



# SERVANTS OF GAIA

Quotation

attribution

In the Age of Sorrows, and long before, Creation has suffered. Where, then, is she to whom it is bound, who all living things call their mother, the last of the creators of the world? Gaia is gone. But is there nothing of her remaining, to watch the world, to show the benevolence which she is so often said to possess?

Perhaps not.

The pages you have begun to read describe her servants, the Dragon-Blooded of Faror. These followers of the last Titan lead lives opposed in nature to their cousins in the greater part of Creation. While the Terrestrials of the Shogunate fought their wars and died, and the Exalted of the Realm struggled for territory and status, those who dwell in the Perfect Valley have led humble, secret lives, little different from those they led a thousand years ago. They lack the military strength available to Lookshy or the Realm, but with the guidance of their primordial patron and her mighty Dragons, they have different strengths; and they are privy to secrets unknown even to the Solar Exalted at the height of their power.

The Farorans live in a true theocracy, where the edicts of their religion are the highest law, and their society is guided from above by a caste of Priestesses chosen for their devotion to their Goddess. They enjoy a society where compassion is the highest virtue, and there are no divisions of blood or wealth. However, they must contend with a divide between the sexes and a nigh-insurmountable ideological separation from the rest of Creation; at the same time, those who would seek any real change in their society must contend with elder Exalted who wield secret, primal powers.

Alone of the Exalted of Creation, the hearts of Gaia's servants are free from the clinging shadow of the Great Curse, and yet, the Voice of All Life whispers in the back of their mind; it grows ever louder, ever closer, threatening to drown out their identity. Balancing freedom and servitude, how will they come to terms with the terrible turbulence of the Age of Sorrows, and make their mark on Creation?

## Introduction

This fan-made supplement to the Exalted setting is made up of five chapters and two appendices. This initial chapter describes the Farorans' history, their home in the deep East and their culture. It will be followed as so:

**Chapter 2: Mechanics** describes the Character Creation process for the Exalted of Faror, and provides the alterations to the normal set of Traits which they use. It also describes Communion, the changes to mind and soul that attend close contact to the benevolent, yet incomprehensible entity whom they revere.

**Chapter 3: Mother and Daughter** describes the religion of the Farorans, and particularly the Priestesses of Gaia, who effectively rule over their society. As well as their philosophy and traditions, it begins to lay out the unique knowledge given to them by their primordial Goddess, including the mysteries of Aether, the First Element.

**Chapter 4: Gifts of the World** provides detailed descriptions of some of the unique Charms and Spells of the Faroran Terrestrials, including new applications of sorcery.

**Chapter 5: Storytelling** talks about the application of these articles and the thoughts behind them. It also describes a few of the dramatis personae of Faror, including their statistics, and provides some of the artifacts that may be encountered there. It provides some guidance on settings.

**Appendix I** describes the secret World of Dreams and its inhabitants, all long hidden by the edict of the gods and for the safety of Creation.

**Appendix II** provides information on the three other secret places where Gaia's followers once dwelt, which have been lost. It also describes the *Emerald Sphere*, the primordial body of Gaia herself which now sojourns in the furthest Wyld, protected by the comet Gnosis.

This supplement draws from many inspirations, and takes a few liberties with the Exalted setting. These are noted, and some words of explanation written, in the Storytelling chapter. I will mention right away, however, that a lot of the "kamitongue" words that are used throughout this text are loosely derived from Irish.

## Lexicon

**Aa:** The sixth (or first) of Gaia's Dragons, who embodies/defines the element of *Aether*. She dwells in the heart of the *World of Dreams* and represents the Faroran's primary contact with their primordial goddess.

**Aether:** The First Element, formed from the not-wyld

that was created by the primordials and from which Creation was born. Linked to yellow jade, it is the essence of thought, motion and vitality and is antithetical to the essence of Oblivion, to the point that contact between the two will cause a mutual annihilation. Kept secret from the Exalted due to its limitless potential and finite supply.

**Aetherworld, the:** *aka* the World of Dreams, the Twilight Realm, and the Elemental Pole of *Aether*. Very rarely referred to as the Sea of Mind. A vast plane composed of pure *Aether*, connected to Creation through the dreams of living creatures. It has a number of outer layers that have taken the semblance of reality and which are worlds in and of themselves.

**ardefar:** "High sister". A way of referring to a High Priestess of *Gaia*. Compare *defar* and *sandefar*.

**Celestial Elements:** A collective term for Solar, Lunar and Sidereal essence.

**Communion:** The measure of how much an individual has been changed by exposure to *Gaia's* primordial nature. May be temporary or permanent.

**defar:** "Sister". Used to refer to one of *Gaia's* Priestesses. More casual than *sandefar* or *ardefar*.

**devas:** A primordial's lower souls, analogous to the demons of the *Yozis*. Almost all of *Gaia's* devas keep to the *Aetherworld* as a result of her agreements with the gods. See also *kami*.

**Faror:** A valley on the edge of the Elemental Pole of Wood, created by *Gaia* in the First Age to be the secret home of her Dragon-Blooded servants. Once one of four such places, now the last that remains inhabited.

**Kami:** Term referring specifically to a *deva* descended from *Gaia*. No longer used often by her followers, who think of them as "the" devas.

**mara:** A *kami* who has been corrupted into a malevolent form, either by another *mara* or by a *maresne*.

**Maresne:** A place in the *World of Dreams* that has been twisted into a nightmare and which attempts to consume those who enter.

**Priestess of Gaia:** One of the Dragon-Blooded women chosen by *Aa* to lead her mother's followers in their devotion. Of various ranks, led by the five High Priestesses of Faror. Exclusively female, and known for their use of Sorcery.

**Providence:** A method of channeling *Gaia's* primordial power, similar to sorcerous Spells.

**sandefar:** "Older Sister". A somewhat formal way to refer to high ranking Priestesses.

**Wardens:** Part militia, part society of hunters. Charged with the defense of Faror from the creatures of the eastern Wyld, they have a few contacts with those of the Lunar Exalted who are similarly entitled.

**World of Dreams:** see *Aetherworld*.

# HISTORY

## The First Age

In the early First Age, when the very fabric of Creation was still recovering from the war with the primordials, two of those great entities remained in Creation. One was Autochthon, the Great Maker, and in that time he helped the Exalted to build their mighty civilization and to repair the weave of the Loom of Fate which he had created. Gaia, too, remained for a time: and yet, despite her stature, the histories of the world record little of her doings. It would seem she did naught else but assist the Incarna as they played the Games of Divinity. But, as the First Age went on, the Exalted began to shape the world and its essence to their desires; and in so doing, they brought concern to Gaia. She began to feel they would not be content with merely the initial fruits of their victory.

Soon, by the perception of primordials and gods, the Exalted grew wary of the Jadeborn, the children of their creator and teacher, Autochthon. They forced the Great Maker to place a Geas on his people, and it lessened them. Dismayed by this, Autochthon left Creation, leaving Gaia the last of her kind in the world. The Exalted had possessed the power and the will to defeat her siblings; now their power was greater still, and their will stretched further. Gaia's anxiety grew, and she knew that she had little power to gainsay their plans. Though it seemed impossible that they could harm her without harming Creation itself, already there were signs that their power and genius could defy such limitations. Gaia decided that soon, she too would leave on the great journey she had always desired: but before her conscience could allow her to be free, she would have to take steps to protect those things that were beloved to her. With the hearts of the Celestial Exalted failing and the eyes of the Incarna turning ever more towards the Games of Divinity, the only clear path was to take the world in hand herself.

In the age before history, Gaia had been worshipped along with the other primordials. Though her cult had survived, and was even vitalized for a time by the presence of the Terrestrial Exalted who bore the power of her Elemental Dragons, it was soon eclipsed by the institutionalized worship of the Incarna. The destruction of Heartwind Isle marked the end of the last community of mortals who revered her first and foremost. But some of those who followed her remained in the ranks of the Dragon-Blooded, and over the length of the First Age she guided the most enlightened and pure-blooded of these faithful,

slowly and carefully, in order to bring them together to four secret enclaves; each at one of the furthest reaches of Creation. With her power, she crafted hidden retreats of harmonious reality on the edges of the elemental poles, and linked them back to Creation by subtle roads. When they were at last concealed there between the mightiest dragon lines, she revealed to her followers their purpose and chose, from their number, those Exalted women who were most dedicated to her. She made them her Priestesses, and charged them to lead her Chosen to their new homes. To these isolated communities, composed solely of the elemental Exalted, she promised to grant her favour, her knowledge, and those powers that were hers to give; in return, they would always work to protect and serve her, and to prepare and await for ever to provide for her needs. With this mutual oath secure, the last primordial instructed the first and final of her Dragons, Aa, to remain and act in her stead to protect Creation, and departed to the unknowable places beyond the world.

In time, as Gaia herself had planned, her primordial influence shaped their culture and their nature, and their fates became blurred, melding with the geomancy of Creation and the hidden world of dreams. Though there were perhaps suspicions by certain of the Celestial Exalted, the Usurpation arrived before Gaia's servants were ever called out. Their Goddess, her *jouten* welcomed in Heaven and unfettered by the Loom of Fate, knew of the starlit hands that worked in silence to guide the Dragon-Blooded hosts; so she did not claim the world, then. As the Shogunate became reality, Aa turned her Mother's Chosen outwards, to face the Wyld. Without the Solars, she knew, danger threatened all Creation.

## The Shogunate

In this time, there were meetings between Gaia's Exalted and those of her consort, Luna. Beings of passion as the Moon-children were, the sons and daughters of Gaia knew that many Lunars would not forgive the transgressions of their cousins, nor how they themselves stood by at the edges of Creation while the Solars were slain. To this day, only a small handful of Luna's Chosen are aware of the Terrestrial Exalted who serve the primordial of Life.

Throughout the Shogunate, Aa encouraged Gaia's children to develop their enlightenment and strength, and to proliferate. With enough aid, she felt, her Mother could make her will known upon this lessened Creation, and protect and nurture it as she had always wished to do; with her Chosen to protect her, the gods would have no choice but to accept her guidance, and the world could be made as whole and beautiful as she had always wanted.

The Great Contagion came.

