body to cause blunt, piercing, or slashing damage. Experienced Umbra may use spells or other skills should they have attained knowledge of them.

A bright light flashes and large crack is heard as Arden casts a spell shattering the guards club before it strikes the bear again. "On behalf of The Order, you are committing unlawful acts against the capitol. Stand down. NOW!"





I know the elders won't tell you New Bloods exactly what happened, but the Guardians have no qualm warning us with visions of that nightmare. Kromek's fate had been sealed; upon his stealing of the Tear from the shrine, the Umbra hath woken from its slumber. A dark amorphous amalgamation of a creature began to take shape before him, distinct beasts and kins could be made out in this shadow. From the fringes of this mass, bone-like protrusions turned to fingers which stretched into spider legs before coalescing back to the whole. At the center of the mass, numerous jaws, eyes, and nostrils roiled against each other, they crackled like hard rain pummeling metal. This guardian angel engulfed Kromek in a coffin of fangs and claws, swirling around him before finally deciding on a form to present itself in, the likeness of Kromek himself. This wasn't an exact likeness; it was. . . off. A nightmarish depiction, a deceased depiction. What happened to Kromek after that moment is beyond what I dare explain to you, it still eats at my soul thinking about it. To say the least, no animal eats another as viciously as this. In the end, Kromek's soul and body became part of the Umbra and the Tear was returned to its rightful place.

– Djembe Amans speaking to New Bloods.



Robert, he's just never been the same since his wife left him; he just won't pipe up about that goddamn nightmare he had. Really? He wants me to believe that he saw some muggers get eaten by a person who turned into some shadow beast? Guy just needs to cut down on the mead and find a new gal.

– Murmurs from some bar.

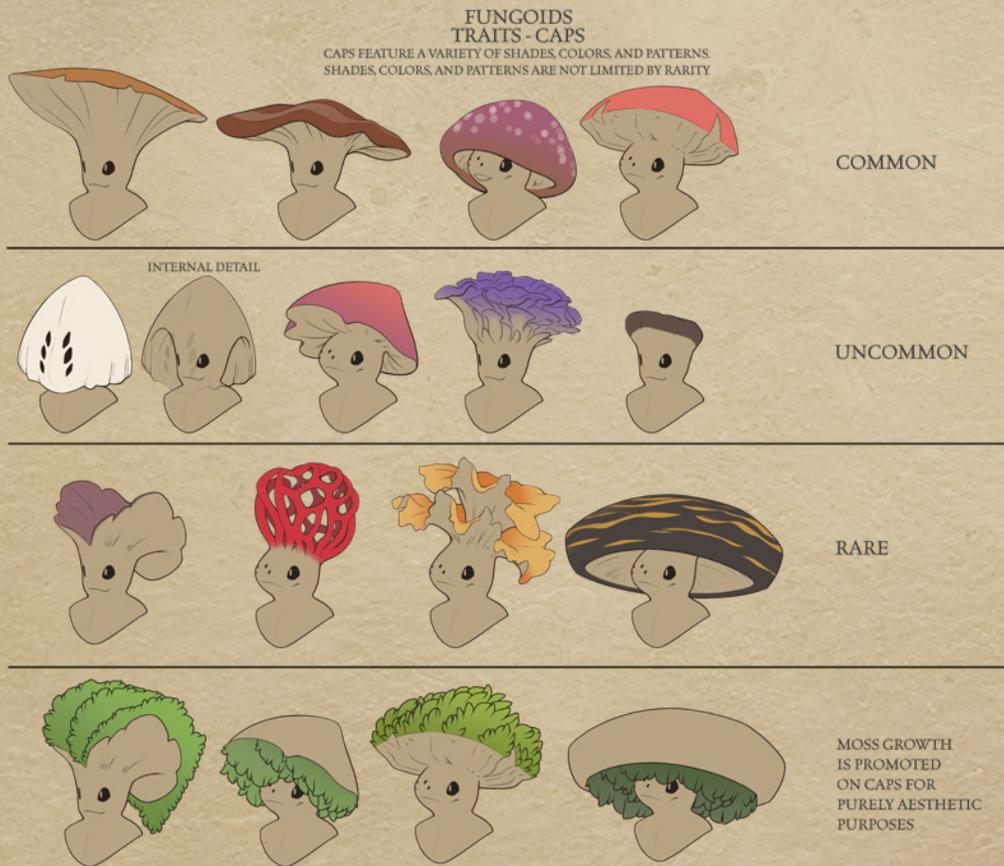
# Fungoid

The Fungoid species is an inclusive lot of varied size, color, and creed. Non-Fungoids that spend too long in their lands often develop mutations and features due to the density of the fungoid spores that naturally fall from the fungoid caps. Those that do find themselves integrated by the spores are able to commune with the mycorrhiza roots that run densely through the Bipus territory. Through the mycorrhiza roots, they can share feelings and send messages great distances to varying degrees of success; the best can even share complex thoughts this way.