Though gifted with skills of medicine and genesis beyond those of the less enlightened Dragon-Blooded, Gaia's servants could not protect themselves when, at last, the plague penetrated their far-flung homes. Aa reached out to her progenitor, turning herself into a conduit through which Gaia, caught so far from her beloved world, could extend her powers; and for a time, the Mother of all Life herself was able to shield her children from the great fog of death that settled over Creation. But as the dead piled and their souls fell to the Underworld, and as the veins of essence that flowed through the world bled and ran dry, Gaia felt herself sicken and starve, and her strength began to fade. Then the Fae came, and she felt the harmony of her essence shudder and twist, threatening her already weakened control. Struggling to retain her power, she knew she could not continue to protect all four of the homes she had created for her Chosen. Only one could survive, and that perhaps for not much longer. She chose the enclave of Faror, which lay close to the Elemental Pole of Wood; there, her power against the Contagion would be greatest, and the Fae would be better exhausted by the powers and resources of the River Province that lay further inside Creation. Wrapping it tight in her power and will, she held it safe as the tides of chaos washed past.

The Terrestrials of the other three enclaves were never heard from again. No lore in the rest of Creation remembers them. When the Scarlet Empress used the

Sword of Creation to cast back the Fair Folk and saved reality itself, it is said that a soft rain fell across all the world for many weeks.

### **The Age of Sorrows**

In time, the Farorans returned to the ways they had kept since the Usurpation, recovering as best they could from the loss of their fellows and the knowledge that the other enclaves had possessed. They worked to grow, and to learn, and to become numerous. Twice, their population grew to the point where they could attempt to retake their sister-lands: first to the south, where a great, mad dragon of fire roared out from the wyld-lands and devastated those who had set out; then to the north, where all seemed well... until all contact simply ceased. The spirit of expansion is dull, now.

Though they are so much fewer than they were, still the servants of Gaia hoped to bring her health and her wisdom to all the world. It would simply take longer. Or so they thought. But now the Scarlet Empress is gone and the Solars have returned, and with them are born their dark mirrors, the Abyssal Exalted. The time is now; this is the last chance. Creation cannot be allowed to fall, and if the Solars regain their puissance of old, Gaia will never have the power to face down their rule and to hold the world herself, the way things were meant to be.

The Servants of Gaia must return to Creation.



# FAROR

## The Perfect Valley

Deep, deep in the forests of the east, the Wyld has prevailed for near a thousand years, its bizarre creatures thriving on the vitality of the Elemental Pole of Wood. To tread the deep woods is to risk a hundred unknown deaths, and if those can somehow be evaded, mutation and insanity may come in their place. If one is fortunate, one may find their way to ancient ruins of the First Age, where once the fertility of the East let humanity spread far into the unknown. Here, one may find reward alongside danger, and respite enough to come to one's senses and return to settled Creation.

But if one is very, very lucky, or possessed of secret knowledge, one might find a forest path: a line of bare earth, unmarred by the ever-present throng of vegetation about it. This path survives without marker, without the tread of many feet or the artifice of Exalted, for it was set by Gaia herself; the topmost hint of a powerful river of earth essence which flows through those lands of green shadow and wood. So long as one stays upon this path, one is safe from the Wyld and the effects of proximity to the Elemental Pole. If it is followed west, one will eventually return to Creation; if one follows it east, it turns and twists, traces along the edge of mighty roots and under the shade of great boughs, until - cresting a great hill - one sees through a thin divide in the endless canopy and perceives, in the distance, two great mountains rising into the sky. The path leads there.

Here, on the very edge before Creation finally falls away before the Elemental Pole of Wood, there is a spot where all five elements return to balance. The two crescent-shaped mountains of Faror, one north and one south, protect a great valley, encircling it with the power of Earth. The outer slopes of these mountains are covered in powerful Manses and Demesnes where the mightiest of the valley's inhabitants have made their final rest, so that the uttermost heights crackle with deadly rainbow sprays of essence, glow with mystic pools and fires and cast strange songs on the air. Those Demesnes that remain uncapped work profound alterations on the beasts who dwell within this peculiar maze of elemental energies, creating dangers that can ward off even the creatures of the wyld. On the inner slopes, there are fewer Demesnes, but the majority of these have been worked into powerful Manses, structures like ancient ruins that rest vine-covered amidst a flawless wilderness, unmatched in its vigorous, rugged beauty. The areas below the uppermost

inner slopes are covered in gardens and orchards, shaded by trees as tall as the towers of the First Age and full of the wondrous plant-based artifacts that the inhabitants of the Valley make. Hidden amongst them are secret entrances to the caves beneath the mountains, where there lie deep an array of earth-aspected Demesnes and Manses; along with them are secret stores, vaults and hiding places, where valuable or dangerous things have been concealed at Gaia's command. These tunnels are thronged with huge roots, many of which have been hollowed into passages themselves, often by the unrecorded efforts of small groups and individuals over long centuries; the caves are complex enough that exploring them is a lifetime's hobby, even for the Dragon-Blooded, and some of them existed here since before the First Age of Man.

On the lowest slopes the forests continue, dappling the ground with shadow at all hours of the day, along with fields of many fruit-bearing trees and other edible plants, with tended animals wandering among them. It is a perfected form of nature that dwells here, shaped over thousands of years by Exalted hands. All things, from the sky-stretched trees, to the most secret caves, to the sprawling swathes of wild flowers and to the tiniest babbling brooks, seem as if they were shaped by natural forces, but all together form a great, harmonious design created to best please the Mother of all Life. All creatures born of her and untouched by alien powers feel peace and wholeness in this place.

Throughout the valley, there are older buildings, from the time before the servants of Gaia came here, left there by the lost Dragon Kings; these are interspersed with the overgrown remnants of their crystal technology, which lies broken but still beautiful, glowing in the night as fallen stars, gentle coloured lights fueled by the sheer saturation of essence in the air. Over time, these structures have been altered as best they can be, worked with graceful curving spirals and lines, but still they are clearly different, buildings which came from ancient hands and appear from a distance to be but overgrown ruins, though they are well-used. In the centre of the valley, they cluster together as a town beside the waters: a great lake is there that shimmers with the light of sun, moon or stars; in the midst of it, there is an island, and on that island is a great, ancient Manse, again altered as extensively by later hands, but still recognizable as one of the tall, pyramid-shaped manses of the Dragon Kings. A long, elegant bridge connects it to shore; its road runs between the buildings that surround the lake, guiding the lines of power which have always flowed along its streets.

## **The Island**

The Manse in the centre of Faror is one of only four in Creation; the other three are each located at the centre of the other secret places of Gaia, which are now lost. These four were converted by the Priestesses into Aether-Aspected Manses. The Island is a Rating N/A Aether Manse, such as could be constructed only with Gaia's direct aid, and only Priestesses are allowed to enter the central structure. Beneath that sand-white stone pyramid, however, are the catacombs, where the majority of the population are entombed, and the relatives of the deceased are allowed to visit. Children are also permitted to explore the passages, which are large and airy and lit by a constant radiance in the air. This is a potentially endless pursuit, since the Aether essence of the Manse constantly consumes and recreates the tunnels when they are not observed. This same essence is what creates the constant sound of singing throughout the Island, as of an innumerable choir but always from a distance; it creates a sense of presence, as if there are always other people nearby. Gaia's servants find this comforting, but outsiders may find themselves feeling paranoid. The song seems to have words, but only characters with the Farorans' version of Whispers can discern their meaning.

Occasionally, people who have visited the Manse tell stories about seeing the ghosts of those they knew who were interred there. The Priestesses maintain that this is impossible, as Aether is the natural antidote to the essence of the Underworld, and any ghost who entered the Manse would pass into Lethe; that is, in fact, the original reason why people are buried there. Currently, the prevailing theory is that such specters are merely caused by the Manse's essence, responding to the strong memories of those who visit. But stories remain of such apparitions leading children or mourners through the catacombs to find informative murals, beautiful statuary or small deposits of yellow jade, and are not likely to die down soon.

Though rated N/A, the Manse produces a level 4 hearthstone. The majority of its power is focused inwards, creating a connection to Aa: the First Dragon is aware of everything that occurs in the Manse and can take control of it at any time. Even without her direct influence, a fragment of her living essence remains in the building, directing its many powers. It can reorganize itself at will and rapidly regenerate any damage; if attacked, it can induce sleep in those within its bounds, and at the extreme can generate essence-based attacks. Storytellers should feel free to add or create any other powers they feel appropriate for a primordial-created Manse, especially when it is being controlled by Aa herself. There is one problem with the Island, however, the same as there is with each of its three counterparts: the essence of Aether is immensely attractive to the Fair Folk.

Each of these parts of the Perfect Valley are referred to simply as the Outer Mountain, the Inner Mountain, the Outer Forest, the Inner Forest, the Town, the Lake and the Island.

Here, there is peace.

## **The People**

Adult Farorans are all very clearly Terrestrial Exalted, displaying Aspect markings as strong as any Dragon-Blood in Creation. As they get older and refine their essence, these traits become even more powerful; this is a powerful distinction of status and, so, as the inhabitants of the valley get older they wear simpler, more minimalist clothing to draw more attention to the signs of their enlightenment. All Exalted Farorans, young and old, wear a glowing debtstone (described in Chapter 2), bedeck themselves in jewelry and trinkets made from small tokens of their element (feathers, shells, gems, pieces of carved bark, etc.), and wear colours that compliment their Aspect

markings. When they expend their essence, the five-pointed symbol of Gaia appears over their chest with the same clarity as the Caste marks of the greater Exalted, burning in the colour of their element.

With the proximity of their Elemental Pole, the larger section of the populace are Wood Aspects, but the careful geomantic balance of the Valley ensures that this is only a slight trend. At various times in Faror's history, some groups have tried to gather the individual Aspects into separate communities, but the Valley's population is too small for interbreeding to be so restricted. Thus, despite what jokes may occasionally be made about "wood aspect girls" and similar subjects, there is little cultural distinction between the Aspects.

More noticeable is the population slant towards women; to visitors, they seem to outnumber the men by almost two to one. This is mostly an illusion: at any one time, a significant portion of the male Exalted of the Valley are out

scouting the Wyld around Faror or residing in the lodges used as base stations for such efforts, making sure that none of the bizarre creatures of the Deep Eastern Wyld get too close to their home, and hunting for any ruins of the First Age or useful reagents that the chaos might produce. A few even venture into Creation, in secret, to see the state of the world and accomplish subtle goals on Gaia's behalf. It's not a completely false impression, however; because of this dangerous lifestyle, the number of men is legitimately lower than the number of women.

Few though they seem, though, the Valley's men have a sense of unity to them; nearly all are warriors, all with at least some combat skill and showing much of the same strong tendency towards teamwork that their cousins elsewhere in Creation do. They are likely to wear the leathers and skins of powerful beasts they slew or of honoured familiars that they outlived. The women of the valley, however, are divided between normal women and the Priestesses of Gaia.

The clergy are distinguished as a whole by the masks they carry with them and the deference that other Farorans show to them; there are then further distinctions of group society among their number that are very noticeable, such as with the Devotees of Remorse, who dress in greys and blues and follow ritual behaviours of humility and penance. The gap between Priestesses and ordinary women, and the ranks within the priesthood itself, have resulted in a class division and antagonism as individuals and groups feel slighted by each other. Many social gatherings suffer from an undercurrent of passive-aggressive conflict and social oneupmanship which comes from this tension.

Faroran children imitate their elders as children tend to do, but wear brighter, more richly patterned clothing to make up for their lack of elemental markings. It is with them that the subtler ethnic characteristics of the Farorans show most clearly; descended as they are from Exalted drawn from all over Creation in the First Age, most foreign humans would consider the people of the valley to have vaguely exotic, hybridized features. Newly born children are left without a name until the formal naming ceremony, once a season, in which they have names given to them by the High Priestesses acting in Gaia's stead. They take their mother's family name, which is itself the personal name of the last High Priestess in their matrilineal ancestry; every time a new High Priestess is raised, all her descendants change their family name to match her.

## Culture

### Religion and Matriarchy

The Farorans are descended from those Dragon-Blooded who were wisest, most pure and most faithful in veneration of Gaia. And it was Gaia herself who chose her Priestesses to be agents of her will and the bearers of her secrets and power. They are wiser, more powerful, and more enlightened even than other Farorans, who are themselves even more enlightened than the Dragon-Blooded of Creation.

And they're all women.

To the Exalted of Faror, closeness to Gaia and enlightenment are one and the same. All souls follow the

#### Gender Limits

The gender roles of Faroran society manifest in two ways. First, in character Creation, Farorans are required to put a certain number of dots into certain abilities, as with characters from the Realm or Lookshy; for the servants of Gaia, however, many of these minimums are gender-specific. They are listed in the character creation section of Chapter 2.

Second, possessing inappropriate Abilities results in a social stigma with Farorans. The "male abilities" are Archery, Martial Arts, Melee, Throw, War and Larceny, while the "female abilities" are Craft, Performance, Medicine, Socialize, Occult and Bureaucracy. The result of *visibly* practicing the opposite sex's Abilities is largely up to the Storyteller; something like -1 to social pools for every such Ability rated above 2 would be appropriate. Aspect Abilities do not count. Celestial Exalted are not expected to live up to this so much: halve any penalties to social rolls they suffer, rounding down.

Although it does not actually grant new Aspect Abilities, the Farorans consider the Charm Transcendent Gaian Harmony, which allows Elder Terrestrials to use another Aspect's anima, to essentially provide an individual with a second Aspect. Thus, a character who gains the Fire anima power is no longer restricted from learning Melee or Socialize.

It is unacceptable for any male Faroran to learn sorcery, even if he is an Air Aspect. He would only end up unnecessarily using it as a weapon. Using non-Silinan style sorcery would also carry a social stigma for women.

path of reincarnation, and that road leads to reunion with the Elemental Dragons and the Mother of all Life herself, through animals to humans to Exalted on upwards until the Priestesses, who are living through the last of their mortal lives. And, since Priestesses can only be female, and Gaia herself is female (or at least as much as a primordial can be), it stands to reason that men are simply less enlightened than women are. The distinction is not absolute, of course - Exalted men are still more enlightened than mortal women, and are clearly capable of exceeding power and wisdom - but still the influence of that belief, and the presence and influence of the Priestesses that constantly reaffirm it, is felt throughout Faroran society.

Those skills which are not in tune with the nature of Gaia (such as the arts of war) are men's work; those skills which are (such as medicine and craftwork) are the domain of women. Women who engage in men's crafts, or act in too masculine a manner, are lowering themselves; men who engage in women's crafts or act in a feminine manner are reaching beyond their station. Again, however, the realities of Exaltation disturb this relatively simple system; all of the Aspects have focal skills and powers which trump gender roles. Gaia herself directed her Dragons to give the Wood Aspect skill with medicine, so *of course* it's fine and good for a wood-ascpected male Exalt to be a healer (even if he never gains quite the same respect a woman would). This conveniently means that the idea of combat skill being inappropriate for women does not cause any dissonance with the origin of the Exalted as soldiers of the gods, as all the women of Faror have a natural talent for some portion of military skill. Still, appearances matter: a woman should not be seen to carry a weapon, making the concealed varieties very popular; whereas, on the other hand, a man not wearing at least a knife is something to remark upon. Of course, as a matter of social pressure rather than specific dogma, one does not necessarily have to avoid having any proficiency at all with abilities not suited to one's gender; just so long as it isn't noticeable, no-one will object. Or, at least, *most* people won't object.

And there are always a few rebels.

In addition to the subtle social deference towards women, both men and women defer to Priestesses. This trend is ingrained early on, as Gaia's clergy are responsible for every child's basic education. The Priestesses continue to occupy a central position throughout one's life; they are the most adept healers, the best craftswomen and the most skilled musicians, ever-present to listen to one's

troubles and to offer wise advice. They conduct the rituals that punctuate the story of life, deal with spirits and elementals, and manage the system that takes the place of normal currency. And they're not rare; almost a third of all adult Faroran women are Priestesses, and since there's no requirement for celibacy in their ranks (quite the opposite), chances are that any individual you might pick out has at least one for a mother, sister or daughter.

One partial exception to all this is the Chieftain, who is the single most esteemed and over-worked man in Faror. Officially the military leader, in reality the Chieftain tends to leave the day-to-day of such affairs to the elder warriors from whom he rose; he is usually more busy acting as a counterbalance to the five High Priestesses. These five Exalted women, one of each Aspect, all of exceedingly refined essence and massive sorcerous power, were each personally chosen by Gaia herself and are the undisputed leaders of Faror. Unfortunately, their long closeness to Gaia means that they have all, to greater or lesser degrees, been altered in mind, body and soul by Communion with their Goddess, who for all her benevolence and understanding remains a primordial: an ineffable entity who has existed before time or reality. They are formidable in many ways, often unexpectedly so, and possess deep insights and secret knowledge, but their motivations and behavior can sometimes be beyond understanding. The Chieftain, working with the less enlightened Priestesses, strives to ensure that their people's practical needs are not totally overshadowed by spiritual concerns.

### ***Geomancy and Genesis***

One of the limitations of living as a servant of Life's Mother is that the magitech of other Exalted is not permitted. Such devices are things of Autochthon, not Gaia. In order to produce them on any large scale, the dragon lines must be diverted from their natural courses to fuel massive factory-cathedrals. Large quantities of metals must be mined, refined and alloyed, removing them from their natural state, scarring the land with huge digging operations and choking the sky with forge-smoke. The manner in which essence flows through those machines is, itself, not the same as the manner in which essence flows through the rest of Creation; many of them must draw upon hearthstones to function, once again stealing power from the sacred works of geomancy. Though they trace the lineage of their culture to the First Age, the Exalted of Faror possess none of the technological wonders that marked that era.

Instead, they have been blessed by Gaia with mastery of



## Locations

Within the Perfect Valley of Faror, there are a few areas of particular interest.

**The Nesting Precipice** is a ridge of cliffs lined with powerful uncapped demenses, accessible only by air or by a skilled Exalted climber. Here reside the most impressive of the Faroran's Gaia-guided Genesis works, the elemental Pangra. These creatures have the posture and bearing of great cats, but wear the scales and heads of dragons. Like the simhata of the Old Realm, these creatures are made as steeds for the Exalted, but have great wings and long, membraned tails that allow them to soar through the air. Their own powerful essence allows them to spit great blasts of elemental energy in imitation of Gaia's draconic souls. Unfortunately, their eggs can only reach maturity when nested in the energy of an uncapped Terrestrial demense, the aspect of which decides what kind of Dragon-Blood they can safely carry; and they breed slowly, producing few offspring. The dragon-tigers are also willful, each one permitting itself to be mounted by only one rider, and are extraordinarily choosy about who they select. Pangra riders become very attached to their mounts, and will often go everywhere with them, even to their work or to their beds.

Characters can have a Pangra with the Faroran version of Familiar 5. They are represented as Simhata, with the addition of scales and wings as for mutations, and an internal essence pool of 20m with which they can fire blasts of essence from their mouths, in the manner of a medium-sized Concussive Essence Cannon (WotLA pg. 131). Each Pangra has an elemental Aspect, and their blasts have the additional effect of an appropriate Elemental Bolt Attack.

**The Dragon Shrines** are five temple-manses, far larger and more elaborate than most other manses in Faror; each is dedicated to one of the Elemental Dragons, and none save Dragon-Blooded of the right Aspect are permitted within. This restriction is enforced by the power of the dragons themselves, with hundreds of traps and dangers that are easily passed only with the protection of the right anima flare. Elementals, too, are attracted to the Shrines and many breeds of spirit can be found within them. Though the Farorans serve Gaia above all, they do also pay fealty to the Elemental Dragons, and a few dozen Priestesses dedicate themselves to the maintenance of each Shrine. Each manse also contains extensive libraries and study facilities dedicated to those Abilities that match their Dragon, along with areas for relaxation and meditation that are designed as to be particularly restful for the appropriate Aspect. Prayers to the Dragons themselves seldom work, but it is in their Shrines that trying to commune with them has the best chance of working.