Their bodies are rather hardy and move with a swiftness that belies their bulk, particularly as they become older; they never stop growing even if they expire with age. Fungoids can eat anything that is or once was alive; minerals and volatile chemicals are about the only things excluded from their diet. How often they eat is dependent on their level of activity and how often they commune with the mycorrhiza as this provides them with sustaining nutrients and enhances their immune

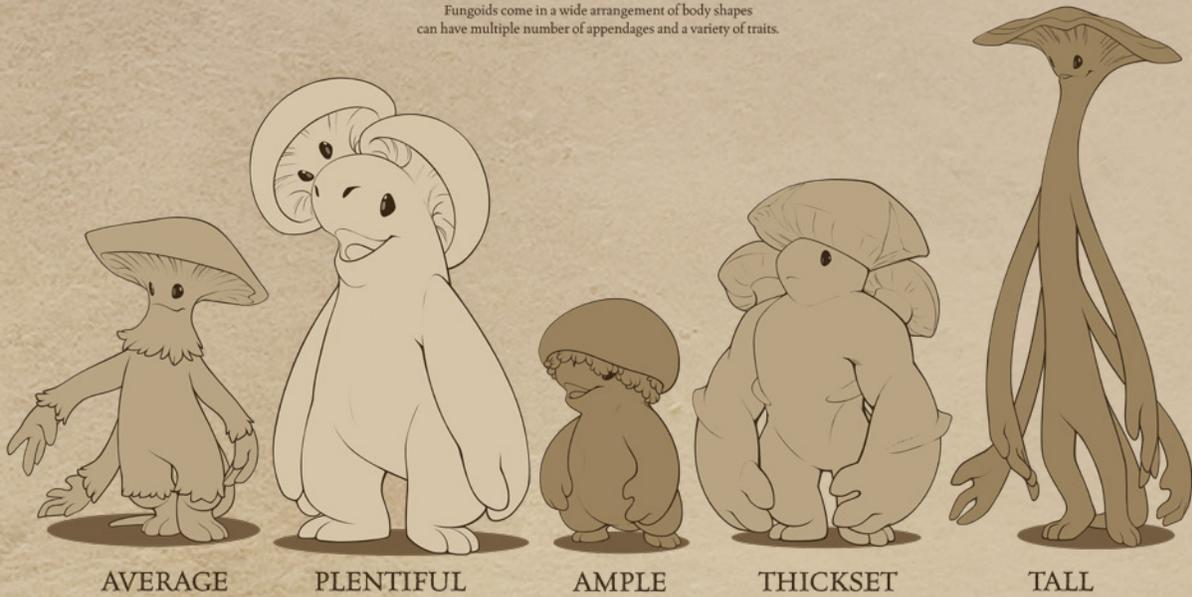
systems. When they do commune, they provide the plants they connect with similar benefits, such as acting as an additional participant for the more complex organic operations, drawing compounds from the mycorrhiza, processing them within themselves, and returning more easily consumed components back whence they came. This is much of the reason for the extremely broad diet; Fungoids can borrow the metabolic capacities of other fungoids and other species that are communed with the mycorrhiza.

Fungoids do not often travel outside their own lands as their bond to the Bipus territory is culturally vital for communication. Those that do travel take caution in whom they take up company with, in the roads they travel and where they stay. While a Fungoid population can produce enough spores to transform other species, a single one is a far cry from that threshold. They do welcome creativity, variety, mutual understanding, and tend to think in the long term which coupled with their long lives has made them a people driven by discussion and purpose.



## FUNGOIDS

Fungoids come in a wide arrangement of body shapes and can have multiple number of appendages and a variety of traits.