Each of the Dragon Shrines is also said to contain great treasures, and none more so than the Shrine of Sextes Jylis. Though the Wood Aspect boasts the highest population in Faror, its temple is the most unwelcoming, for it rests deep in the darkest, densest forest of the valley. Its walls, eternally coated in thick ivy and moss, appear ruined; there is little light within, and none below in the lower floors. Normal Wood Aspects occasionally grumble that they can't get lower than that, so dense is the labyrinth of stone corridors and tunnels bored in the earth, a network of secret passages carved into the stone or hidden within the great roots of the massive trees that surround the temple, where the meanest and most secretive of elemental creatures lurk. The most persistent rumor maintains that what lies beneath the Shrine of the Wood Dragon is part of one of the greatest secrets of Creation: the method by which the very first of the Dragon-Blooded were Exalted.

**The Silent Library** resides beneath a tall tower in the midst of the buildings by the lake, where it can be accessed easily while also being readily defensible. Among the secrets that have been passed to them by Gaia and her Dragons, some Farorans have the ability to journey through the dreams of Creation and to discover secrets thereby; beyond even that, a rare few of Gaia's servants have an ability to sense the future through a deeper and far more difficult bond to the world, though these visions lack the bureaucratic accuracy of knowledge gleaned from the Loom of Fate. Those details of the past, present or future that are discovered by either method are recorded, sorted and protected within the Library. The building draws its name not from the hush maintained within but from the tower that rises far above: within the topmost chamber is a massive bell forged from white, black and yellow jade. When struck - as it has never been since the Great Contagion - this bell tolls a peal of silence that cuts through any other sounds. As well as alerting the entire valley to an emergency, any creature that lacks a Communion track must have an MDV higher than 6 or spend 2wp, else immediately fall into a supernatural sleep upon hearing it.

Genesis: the production of living, organic artifacts. Those of Faror, in particular, revived the secrets of vegetative technology which had been practiced by the ancient Dragon Kings, which thrives in proximity to the Elemental Pole of Wood. They remain masters of that craft, and the convenience and luxury of eras long gone are replicated by living artifacts. Primitive-seeming homes carved from living wood maintain a comfortable temperature, humidity and light; they clean themselves, and draw fresh water up from the earth. By linking together individually grown organs with the arts of symbiosis, many wonders that magitech could accomplish can be replicated, though not without some extra effort. Acres of land are given to the equivalent of factory-cathedrals: beautiful gardens where the tenders of the craft slowly dance and sing along lines between pillars of smooth, carved stone, guiding the development of many living artifacts with the essence of their music. All this is imbued with vitality and essence by that other of Gaia's gifts, the mastery of geomancy.

Geomancy is sacred; the essence that flows through Creation is part of the body of Gaia. Though many practice the crafts of stone and wood and may act as geomancer's assistants, only Priestesses are allowed to design and oversee the building of Manses. Nearly every Manse so built is made to express the nature of the Demesne it caps, rather than any of the desires of its creator. This art is revered even more as a connection to one's ancestors, for Faroran Exalted retain knowledge of a First Age Charm that allows Terrestrials of great power to let their elemental essence surge forth, ending their lives but marking the spot of their demise forever with a Demesne (*Earth Reclaims Her Bounty*, DotFA:Lords p. 79). To die in such a manner is to become one with Gaia and to leave an honoured heritage for one's descendants, so many Farorans who reach old age prefer and are encouraged to end their lives in this manner. Only the insights granted by their Goddess allow the Priestesses to cap such Demesnes, creating Manses with great and unusual powers, and which provide numerous, powerful hearthstones. However, not all who die such wish their Demesne-memorials made into Manses at all, and their wishes are respected. Every building in Faror, from the tallest outlook to the smallest dwelling, has its construction carefully overseen to make sure it does not disturb the geomancy of any of these holy places.

Together, these arts, and the more common crafts that the Farorans consider to be lesser, maintain their home at a level of technology similar to that of the mid-shogunate: poor by the standards of the First Age, but wondrous in the Age of Sorrows.



### **The Power in the Land**

Faror and its sister colonies were all crafted by Gaia. They were then inhabited over centuries by her Exalted servants, who were guided in every major undertaking by that primordial's priestesses. The result is that the whole Valley is geomantically perfect and saturated with Gaia's essence.

Each hour, any essence-channeling creatures in Faror (save those of the Underworld) regain one additional mote to their essence pools. All Creation-born creatures may also benefit from fortune and health; after a season of living in Faror, characters may turn a single botched roll to a simple failure once a month. After living there for a year, they will gain a temporary dot of Stamina. These benefits fade after two weeks out of the Valley, but may be preserved for up to a year by a thaumaturgical ritual of decorating and painting of the body. Creatures of the Underworld, for their part, suffer a -1 internal penalty to all actions due to a clinging discomfort; Abyssal Exalted may negate this by channeling essence, as they can for the normal penalty of acting in Creation.

The ambient essence field in Faror, though not completely similar to the geomantic networks of the First Age, can power Artifacts which required such an atmosphere. Most of these, however, are based on magitech, and their use would be seen as a form of sacrilege by devout servants of Gaia.

## **Life, Love, Death and Service**

### **From birth to adulthood**

As in the Dynasty of the Realm, the children of those who serve Gaia are raised in expectation of their Exaltation. But for those born in Faror, there is none of the doubt, the shadow of mortality that hangs over the lesser Dragon-Blooded, for the primordial whose servants created the Terrestrial bloodline has seen to the purity of their lineage. For a child to even reach the age of 15 without Exaltation is a minor scandal. The downside of this is a substantially reduced drive to prove oneself worthy of the Second Breath; it is assured. This lack in the children is made up for, however, with the efforts of those who raise them. For the first 5 years of their life, a child is raised by their parents and by any members of their family who they develop an affinity for. They explore their beautiful surroundings, play games that begin to teach the basics of survival, reading and writing, and develop physical fitness and quickness of mind. Boys also play games of mock battle, while girls learn simple crafts. The stories and songs they learn are tales of Gaia and her servants, and teach a

simple version of the natures of spirits, Exalted and the Fair Folk. After their fifth birthday, children are turned over to a Priestess for the beginning of their formal education.

From then until their Exaltation, each child spends at least 3 hours of every day in the company of the Priestess who was chosen to raise them; normally, this is a woman who is experienced at the job of teaching, whom they already know and have a positive relationship with, but regardless of the child's affections for their teacher, the period of teaching resembles an apprenticeship. They follow the Priestess as she goes about her normal duties, performing tasks she sets which may or may not be designed to give a lesson themselves. In return for this aid, the Priestess teaches whatever she feels is proper. Another 3 hours of each day are spent in Faror's only school for children, where they are segregated according to age and, for particular subjects, by gender. They learn reading, writing, history, wilderness lore, and the basics of essence and the supernatural realities of Creation, as well as beginning to learn the magical genesis-technology that the Farorans possess. Finally, for another two hours, Boys are given over to an older man to learn military arts, while girls remain with the Priestess to learn crafts, further knowledge of the supernatural, basic insights into psychology and social interaction, and the performance of music and dance. Those who show prodigious skill at any subject maybe be given extra training by their personal tutors. Festival days - the last and first day of each month, a week at the height of each season, and Calibration - are without school or duty for children.

Atop all this, however, is a thick layer of ideological initiation; the Priestesses chosen to give lessons are picked from those well-skilled at performance and persuasion, with powerful social Charms at their disposal. Such powers allow the teachers to truly understand the troubles and desires of their charges and to make their education as thoroughly efficient and enjoyable as possible, but is also an excellent method by which to make absolutely sure that by the time any child is Exalted, he or she has been impressed down to their soul with a sense of obligation and loyalty to Gaia... and to those who represent her, of course.

Once the Second Breath has been taken, the gloves are off. The young Exalt is no longer a child, but also, not yet an adult. What follows is a concentrated deluge of education and training designed to shape them into a worthy agent of their primordial Goddess. The new Dragon-Blooded start off by learning the Elemental

Concentration Trance Charm, and are expected to use it as much as possible; according to the traditions of their religion, the Farorans believe that all living things should emulate Gaia in her search for personal growth, learning and enlightenment. Over the following years, the Terrestrial adolescents spend every day in study, being constantly swapped between different apprenticeships, lectures, training programs and tests, with only meals and an hour of meditation each day - and that an exercise in essence control - to serve as relaxation beyond sleep itself. They get only one day free each month and at the height of each season, as well as the break at Calibration. Such high strain would not be possible if it were not for the fact that all adult Farorans are Exalted, and a high respect for teaching encourages the development of superhuman expertise and Charms that allow far more to

be done than mere mortals could handle. Aside from teaching itself, this period of training serves two other purposes:

First, to teach humility. Farorans learn during childhood that they're privileged in their Goddess' service, more pure of blood and soul than even the other Dragon-Blooded of Creation. But the Farorans, unlike other Dragon-Blooded, are servants, not soldiers. Their ancestors never took part in the Usurpation and did not take Creation's rulership on themselves. Their purpose is to carry out the will of a greater being, and to do so by working together, in knowledge that there are entities of mightier power than themselves. Their disposition must suit their place in the world. It is to teach this that the first years of one's life as one of the Exalted must be so

### **Festival Days**

Festivals are important to the Farorans. Gaia herself decreed them when she first bid her servants to live apart from the rest of Creation; each one has a particular purpose. The *Passing Festivals* take place on the final day of one season and the first day of the next. At sunrise, there is a ritual where the High Priestess of the previous season's Aspect symbolically passes her temporal authority to the High Priestess who represents the next season's. Other than that, though, the Passing Festivals are simply free days; unexalted children are released from school to do as they wish, and adults are encouraged to get out of their normal routines to walk, socialize or otherwise enjoy themselves. Each of the other festivals, however, have special meaning.

The *Resplendant Festivals* take place for a week at the height of each season. Each is named for that season's element and has a different purpose. The Air Festival is for knowledge; during that week, the Farorans pay additional respects to the gods, and they remember the lore of Creation. They tell the stories of their history, re-enact tales from the First Age, and pass on things that they know, mostly by song and story. The Fire Festival, on the other hand, is one in which one takes pleasure in the physical; in food, in drink, and dancing. It is a vent given for buried feelings to be released, a time when the passion of the Dragon-Blooded is to be set loose. This also makes it the most violent festival, as it is briefly allowed for truly dire enemies to engage in duels and other violent contests. The Water Festival, on the other hand, is a week of sorrow; a time given to remember that which has passed into the flow of history. Each individual grieves for their own losses, and as a whole, the Farorans remember those who died in the Contagion; they remember the passing of the First Age, and of Gaia's primordial brothers and sisters. Those who have become closest to Gaia herself may experience reflections of her memories, things long gone and indescribable. The Earth Festival, then, is a period of meditation and self-reflection; of returning to one's foundations, seeing what one has built and planning how best to go on. It is a holiday to honour craftspeople especially. The Wood Festival, finally, is similar to the harvest festivals elsewhere in Creation; the servants of Gaia give thanks to her for her generosity and take pause to enjoy the bounty of nature, and spend extra time with their descendants.