AVERAGE

PLENTIFUL

AMPLE

THICKSET

TALL

## Fungoids

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init
1	1	8	14/12/12	2/2/4	2	2	2	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
2	2	18	14/12/12	3/2/5	3	3	3	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2
3	3	26	14/12/12	3/3/5	4	4	4	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	2

### Base Traits

(a summary of what a level one character with a class level would have in addition to that class level)

+2 Constitution; 3d8 HD (1d8); F1/R1/W3; 30 ft speed; Bast Atk 2; 1d6 Slam Attack+Str

+2 Wisdom; Immunity to critical hits and extra damage based on striking anatomy; +2 Natural Armor

### Iron Clad Template

(For exceptionally tough bugs); +4 Natural Armor

Increase size of attacks damage dice on step:

1d3 to 1d4; 1d4 to 1d6; 1d6 to 1d8; 1d8 to 1d10; 1d10 to 2d6

Speed Increase: +10 all types

25% immunity to critical hits and extra damage based on striking anatomy

### Fungoid Template

**GM Note:** This template is meant for characters who start out as another species but become fungoid through exposure to their spores over time.

+2 Con; 1d4 Slam+Str; +1 Natural Armor

25% immunity to critical hits and extra damage based on striking anatomy

FUNGOIDS  
TRAITS - BODY ACCENTS



COMMON



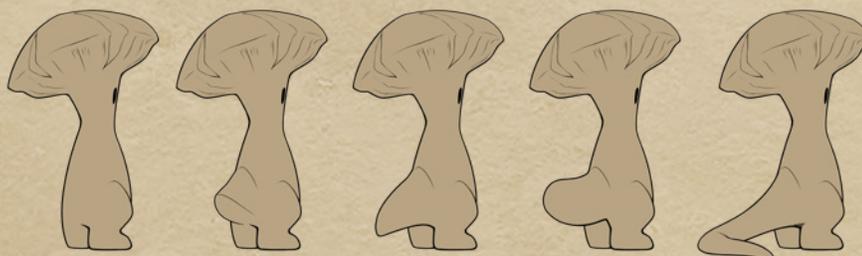
UNCOMMON



RARE

TAILS

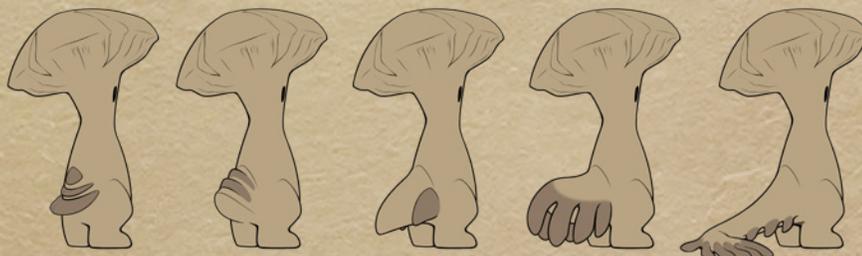
ROOT STYLED APPENDAGE THAT VARY IN SIZE  
- MAY FEATURE SAME ACCENTS AS THE ARM AND BODY



COMMON



UNCOMMON



RARE

\*A SINGLE FUNGOID CAN FEATURE SEVERAL MIXED TRAITS



## Spire Hounds

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod-High	Mod	Mod	Mod-Low	Mod	Low

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init
1	1	20	19/13/16	4/3/4	4	4	7	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3
2	2	18	19/13/16	5/3/5	5	5	8	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3
3	4	38	19/13/16	5/4/5	6	6	9	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3
4	5	51	20/14/16	6/4/6	7	7	11	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3
5	6	62	20/14/16	6/4/6	8	8	12	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3
6	8	84	20/14/16	7/5/7	9	9/4	13	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3
7	9	92	20/14/16	7/5/7	10	10/5	15	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3
8	10	104	21/15/16	8/5/8	11	11/6	16	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3
9	12	128	21/15/16	9/6/9	12	12/7	17	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3
10	13	141	21/15/16	9/6/9	13	13/8	18	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3

Attack	Damage (1-10)
Slam	1d6+3

**Special Abilities:** Touch attack or slam attacks begin a grapple. Once in a grapple they cover their opponent with their body and begin suffocating them while squeezing air from their victim's lungs; their suffocation is aggressive, and you may need to tweak your system's suffocation mechanic to suit. May continue to slam opponents and can cover a creature up to three times their size. Attacks that damage a Spire Hound also inflict damage to anyone they grapple.

## Constructs of Thought

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod-High	Mod	N/A	Mod	Mod	Mod-Low

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed (GM Choice)	Space/Reach (GM Choice)	Init	Poison*
1	1	20	19/16/13	4/3/4	4	4	7	60 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	12
2	2	18	19/16/13	5/3/5	5	5	8	60 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	13
3	4	38	19/16/13	5/4/5	6	6	9	60 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	15
4	5	51	19/16/13	6/4/6	7	7	11	60 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	15
5	6	62	21/18/13	6/4/6	8	8	12	60 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	16
6	8	84	21/18/13	7/5/7	9	9/4	13	60 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	16
7	9	92	21/18/13	7/5/7	10	10/5	15	60 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	17
8	10	104	21/18/13	8/5/8	11	11/6	16	60 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	18
9	12	128	23/20/13	9/6/9	12	12/7	17	60 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	18
10	13	141	23/20/13	9/6/9	13	13/8	18	60 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	19

Attack	Damage (1-3)	Damage (4-7)	Damage (8-10)
Variable	1d6+2	1d8+4	2d4+6
Slam	1d4+3	1d6+6	1d6+9
Poison*	1d4/1d4 Dex	1d4/1d4 Dex	1d4/1d4 Dex

**Special Abilities:** May possess abilities/traits from climbing sear surfaces without issue to ventriloquism as is beneficial to the creature; GMs can make these rather unique. Abilities given will more often be traits as opposed to a spell like ability. Immunity to critical hits and extra damage based on striking anatomy.

## Umbral Wraiths

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
N/A	Mod	N/A	Mod	Mod	Mod-High

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk** (grapple)	Speed (fly)	Space/Reach	Init	Mental
1	1	8	16/10/16	0/3/4	3	3	3	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	13
2	2	16	16/10/16	0/3/5	3	3	3	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	13
3	3	22	16/10/16	1/4/5	4	4	4	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	14
4	4	30	17/10/17	1/4/6	5	5	5	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	14
5	5	39	17/10/17	2/5/6	5	5	5	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	15
6	6	48	17/10/17	2/5/7	6	6	6	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	17
7	7	58	18/10/18	2/5/7	6	6	6	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	17
8	8	66	18/10/18	3/6/8	7	7	7	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	18
9	9	74	18/10/18	3/6/8	7	7	7	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	18
10	10	82	19/10/19	4/7/9	8	8	8	30 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	3	19

Attack	Damage (1-5)	Damage (6-10)
Bedlam Touch	1d6	1d8
Mental Erosion	1d3 Cha	1d4 Cha

**Special Abilities:** \*\*Grapple attack is incorporeal only. Incorporeal; 50% chance all magical weapons miss this creature and non-magical weapons miss altogether. Immunity to critical hits and extra damage based on striking anatomy. When attacking with either Bedlam Touch or Mental Erosion these attack merely need to touch an opponent, not pierce tough armor to harm.

## Sprites

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Low	High	N/A	Mod-High	Mod-High	Mod

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init	Aura	Pulse
1	1	8	14/10/14	0/3/4	3	3	3	20 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4	14	14
2	2	16	14/10/14	0/3/5	3	3	3	20 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4	15	15
3	4	31	15/10/15	1/4/5	4	4	4	20 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4	15	15
4	6	45	15/10/15	1/4/6	5	5	5	20 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4	16	16
5	7	62	17/10/17	2/5/6	5	5	5	20 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4	16	16
6	8	70	17/10/17	2/5/7	6	6	6	20 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4	18	18
7	10	86	18/10/18	2/5/7	6	6	6	20 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4	18	18
8	12	104	18/10/18	3/6/8	7	7	7	20 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4	19	19
9	13	113	19/10/19	3/6/8	7	7	7	20 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4	19	19
10	14	122	19/10/19	4/7/9	8	8	8	20 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4	20	20

Attack	Damage (1-5)	Damage (6-10)
Pulse	1d6+2	1d8+3
Aura	Rage or Complacency	

**Special Abilities:** Spell Resistance: 15+HD (Mod-High). Aura range 30 feet; induces a rage state or a state of extreme apathy preventing actions from being taken; active by choice. 50% chance for each enemy attack attempting to damage a Sprite to miss altogether. Pulse range 10 feet. May walk on surface as if gravity is holding them to that surface.