The *Calibration Festival* is somewhat different; the five days between years is time for a holy task. The population of Faror splits in two, one half for the day and one half for the night. Switching at the hours of twilight, the servants of Gaia kneel in the sacred Manses built for the purpose, and for half each day they simply pray in chorus to her. The primordials do not need worship the way that gods do, but it strengthens them; during Calibration, the Farorans know, the Elemental Dragons are at their weakest. Once the new year comes, the Farorans celebrate the return of the proper order of things for three days.

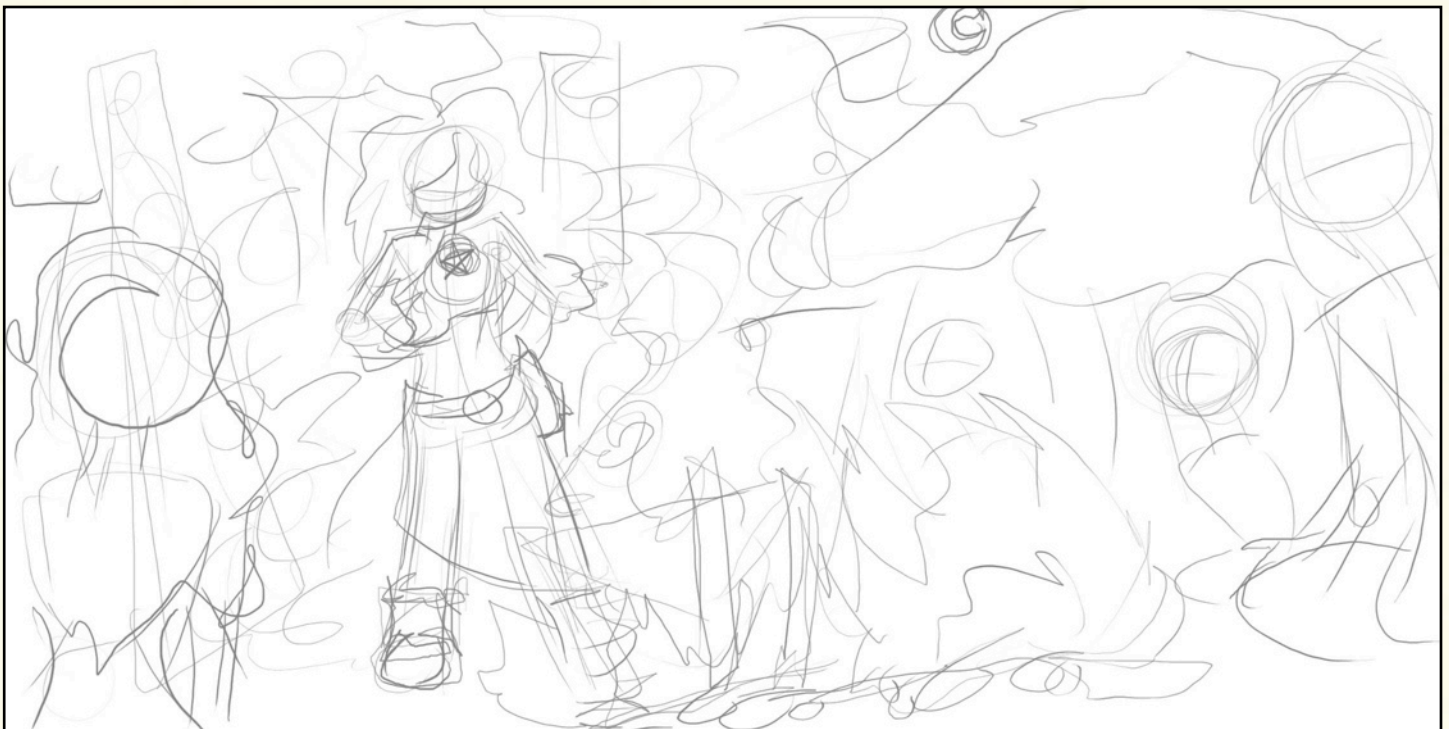
There are various other minor festivals throughout the year, generally observed only by particular groups of people. For example, children are named at a naming festival once a season, but only the parents and siblings of such newborns attend them, not counting the High Priestess who carries out the ceremony in the name of Gaia. There are also plenty of holidays observed only by Dragon-Blooded of a particular Aspect, age, gender, family line or other quality, often to commemorate some historic event. Most individuals have complicated calendars.

hard; after receiving the essence of the Dragons, they must understand the pressures and responsibilities of their Exaltation before its power can go to their heads. They must know and take pride in themselves, while also remaining humble. It is a difficult balance, and many Farorans look back on their adolescence with relief that they will not have to go through it again.

Second, to find an individual's talents and develop them, and to gauge their personality. Though they don't have much free time, many of the subjects taught allow a good deal of self-expression: the keen eyes of elder Dragon-Blooded can quickly and competently judge their students' tastes and disposition. A young Terrestrial eventually finds their time being spent more and more on those crafts that they enjoy and are naturally adept with. Though the gender lines of Faroran tradition still hold, the study of Aspect abilities can cross these boundaries, allowing even the most rebellious youth to find something to take pleasure in. Speaking of taking pleasure, a close watch is also kept on the interactions between the young Exalted, who will soon begin to feel the legendary passions of the Dragon-Blooded. Breeding is possibly even more important in Faror than in other Dragon-Blooded cultures, and though the older Terrestrials may smile as they observe (and occasionally take part in) the ebb and flow of romance, they take steps to ensure it never goes too far. A Faroran's first marriage is generally arranged even before they have formally become adults, often without any input on their part.

When their mentors judge them ready, young Terrestrials are tested on their skills and the degree to which they have absorbed the traditions and philosophy of their people. They are tested on the skills of their Aspect and their gender, and as a final test, they are taken into Creation. For one season they must survive by their wits and witness the state that the world outside Faror has fallen into, aided only by whatever they have made with their own hands and by the guidance of Gaia. Often during this journey these young men and women receive their first direct contact with their Goddess, for the primordial does truly watch over them during this time, speaking to them in dreams through Aa, to guide them to places of safety and extending her will to protect them from the Wyld. Indeed, this final test is purposefully designed to be one that will, at least one point, truly demonstrate the Mother of All Life's benevolence. This puts a final, personal note onto the young Exalt's long indoctrination into loyalty towards her, and will generally open even the most cynical heart. This loyalty and touch of primordial divinity manifests mechanically as the Expression of Will Charm, which is fully realized when the young Terrestrial returns to Faror and is ritually tattooed across their chest with the Mark of their Goddess. It glows, and fades into their skin, but from then on will return with their power and shine with the light of their element, as a symbol of their status as a servant of Gaia.

Coincidentally, this journey very often puts young Farorans through most of the Trials of Sorcery.



## Duty and Marriage

The first duty of adulthood - which many see also as the last part of becoming an adult - is to be married and to have children. Just as in other Dragon-Blooded societies, good breeding is a dire responsibility; for the Farorans, who consider it to be a sacred duty as well as a patriotic one, it is perhaps moreso. And, again as in those societies, marriage is therefore more of a practical matter than many starstruck youths might prefer. Still, the way the servants of Gaia conduct marriage is a little different than in places like the Realm.

An individual's first marriage is to a much older Exalt, most likely one who has demonstrated their worth in society and usually one who has at least one spouse already; no-one gets out of it, except for young women chosen to be Priestesses, and even that is only while they remain Novices. This first marriage is essentially a form of apprenticeship in which the older, experienced Dragon-Blood, and their older partners, teach the younger Exalt how to deal with marriage itself and to raise a child properly; the Farorans take parenthood too seriously to let it be fouled up by inexperience. In exchange, the young Exalt is expected to act as a servant for the elder. Many priestesses, for example, employ their younger husbands as bodyguards when they venture outside Faror. All marriages last 25 years, after which they always end; if two individuals wish to remain together, all they have to do is marry again. If not, and if either party thereby becomes unmarried, they need to seek another mate. Most seek out someone they are at least friends with already, but a (mostly) unbiased priestess is always final arbiter of whether a match is compatible. Generally, the first century of an individual's life will have them change marriage once or twice before they find a person they will stay with until death. It is not an overwhelming trend, though: some settle down right away, and some continue to change person every 25 years for the rest of their lives. Since marriage is only for breeding, however, one need only involve oneself with one's spouse once every five years, since that is the minimum time between births that wise Dragon-Blooded women will wait. Many Exalted separate themselves almost completely from their mate during that time, or carry on a more romantic relationship with another person. Such relationships must be childless, however, since the penalties for having illegitimate children are severe.

This system is, of course, not perfect. The vast majority of violent crime in Faror is the result of jealousy and similar afflictions brought on by the complexity of human relationships.

Now that education is complete, the Dragon-Blood takes up a job appropriate to their gender and skills. Faror is unique in that it is possibly the only place in Creation where an Exalt can live a simple life. Some individuals have done little more than be born, take the Second Breath, and then lived a quiet routine for a few centuries before growing old and dying. Such lives are rare, though, and still not as humble as any mortal life in the Age of Sorrows; all those who live in the Perfect Valley are expected to be ready to serve whenever and however their Goddess requires it. Farorans are expected to keep as many skills as possible in top shape throughout their lives; a goal which they have ample free time to pursue, as their Exalted prowess allows them to perform the day-to-day chores of existence much faster and easier than mortals can. For the most part, professions are much the same as for other Dragon-Blooded societies in Creation, lacking only the military aspect of the Realm and Lookshy; even then, many men and a few women are members of the Wardens, the second most powerful organization in the Valley, who are tasked with protecting Faror from creatures of the surrounding Wyld and with venturing into Creation when necessary. They tend to operate alone or

### Expression of Will

Cost: - Requirements: Occult 2, Essence 2

Type: Permanent; Keywords: Gaia

Duration: Permanent; Prerequisites: None

Learning this Charm literally marks the Dragon-Blooded as a Servant of Gaia: the symbol of Gaia's worship, a five-pointed pentagram within a circle, appears on the Terrestrial's chest in their Aspect's colour. The mark fades and appears in exactly the same manner as a Celestial Exalt's Caste Mark.