# Spire Golems

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Legendary	Mod-Low	N/A	Legendary	High	Mod-High

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed	Space/Reach	Init
1	2	16	17/16/11	0/0/6	5	5	5	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4
2	4	32	17/16/11	0/0/7	6	6	6	40 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4
3	6	48	18/16/12	1/1/7	7	7	7	50 ft	5/5 : 5 ft	4
4	8	64	21/19/12	1/1/8	9	9	13	50 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	4
5	10	80	22/19/13	2/2/8	10	10/5	14	50 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	4
6	12	96	22/19/13	2/2/9	11	11/6	15	60 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	4
7	14	112	25/21/14	3/3/9	11	11/6	15	60 ft	10/10 : 10 ft	4
8	16	128	25/21/14	3/3/10	14	14/9	22	60 ft	15/15 : 10 ft	4
9	18	144	26/21/15	4/4/10	15	15/10	23	70 ft	15/15 : 10 ft	4
10	20	160	28/23/15	4/4/11	16	16/11	24	70 ft	15/15 : 10 ft	4

Attack	Damage (1-3)	Damage (3-7)	Damage (8-10)
Variable	1d6+6	1d8+8	2d6+10
Slam	1d8+3	1d10+4	1d12+5

**Special Abilities:** Spell Resistance: 18+HD (High). Communes with all other spire entities in a method similar to telepathy. May walk on surfaces as if gravity held them down and can negate damage from falling. Immunity to critical hits and extra damage based on striking anatomy.

# Nocturn Alas

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Mod	Mod	Mod-High	Null	Mod-High	Mod

Level	HD	HP	AC/FF/T	Saves F/R/W	Atk (to hit)	Atk (full rnd)	Atk (grapple)	Speed (walk/fly)	Space/Reach	Init	Poison*
1	2	24	16/13/13	3/3/3	3	3	3	20/40	5/5 : 5 ft	7	14
2	4	38	16/13/13	4/4/4	5	5	5	20/40	5/5 : 5 ft	7	15
3	5	46	16/13/13	4/4/4	6	6	6	20/40	5/5 : 5 ft	7	16
4	6	52	17/14/13	5/4/5	7	7	7	20/40	5/5 : 5 ft	7	17
5	7	64	19/15/14	5/5/6	8	8	12	30/50	5/10 : 5 ft	8	18
6	9	88	20/16/14	6/6/7	11	11/6	15	30/50	5/10 : 5 ft	8	19
7	11	108	21/17/14	6/7/7	13	13/8	17	30/50	5/10 : 5 ft	8	20
8	12	122	22/18/14	7/7/7	14	14/9	18	40/60	10/10 : 5 ft	8	21
9	13	138	24/19/15	7/8/9	16	15/10	20	40/60	10/10 : 5 ft	9	22
10	14	152	24/19/15	8/9/11	17	16/11	21	40/60	10/10 : 5 ft	9	23

Attack	Damage (1-5)	Damage (6-10)
Bite	1d3+2	1d4+3
Wing	1d6+2+Poison	1d8+4+Poison
Slam	1d8+4+Poison	1d10+6+Poison
Poison	1d4/1d4 Dex	1d6/1d6 dex

**Special Abilities:** Poison Cloud: 10 ft radius when released; once every minute maximum. Land speed is the same as fly speed; use Good Maneuverability if applicable. Immune to its own poison and poison of other Nocturn Alas.

# Appendix:

## How to Read Tables

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**HD:** Hit Dice

**HP:** Hit Points

**F/R/W:** Core checks a character makes against various affects broken into bodily **fortitude**, **reflexive**, and **willpower** based forms of resisting negative effects (could be against positive but usually is focused almost exclusively on resisting negative effects)

**AC/FF/T:** The threshold that must be met in order to have a creature experience damage bearing damage resistances from an attack broken into three varieties: Armor Class (AC), what is necessary to damage a fully aware creature benefiting from all applicable increase to this sort of damage; Flat-Footed (FF), what is necessary to damage a creature who is unaware; and Touch (T), for the difficulty in touching a character disregarding their armor

**Grapple:** Number used against another creature when trying to detain them/wrestle them into submission

**Space/Reach:** The space a creature occupies on a board and reach being the space they threaten/can reach outside the space they occupy

**Init:** Initiative, the bonus a creature possess in determining their placement in a turn order

**Listed Ability\*:** The numerical threshold needed resist the effect of an ability or trait such as poison, an aura that brings with it an affect, or an ability that erodes someones mind

**Spell Resistance:** Threshold needed to meet to affect this creature with magic or other supernatural effects; often has a form representation in a system that includes such abilities

**Atk (to hit/full rnd):** The bonus a creature posses to meet an opposing number utilized to discover if an attack will or will not inflict damage to a creature (often with a roll of the dice that this bonus is applied to). A full round would be the number of attacks that a creature requires

**Str/Dex/Con:** Physical statistics that separate raw strength (Str), one's lifting and fighting ability; dexterity (Dex), agility and control of bodily motion; and constitution (Con), the body's ability to endure harm and resist ill health effects

**Int/Wis/Cha:** Mental statistics that identify intelligence (Int), a person's ability to learn and retain information; wisdom (Wis), awareness of the world around them, awareness of self, and willpower; and charisma (Cha), the memorability and social sway an individual possesses in general

**(m)/lrg:** Medium and Large in reference to creature size; large being a step above medium which is the normal size for a human.

**Templates:** May be added to an applicable creature to further modify their base traits or add to base traits in some way.

**Variable:** A variable attack can be of any basic damage type as is needed by the creature, creatures with this attack are often shape-shifters or can be constructed with optional attacks that best suit a situation

**Natural Armor:** Tough body that provide natural protection when compared to human skin.

**Alternative to Stat Damage:** If the system you utilize shies away from statistical damage or your believe it would be to cumbersome then some alternatives might be a status such as nauseated (some limitation of actions), blindness/deafness, additional damage, and or something more sp

**Statistics Scale:** Scale to your system of choice; if it is markedly different than what is presented here the hope is that providing basic statistics and backgrounds for the creatures will enable you to create them strictly in the mold of your system of choice.

Low (Sickly and or particularly incapable in this trait), Mod-Low, Moderate, Mod-High, High, Legendary, N/A: (Not applicable for this creature), Nil: Instinct driven but can potentially be trained/tamed.

Story

# The Moment of Truth

by Hawkfeather and JD Puppy

Tall figureheads make their way down the hallway toward the stairs that lead to the loft overlooking the stony platform below. It was quite the unexpected honor that Headmaster Okuma be in audience. Usually only the division leads oversee the ceremony, since they make the decisions on admission and advancement.

There is an echoing clang of the bell in the evocation lab's inner tower, signaling the approaching start of the ceremony. Many of the tall figures have already started to make their way out of the foyer, splitting off in different directions depending on if they were viewing the event, facilitating the upcoming activity, or as students, readying themselves for their performance. Arden clutches his scroll case tightly and after a small gulp, recenters himself and nods with a determined look. He descends to the staging hall, his footsteps down the stairs as quick as his racing heartbeat.

"Renshaw! Get over here! You're in the first wave!" a voice hisses from a pew across the room once Arden clears the spiral staircase. Arden looks up in that direction and sees the brief movement of a wolf putting the hood of her blue cloak back on. He rushes past the neatly arranged spectrum of cloaks - green, purple, blue, and red - intermixed in pods of four, except for the first row, which has a clear gap where the young canine wizard was meant to sit.

"Cutting it close there, huh, kiddo?" A horse's snout poking out of a purple drape turns to the dog as he takes his seat. "I would have expected more from their favorite prodigy"

"I made it here -just- fine," Arden remarks with a short, curt voice. "I'll have you know Headmaster Okuma himself stopped me while I was on my way, so if anything I'm here just in time."

The horse grimaces and turns to face forward, unable to hide her jealousy. "Teacher's pet..."

Arden ignores the remark and remains focused ahead. He knows he is here not because of favor or pity, but because of his ability. Despite his age, he has proven himself time and time again in scholastic excellence compared to his peers - and this time was going to be no different. Or rather, it will be quite different. Again, Arden grips the scroll case tightly and takes a deep breath as he centers himself. He is committed not just to execute, but to excel - to show what he is truly capable of, what a person of his persistence and skill is able to accomplish.

Meanwhile, the low, rumbling rhythm of bass drums accompanied by the regal hum of the pipe organ echoes throughout the chamber from an elevated area seen through an elegant arch. Around the perimeter of the room, there are five other similar arched areas where teachers and senior members of The Order alike have assembled to preside over the ceremony. The viewing galleries look down as three figures in plain black teachers' robes complete their procession in time with the hymn's end. The iguana who was leading in the center, positions himself at the podium, while the koala and donkey flanking their sides bow and leave the stage.