Being marked such allows the character to act as a connection to Gaia: it grants (or inflicts) Communion on them, which they track on their character sheet in a similar manner to Limit. (See Chapter 2 for more on Communion). At the same time, this Charm grants the character immunity to all Servitude effects inflicted by anything less than primordial power; they belong to something greater. Many spirits can recognize this quality.

Though it is impossible for Gaia to take Charms, spells or most other powers she grants to her servants due to the nature of Exaltation, she can stop the Mark of this Charm from appearing; this rejection also nullifies the protection of her ownership. Her favoured servants, by her will, have incorporated the showing of the Mark into almost all their rituals, so as to out any unfaithful interlopers.

in small groups, and possess the closest ties to those Lunars who know of Faror's existence.

Some professions are different in Faror, however, or entirely new. Many women, for example, are Deakhara musicians - performers who play in shifts all day and all night, in a high Air-Aspected Manse whose winds carry the sound all through Faror, soothing and encouraging all the spirits who dwell there. Music and dance are both highly esteemed arts, as they please the Elemental Dragons and are sacred to Aa. Manse maintenance is also a well-populated profession; though only Priestesses are allowed to actually construct Manses, all Servants of Gaia have an affinity for geomancy and may earn a living keeping the Valley's many places of power in top condition and harmony. It's an interesting profession, since some of the Manses require unusual forms of maintenance; one Manse, for example, requires an Earth Aspect and a Water Aspect to meet on the night of the Full Moon every month, do battle, and finish with the Earth Aspect's victory.

For the most part, however, it's women who perform jobs at home and in the Town. All Faroran men are trained to scout, hunt and fight in the wyld that surrounds the Valley, and many of them find it easier and more appealing to their Exalted natures to do just that. That's not to say that men can't also have their cultural influence, writing stories or teaching others: but they're not in an advantageous position compared to their female contemporaries.

### **Sorcery and Martial Arts**

The Farorans recognize Martial Arts as a worthy pursuit, and Celestial Martial Arts as a path to greater power and essence control. But the Farorans do not link martial arts with enlightenment the way that the Immaculates do. Yes, the Priestesses say, the Immaculate Styles emulate the power of the Elemental Dragons... but Dragon-Blooded do not *need* to emulate their power, for they have it already in their blood and bones. The Servants of Gaia have not managed to gain access to any of the Immaculate Martial Arts Styles, and have a hard time learning Celestial Martial Arts in general; an individual Faroran has about the same chance to learn them as an Outcaste, so most martial artists in the Valley content themselves with Terrestrial martial arts. Most who do go beyond that are trained by the Faroran's few Lunar contacts, and so are most likely to learn Lunar Hero Style or an animal style. Water Aspect Priestesses do maintain a small following of the Dreaming Pearl Courtesan Style, however, which they say offers understanding of the Sixth Dragon, Aa. Typically, Dragon-Blooded who serve Gaia gain enlightenment in Celestial styles through the Tiger-And-Bear Charms.

It is Sorcery, instead, that takes the place of the powerful, holy art in their society. Unlike other cultures, who view sorcery in the shadow of its yozi-tainted history, the Farorans see their sorcery as a gift from Gaia, a way of coming close to her own primordial power. It is not an arrogant act of commanding reality to their desires, but a miraculous act of humbly channelling their Goddess' will, and thus a deeply respected profession. Almost all Faroran-trained sorceresses are Salinan sorcerers, save those who take their philosophy even further, scorning the ways of civilization to develop the strange, somewhat frightening path of Tellurian Sorcery (described in Chapter 4). Both these schools of spellwork have a vast base of knowledge from which to learn spells; they seldom summon demons, due to their treacherous nature and for fear of disturbing Gaia's body with their alien essence, but there is no particular stigma against demonology beyond that. Men are not permitted to learn sorcery at all, which is unfortunate, because Faroran sorcerers can gain great powers through the benevolence of Gaia. All of Gaia's Priestesses are sorceresses, however; with her guidance, they have developed the ability to use co-operative sorcery, a supernatural technique in which several women synchronize their spellcasting to increase its power. This skill is often passed on to less enlightened sorceresses, as the priesthood possess even greater secrets to keep for themselves. (These mysteries, as well as co-operative sorcery, are described fully in Chapters 3 and 4).

### **Recreation**

For all their religion urges them to be prepared for anything, the Farorans have things much easier than most people in the Age of Sorrows, and they have plenty of spare time and energy to spare on other pursuits. By design, most such pursuits - sports, craftwork, martial arts, study of sorcery - also have their usefulness. In general, women engage in more social hobbies, such as workshops, choirs and theatre, while men are more physically active and keep the childhood pastimes of competition with each other.

### **The Arts**

The activities which fall under the Performance Ability are most noteworthy: music, song and dance all have an enormous part in Faroran religion and every girl child in the Valley is raised to be competent with at least one of those three. Oratory is prized as well, both for storytelling as a pastime and for its use in teaching. Faroran theatre is notable in that, aside from Wood Aspects, men are not allowed on stage. Thus, when a production calls for, say, the part of Kiarok the Red Spear (a Fire Aspected man who is

the main love interest in *Watching The Rain*, a story set during the Contagion), it falls to the most athletic-looking Fire-Aspected actress to bind herself up in male dress and play the part. So important is music to the people of the Valley that nearly all types of performance are backed up by two or three people on instruments, and Faroran theatre nearly always includes songs and elaborate musical routines.

## **Drugs**

Given their talent for plant-based artifacts and their appreciation for Gaia's bounty, it should be no surprise that the Farorans enjoy recreational use of various herbs and alchemical products. The trouble is that, being Exalted, normal plants and chemicals provide little stimulation. Over time, they have bred new species with the potency to overcome their divine resilience and the variety to give their long lives interest: therefore, as well as more powerful varieties of drugs that mortals use (strong enough, in fact, to often kill normal mortals), they also possess intoxicants such as Bellheart, which temporarily simulates the effects of a high Permanent Communion rating, and Merumoss, which instils a profound sense of stillness and awareness, allowing a user to sit patiently in one place for days at a time and perceive all the spirits who pass by.

Faroran education tries to instill children with a sense of responsibility, while polite society shuns those who impair themselves at inappropriate times; but still, accidents and mistakes due to intoxication are some of the Valley's biggest problems.

## **Sport**

In the First Age, a game called *Shining Dragon Championship* developed great popularity; derived from a game played by Dragon Kings before the primordial war, it was played principally by Dragon-Blooded. Played on a circular, indented pitch, the wild essence displays that appeared in each match gave it its more casual name of *Anima Bowl*, which in time was shortened simply to "animowl". That name stuck. In the Age of Sorrows, the only place in Creation the game can still be seen played is in Faror.

The six players of each team rocket back and forth in daring strategy and risk, using their Charms to full effect; a number of bizarre rules, such as allowing players to attack each other so long as the referee doesn't see them, present opportunity for a wide range of skills to be brought to bear. Animowl is played with artifacts to

increase its drama and spectacle; boots to increase speed and running distance, the gloves and sticks enchanted for safety, and the ball designed to carry the essence of the Exalted who strike it. Over the course of a game, the ball takes on the essence of the players who have struck it, so that it becomes a dazzling rainbow comet streaking from person to person. To keep the complexity and cost of these items down, they draw essence from the pitch itself, which in turn requires power from a geomantic network. After the Usurpation, it continued to be played for many decades, but eventually the shogunate grew weaker and the extant playing fields were repurposed. Only feeble mortal derivatives, far descended, remain in Creation.

Gaia's servants, however, maintained the game of Animowl as a valuable means of channeling the need to compete among themselves. Faror has one pitch, and the equipment needed for its teams to play the game. No doubt most who live in a troubled world would see it as a needless frivolity; but, as its avid followers from the First Age down have always said, the game has much to teach. And perhaps Creation could use a way to work out its tensions safely.

## **Outside the Valley**

Inside Faror, the Exalted who serve Gaia are open, friendly and peaceful, secure in the rich essence and harmony of their surroundings. When they venture outside, however, they become wary, withdrawn and sometimes contemptuous of what they find. They have some good reasons: Creation is filled with dangerous beings, their home is surrounded by the Wyld and, of course, they are still meant to keep themselves secret from the rest of humanity. Over time, they have formalized a set of ritual behaviors to protect themselves from some of these problems.

## **Planning**

Depending on who is going where, Gaia's followers have a number of resources to draw on. The Wardens know the land around Faror well, as much as is possible in the Wyld; past the Mountains, reality gives way rather fast, with only a tight ring of tainted lands and bordermarches before the vast middlemarches and Deep Wyld of the far East reassert themselves. Anyone who would go that way needs the guidance of the Dragon-Blooded's hunters and a sorceress to protect them. Unfortunately, the Aether essence that flows from the Island in the centre of Faror brushes lightly against the Wyld here, enough to shade it with the memory of Creation's ancient past, long before the First Age. Wyld-things stalk the forest, phantasms and Fae in shapes borrowed from the primeval forms of a



## Play Ball?

Storytellers or players may, for various reasons, want to play out sports competitions in Exalted. This may be inspired by the “sports drama” genre of fiction, in which characters put their hopes, ideals and emotions on the line in whatever field of competition is the subject. Exalted already provides for this in terms of battles and martial arts tournaments, but in order to expand the list of options a little more, this page describes Animowl and how to integrate it into a game. The sport is most suitable for appearance in a First Age story, but can be adapted into other periods easily enough.

Animowl is played on a circular, bowl-shaped field 500 feet across, which is divided into two halves. Each half has five disc-shaped “Maiden” markers, each a foot across, on posts around the outer edge of the pitch; there is also a pair of three-foot markers, the “Sun” and “Moon” or simply goals, together on the edge facing towards the dividing line (and towards their counterparts). The aim of the game is to build up points by hitting the other team’s Maidens (for one point) or their goals (for five points) with the ball, while preventing them from doing the same to you. The game lasts until one team gets twenty more points than the other, or two hours at most; whenever one team achieves a ten-point lead, or at the one-hour mark, the game pauses and the teams switch sides of the field. The winners are, as you would expect, the team with the most points.