The iguana lowers their hood and projects their voice in a rehearsed cadence, "Thank you all for joining us today for this momentous event. Today, we welcome esteemed students who have studied in The Order of Arcane Sages and displayed the characteristics deemed appropriate for official admission into a higher division of The Order." With a breath and a smile, breaking from the traditional script, the iguana shares next, "And we are privileged to have with us today, the leader of The Order of Arcane Sages, Headmaster Okuma!" The elderly crow rises from his seat to wave at the audience, which bustles with excited applause.



After the clapping dies down, the practiced recital returns. “Today, each student will be executing a demonstration of their magical capabilities,” the iguana raises a green hand to gesture across the room, as the first target, a limp scarecrow-like figure, is being positioned by the koala and donkey, “in a focused spell that is to be judged on accuracy and strength by esteemed representatives of each...”

The voice continues, describing the familiar exercise in the usual pomp and circumstance, and the students, seated just outside of view behind the nearby entryway listen intently for the upcoming cues. The mix of emotions among the colorful cloaks creates a palpable air of nervousness, excitement, anxiety and anticipation.

“And now we welcome our students!” The proclamation and audience applause create a spike in the intensity of those emotions. Just as done in rehearsal, the first row

stands and makes their way across the threshold in single file, while the remaining students wait their turn. Arden follows the wolf who summoned him earlier, trying to be careful not to brush his hands against her tail wagging nervously behind her, his own nub tail mimicking the action involuntarily.

The audience calms after the four students situate themselves behind the podium in the space vacated by the iguana earlier. Arden can feel all eyes on him as he creates a significant gap in the relative height of the cloaks. To add to his pressure, he catches a glance of Headmaster Okuma. The aging crow is leaning forward, resting his beak on overlapping feathered hands, elbows resting on his knees underneath the grayish white cloak, whose eyes most certainly were following the white furred mage.

"Please step forward, state your name, the division for which you are seeking entry, and the spell you will be demonstrating," the iguana recites from the side.

The wolf ahead of Arden steps forward to the stone podium, and lowers her blue hood, resting her hands on the pillar, level with her chest. "Lucine Bronson, seeking admission into The Craftsmen's League as a Maker, and I shall perform a conjuration of Ice Knife."

"Proceed."

She opens her scroll case and unrolls the parchment, anchoring it with the weights left on the pedestal. Pressing her fingertips together near her collarbone, Lucine lowers her head and begins to read from the scroll, her breaths starting to become visible in front of her muzzle. Simultaneously, she raises her head and one of her hands, a sharp frozen blade forming in the path traced by her claws while her eyes, glowing an icy blue, focus on her target twenty yards across the room. With a reverberating shout, she chops her hand forward, and the cold blade darts across the room, and makes contact with the target's head. The dummy reels back from the impact. The dagger of ice juts out from the dummy while Lucine gestures a long arc in the air, the dummy bobs forward from the weight before the dagger slams into the body and slices into the torso. Applause fills the chamber as the glowing aura fades from Lucine's eyes. She lets out a long sigh of relief, tail unable to hide the reassured and happy emotion the lupine was experiencing as she returns to her place in line, standing at attention next to Arden.

As the noise from the audience dwindles, and the koala and donkey finish replacing the target, once again the iguana recites, "Please step forward, state your name, the division for which you are seeking entry, and the spell you will be demonstrating."

Nervously sweating under his green cloak, Arden steps forward to the stone podium which eclipses his height. He gets on his tiptoes to give visibility to those watching and removes his hood. There's low chatter and snickering from above him, but he refuses to let the spectacle threaten his dignity as he steels himself and shouts out confidently to the crowd. "Arden Renshaw, seeking admission into The Strategem as a Shepherd, and I shall perform an evocation of," Arden breathes, "Ray of Fire."

"Proceed."

With shaking paws, Arden opens up his scroll case and pulls out his spell, reaching high across the podium to

set it down, and then retrieves an addendum that he had carefully recorded from his diligent efforts in The Order's Archives. The product of many hours alone amongst the books, the extra piece of paper held a formula that Arden had derived, seemingly designed to augment the potency of spells. In his studies and in preparation for this test, Arden was able to piece together this formula through deep research of various powerful mages in The Order's history. Each of their records gave him an additional glimpse into this augmentation, but none went through the full methods in detail. Regardless, Arden was able to string together the key elements and was confident in his formula, surely something no other pupil has ever set out to do before. Arden was not just seeking entry into The Shepherds - Arden was expecting to prove himself more than just worthy to join, but rather among the best to have ever joined. Then all of his peers would have no choice but to respect him.

Arden settles back on his heels, steps around the podium and positions himself in front of it. He looks up and sees Headmaster Okuma with an accepting smile on his beak giving the dog an encouraging nod. Arden mutters under his breath, "Time to impress." Unlike the previous demonstration, the young pup begins to recite the spell from memory, spreading his feet into a braced offensive position while he presses his palms together. An orange glow emits from inside his pawpads which matches the fiery gaze on his face. Completing the traditional part of the spell, the white dog winds up in a twist and strongly pivots with a palm strike, shooting out a focused blast of flame from the center of his hand. Feeling the energy escape his paw, Arden initiates the next phase and begins the addendum. This is the moment he has been waiting for.

With every passing word, he can feel the ray expand in diameter in his palm, and Arden's tail wags as he feels the augmentation work exactly like he had planned. The ray lands squarely in the target's chest, burning a precise hole in the center of the torso, eliciting the expected applause from the audience. He wasn't going to stop now; continuing the spell he jabs forward with his other palm, the ray adopting spiraling spikes of fire emerging one by one, Arden's fur practically standing on end while his cloak flaps in the wind created by the rapid temperature change in the air immediately around him. His mutters

evolve louder and louder as he feels the spell grow more and more powerful.

The audience's applause begins to falter - surely the demonstration did not need to proceed as long as it did, and gasps that are elicited are not of astonishment but that of concern, confusion, and fear. Arden continued to remain focused in his spell, muttering the final words, screaming out the last syllable, unaware of the impacts it was having on his small body. A strong pulse of fire escapes his two paws, pummeling through the helixes spinning around the ray, the force of which pushes Arden off of his feet, slamming his back against the stone podium behind him. The dummy and the stone stand holding it up promptly explode from the impact of the flaming pulse, the koala and donkey cover their faces to protect themselves from the shrapnel. The pup screams out again, now in pain, not from the impact but from the burning heat emitting from his paws. It feels like the fire is travelling up his veins as it envelops his hands entirely and explodes out again. Another uncontrolled burst is fired toward the place where the target once stood, blasting a crater into the wall and causing the stage to shake and crack.

Panic in the audience ensues, the crowd reacting chaotically, some advancing forward to get a better sight at what's happening, many others rushing out of their seats to retreat and find shelter. Lucine and the other students recoil in surprise, yelling in terror, and the once orderly row of aspiring mages scrambles back to the entryway causing alarm in the remaining cloaked figures.

Seeing the chaos and damage, the lieutenant general stands and yells in absolute shock, "What the HELL is going on?"

Okuma, also standing, clutches a talon on the lynx's arm, "Something's wrong! We must intervene with haste! NOW!"

The white cloak does not hesitate. He first tries to push through the crowds, then deems it too encumbering. He then races toward the viewing archway and launches himself into the air, rolling up his sleeves, extending his arm feathers to direct his free fall, before casting a featherfall to safely land on the ground. He beelines for the screaming pupil.

The pup crumples on the ground, cornered and pinned against the podium which is now cracking from the pressure. Arden clenches his hands in agony while steam emits from his crying eyes as the spell continues to emit from his hands. The glow shoots up his arms geometrically and randomly, sending additional and more powerful bursts flung in random directions in the stone atrium, his frail fingers standing no chance against the flaming energy.

Scanning the small dog urgently, Okuma sees the magic coursing through Arden's body and abjures a focused magical barrier spell. It evokes a blue protective bubble around his talons as he grabs the dog's hands. He willfully expands the barrier to smolder the fiery pulses as well as the magical kindling fueling the spell.

"What were you thinking?" Okuma cries out, drowned by the dog's screams as his breath evaporates above him, as if burning from the inside. Unable to stop the writhing of the wailing dog beneath him, and as a last-ditch effort, Okuma turns his head, and with a swift whip and turn, slams his beak against the dog's temple and cheekbone. This flings Arden's glasses away, and sends the dog toward a state of unconsciousness, at which point the fire extinguishes itself in the barrier orbs around the dog's severely burnt hands.



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—Hawk Feather

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—Djarums

We would love to hear about your adventures in the world of The Cross. Email us at: [yeen@goblfc.org](mailto:yeen@goblfc.org) or use #coeurasa



Thank you for putting up with me for the countless days of work.  
I'm looking forward to doing it again soon.

—Dabbles



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