Each team has six players; one Lord (the captain), one Steward (the keeper), two attackers and two defenders. The lord and attackers are equipped with a shield and a club-like stick, while the steward and defenders are equipped with a shield on each arm. All players also have Animowl boots and gloves. These objects are Artifacts: minor ones (1-dot), despite their powers, as they function only in the particular essence field generated by a proper Animowl playing field. Mostly these are just enchantments of safety (these objects can only deal bashing damage if used as weapons) and of durability (to withstand their Exalted users’ power), but the boots also allow the players to run at twice their normal speed and double their jumping distance. The ball itself is also an Artifact (2-dot) with the same safety and resilience enhancement, but it also has an essence matrix which allows it to absorb the Charms used by the players; this allows them to enhance their strikes even with supplemental powers that do not normally function in conjunction with ranged attacks. This same effect also causes the ball to pick up the anima display of the players, to the point that it is eventually engulfed in a multicoloured blaze of essence.

The game is played in Ticks, basically as combat: the ball is placed in the center by the referee before they start the match. To “control” the ball, all a player needs to do is hold it; they can then pass, strike or attack (as in literally use the ball to attack another player) by using their combat abilities. Any player can use Martial Arts, Archery or Thrown to punch, kick, throw or otherwise put the ball in motion, and attackers can also use Melee with their stick. This is resolved as an attack with the ball as the weapon; an Animowl Ball has Speed 5, Accuracy +0, Damage +2B, Rate 2 and Range 50. Any player within movement distance of the ball’s trajectory can attempt to intercept it using either their Parry DV or their Dodge DV (in the latter case leaping directly into its path). Each shield a player has adds +2 DV. Taking the ball from a player who is carrying it requires either a Disarm or some sneaky way of stealing it. Players are allowed to attack each other with something other than the ball only if the referee or their two assistants (who sit at either end of the field’s dividing line) don’t see the assault take place; a quick social attack or use of Larceny (Speed 5 Miscellaneous action) by any player can be used to try distract them for a time. The teams are also allowed to freely taunt, deceive and otherwise try to manipulate each other.

Each team tracks a pool of “unity points” earned through good strategy or leadership; the lord or team coach can roll their [Intelligence + War], [Charisma + Performance] or other suitable pools beforehand to plan or to inspire their team, receiving one opportunity to do each, and the successes from these are added to the team’s pool of Unity. During the game, the team Lords can take a Sp5 Miscellaneous Action to inspire their team or to lead their team in demoralizing their opponents. Each is done as a social attack, with successes adding to or subtracting from the appropriate pool of Unity. With appropriate stunting, observers outside the game may do the same in Long Ticks with cheering or similar displays. Unity points can be spent by any player of that team to reroll a dice action.

The lord of each team (or the steward, if the lord is incapacitated) can call time-outs to substitute players; the referee will pause the game in any case if a player is knocked out. If there is no substitute, the opposing team receives a goal (five points) and they must send off one of their own players so that the teams remain equal. Players can also be sent off for infractions such as visibly attacking, doing long-term damage or stealing the goalposts.

newborn world; immense, reptilian, elemental creatures. Only two paths out of the Valley are free from these dangers: the thin road back to Creation, and the "forest path", which leads into the Elemental Pole of Wood. Only Priestesses go to the courts of Sextes Jylis; the other way is much the more used, and watched.

## **Preparation**

Before leaving the Valley, farorans have patterns painted onto their skin by a knowledgeable Priestess, using various colours of durable body paint. Some would draw a parallel to the moonsilver tattoos of the Lunar Exalted, and some of the designs may look similar; however, the intention of this body art is not (usually) to protect against the Wyld, but rather the poor geomancy of the rest of Creation. The Servants of Gaia see diseases, war, even bad luck as unnatural things, brought on by a deficiency in harmonious essence which is, in turn, brought about by the corruption of geomancy caused by the ignorant works of unenlightened humans. The lines and shapes painted on a faroran's flesh ensure that the essence flows about their person remain favourable.

## **Meetings**

For a similar reason, when Farorans meet strangers beyond their land, they introduce themselves with a long list of relatives, titles and achievements. If possible, they will draw abstract, geomantic symbols in the soil or sand, or draw one with a piece of chalk or charcoal, as a form of prayer to local spirits, entreating them to hold the world in its correct form. This ritual, along with the elemental decorations, is actually a minor thaumaturgical ritual which does indeed provide some protection from the Wyld; however, it exists mainly as insurance or in the event of an unexpected journey. Most farorans who travel in the Wyld either use the path laid by Gaia back to stable land, or do so with a Priestess who can cast spells that do the job better. When Priestesses travel abroad themselves, they tend to keep a low profile; their knowledge would be invaluable to the right (or wrong) recipient.

## **Visitors**

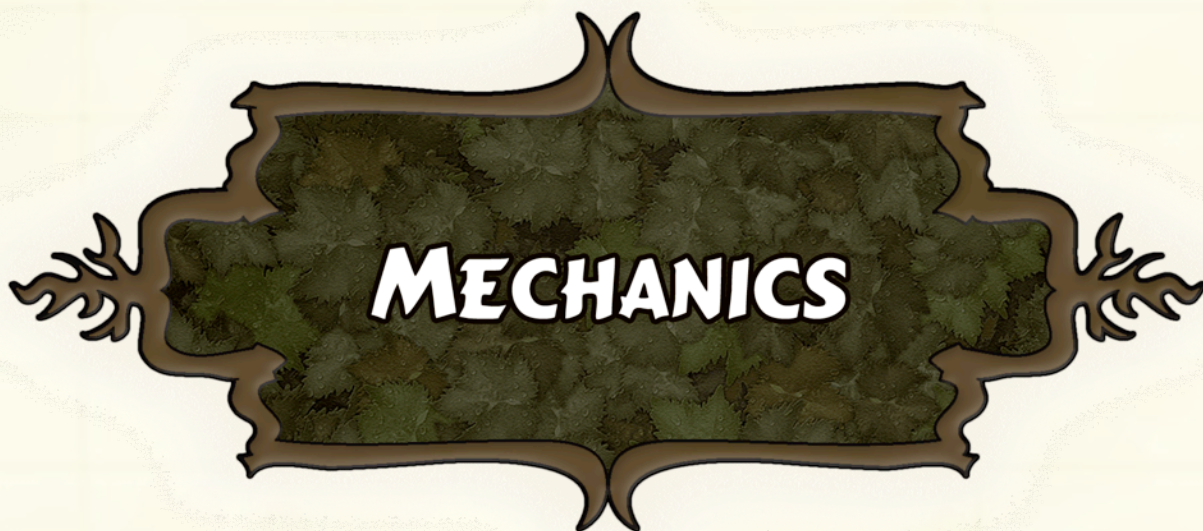
Obviously, since Faror is meant to be a secret, outsiders seldom come into the Valley. Adding to the rarity is that normal adult mortals are not allowed to enter - their unenlightened souls, heavy with the burdens of life, would disrupt the harmony of essence in the Eastern Enclave. Children, as well as mortals with enlightened essence, do not suffer this restriction. However, creatures of the Underworld, including Abyssal Exalted, would never be allowed to even come within view of Faror's mountains.

The Wardens know all the ways into their land, secret or not, and will likely detect any intruder less than a Celestial who has truly mastered the arts of Exalted stealth.

The most likely visitors to Faror are those small number of Lunars who are aware of the Servants of Gaia; in this Age, however, it is increasingly likely that others will eventually walk this holy land. If any unknown Exalted did come near the Valley, they would likely be taken in. Sending them away, after all, would only rouse their curiosity. These Exalted would then be the Faroran's honoured guests, and provided with numerous small gifts and services in the name of hospitality; this would give the Priestesses time to gauge the visitor's natures and, unless the guests show themselves extremely trustworthy, for their powerful social magic to take effect. They would be attended constantly during their stay, most likely by a whole team of Gaia's clergy, with each smiling "hostess" constantly leaving for "personal business" and being replaced by a hitherto unseen woman who "has the time". Well aware of the powerful charisma of the Chosen, the Servants of Gaia employ this tactic to gently wear down the mental defences of potentially dangerous visitors and ensure that none of their own can be persuaded in return. The end goal is to lodge firmly and deep in any visitor's mind that Faror must be kept secret and safe and free to run itself. Often, particularly with visitors who have not developed their powers to the task of shaking off such influence, they may be persuaded to simply forget the Valley exists at all.

Thus, although visitors to Faror are afforded incredible luxury, they have no privacy. This is, in part, simply part of Faroran culture (no personal possessions; everything belongs ultimately to Gaia), as can be seen in that few Faroran dwellings have closeable doors; a hanging curtain of cloth or beads is the closest that they'll get. But it is coincidentally very convenient for keeping an eye on untrustworthy individuals, and strangers in the Valley may have some time getting used to the constant presence of other people, even when sleeping, bathing or trying to speak amongst themselves. The buildings themselves also take some acclimatization; visitors will likely be kept in the same homes the Farorans use, which are built into the natural setting of the Valley. Often hidden in the landscape itself, the rooms are designed for geomancy before all else, and so will possess strange dimensions and can have walls, floors and ceilings with gentle curves and twists that most humans in Creation would be unused to.

The result of all this is that visitors find Faror both beautiful and pleasant in the extreme, but also paradoxically uncomfortable.



# MECHANICS

Most of the systems used by the Servants of Gaia are similar to those used by other Terrestrials and by the game in general: see SoE: The Dragon-Blooded and the core Exalted rulebook for any Traits or details not mentioned here. This chapter mostly details new Backgrounds and alterations to existing Backgrounds, as well as providing guidelines to character creation. Of special note is that Gaia's followers do not suffer from the Great Curse, and as such do not track limit at all; instead they track Communion, which acts for them much as Clarity does for the Alchemical Exalted. Full details on that are provided towards the end of this chapter.

As with most kinds of Exalted (with Storyteller permission), circumstances can allow Servants of Gaia to have Backgrounds not normally available to them, and their Backgrounds may be available to others.

## ABILITIES

### Linguistics

Living in a community isolated from the rest of the world since before the Usurpation, the people of Faror have partially developed their own language. This "Kamitongue" is a distant dialect of Old Realm, mutually

comprehensible with difficulty; but it is written using a flowing, curving script that bears no resemblance to that ancient language's alphabet of syllables. This written form contains within it a simple geomantic harmony, and the smooth scrawlings of its words are often accompanied by larger pictograms that efficiently summarize complex but useful concepts. It is a good language for music, for describing geomancy and primordial concepts, and notably religious; many key phrases reference Gaia.

Most academics also know the original Old Realm. Farorans have sufficient contact with the rest of Creation to learn High and Low Realm, Riverspeak, Foresttongue and the many various tribal languages of the east. A few dedicated linguists may know additional languages. Members of the Wardens may be able to learn Clawspeak from their Lunar contacts.

## ALTERED BACKGROUNDS

### Cult/Followers/Resources

Faroran characters cannot take these Backgrounds unless they gain them in Creation, in which case they purchase them the same way as Outcaste Dragon-Blooded. The only Farorans with any dots in Cult are the High Priestesses, who have only one dot each; there are no

mortals to become Followers; and goods and services are tracked with the Worth Background, described below. Characters who try using Resources to purchase things in Faror count the Background as being one dot lower, unless they've specifically converted their wealth into Jade or other magical commodities.

### Allies

Faroran character can use this Background as Lookshian characters do to represent armigers, reducing the power of the Ally by an effective dot to represent a faithful companion who is always on hand. This can represent a powerful Genesis-crafted creature that is not easily represented by the Faroran version of the Familiar Background, or possibly a being such as a god, elemental or kami (See Appendix I) who is somehow bonded to them.

### Artifact

Faroran Exalted both benefit and suffer from a cultural distaste for mass-produced Artifacts. But those few Artifacts which a single Dragon-Blood can have made for themselves continue on when they die, and pass on to their descendants; thus, Faroran Exalted can have a strong supply of ancestral heirlooms to equip themselves with.

However, Farorans possess no magitech, nor can they purchase any Artifact with overt military applications; for either of these they must use the Solar version of the Artifact Background, representing items retrieved from Creation. Genesis versions of some magitech artifacts are available (subject to Storyteller approval), but as such items are of course living things, they are self-maintaining and self-repairing; they increase their Artifact rating by one.

All Faroran Exalted have a debtstone (detailed under Worth, below), and do not need to pay for it with this Background.

- - The character has a single Artifact of level 1 or 2.
- ● - The character has three dots' worth of Artifacts, none rated higher than 2.
- ● ● - The character has five dots worth of Artifacts, only one of which can be rating 3.
- ● ● ● - The character has seven dots worth of Artifacts, with perhaps one rated 4.
- ● ● ● ● - The character has nine dots worth of Artifacts, with one rated 4 or 5 and no other rated higher than 3.

### Arsenal/Command

Faror lacks the military organization required to provide these Backgrounds. The closest a character in the Valley can come is Backing, which may temporarily see them leading others and provided with equipment if required.

### Backing

There are a decent amount of small organizations in Faror, ranging from sports clubs to researchers to explorers, but the relatively low population limits their influence.

The only two organizations currently powerful enough to warrant this Background are the Priesthood of Gaia and the Wardens. The Wardens' system is quite simple: they're part militia and part scout force, with Backing 5 reserved for the Chieftain. Backing in the Wardens gives the character access to Faror's most military-like force, and contacts with the rest of Creation, including connections to the Lunar Exalted of the Wardens of Gaia faction. The similarity of name is no coincidence.

The Priesthood, on the other hand, has a rank system more closely linked to the Backing Background itself, which is detailed further in Chapter 3. Summarized so:

- - Novice. The character has just begun training with the Priesthood. She does many chores and most of the grunt work of the clergy, and spends the rest of her time studying. She wears a mask at all times and acts under a fabricated identity.
- ● - Apprentice. The character has learned Terrestrial Circle Sorcery and has begun to be initiated into the Priestesses' secrets. She resumes her old identity and gets married, and may begin attempting to develop the Aether Awareness Charm. She continues to do much of the day-to-day work.
- ● ● - Adept. The character has birthed and raised a child of her own to adulthood. She learns most of Gaia's lore and should develop Aether Awareness at this level if she can.
- ● ● ● - Elder. The character has probably developed Aether Awareness, and has been initiated into the secrets of Providence. She learns all the secrets of her Goddess, and may leave mundane work behind to engage in higher matters full-time.
- ● ● ● ● - High Priestess. The previous High Priestess of the character's Aspect has died, and Gaia has chosen the character to fill that role. Her body and soul have been reworked as Gaia wills to grant strange new powers.

## Breeding

All Faroran Exalted possess the level of Breeding that marked the original Terrestrial Exalted. This is as per the Legendary Breeding Merit (Scroll of Heroes, page 60). When two Farorans produce offspring, an Exaltation roll is never needed; Simply roll a d10 and subtract the result from 16 to identify the age the child Exalts. They receive these benefits for free.

## Familiar

All Farorans feel a deeper connection to the natural world than any other Exalted save Luna's Children. It is only natural that they would attract animal companions. But dwelling deep in the Wyld, surrounded by powerful Demesnes and with many skilled Genesis-crafters in their society, they would be surprised to end up with a normal animal at their side.

A Familiar purchased using this Background is "constructed" using bonus points provided by the Background's rating. Beginning with any natural animal, mutations may be purchased for their standard points cost; Attribute dots may be purchased for 3 bonus points each; and Abilities (if it is conceivable for the creature to learn them) can be upgraded for 2 points per dot. If an Intelligence of at least 2 is purchased, the animal is able to speak, and Essence may be increased to 2 for 10 points, granting an essence pool of 20 motes; up to 5 of these may be committed to their master to provide them with extra essence as with a normal Familiar of high rating. Note that even "invisible" improvements come with cosmetic changes that mark an animal as different from most of its kind. Any Familiar created with this Background has the Motivation to protect and serve their master's interests.

- - The character's Familiar possesses the *Elemental Adaptation* Mutation, typically either Wood or matching the character's Aspect, plus 4 freely usable bonus points.
- - The character has 8 points with which to improve for their Familiar, in addition to *Elemental Adaptation*.
- - The character has 13 bonus points for their Familiar, providing benefits in addition to *Elemental Adaptation*. Such alterations, if not already obvious, can be detected with a Perception + Awareness roll.
- - The character's Familiar has 18 points with which to purchase improvements, along with the standard *Elemental Adaptation*. The animal's mutations are obvious, and may not be totally beneficial: at this level and the next, negative mutations may be added in order to provide additional points.

●●●●● - The character's Familiar is a wonder of Genesis or a tamed prodigy of the Wyld, and possesses 24 points worth of mutations and/or heightened Abilities/Attributes, as well as *Elemental Adaptation*.

## Henchmen

Lacking a mortal populace to draw from, the Exalted of Faror must use the Dragon-Blooded version of this Background, found in *Dreams of the First Age: Lords of Creation*. Thus, they must possess at least Rating 2 if they possess this Background at all.

## Manse

Farorans must purchase this Background (and justify it) if they want a Manse or hearthstone they can freely use for their own ends. Otherwise, they are perhaps better served by the Legacy Background (see below).

## Retainers

Faroran characters must purchase the "supernatural creatures" version of this Background, found in *DotFA:Lords of Creation*, representing other Dragon-Blooded or elementals. The character must therefore purchase this Background at at least level 3, for two such retainers. Starting characters are unlikely to possess it.

### Crazy Beasts

Yes, the Faroran version of the Familiar Background could allow a character to start the game with a superintelligent fire-breathing kung fu tyrant lizard loyal only to them. Or, for just one bonus point, a normal tyrant lizard with Intelligence 2 and, oh... a pair of horns? And this is, indeed, *totally bonkers*.

But there are factors to consider before balance can be totally written off as a loss.

For a start: what do you do with them? The Background can provide large, impressive creatures easily, but the trouble then is that they're large and impressive, and it's not practical to bring them everywhere. Even animals that are smaller will draw attention when they're covered in armour plates and can fly. And still, the character's Familiar must be compared to the dangers that Exalted usually face. Whereas Allies allows a player access to aid from beings who are far more powerful than themselves, a Familiar purchased using this version of the Background, even at the full rating of 5, is not much of a match against Exalted of any significant experience.

## Whispers

Having become closer to Gaia, her servants begin to hear her distant song, the essence to which all Creation dances. Most Farorans only hear it in their hearts, not consciously recognizing it save for brief forgotten moments in their dreams, but those who make the effort to learn can hear and even understand the distant words. The music is the sound of every instrument, every human or animal noise. Wind blowing, water flowing, stone grinding, leaves rustling or fire crackling; all things have their own voice. This great chorus rises and flows together to sing the song of Aether, the Breath of Creation, the Voice of Aa, and that voice can sing of anything through which Gaia's essence flows. Those who listen can gain knowledge, peace, and fortitude; its tone can suggest the moods of other creatures, or even carry brief notes of the future plucked on the strings of the Loom of Fate.

This Background functions mechanically in the same way as the Whispers Background given in MoEP: Abyssals, but is thematically opposite: It guides characters to protect and nurture Creation, and offers reassurance and serenity. Those who possess Whispers at a rating of 4 or 5 are quite rare, and gain much esteem in Faroran society. It has an additional ability to let the character know automatically when and how far they stray from Creation, but the character's rating drops by one for every "step" away they are from Gaia's body, like so:

[Creation > Shadowland/Bordermarches > Underworld/Middlemarches > Labyrinth/Deep Wyld/Cecelyne > Mouth of the Void/Pure Chaos/Malfeas/Autochthonia]

## NEW BACKGROUNDS

### Legacy

Faror's mountains throng with Demesnes, left behind by powerful Terrestrials who, when they felt their bodies finally beginning to age, allowed their elemental power to burst free from their bodies and become one with Gaia. Because the ranks of the Goddess' clergy hold dozens of geomancers with Exalted skill, all of these sacred memorial places can have their power harnessed. The resultant hearthstones are carried by the descendants of those whose deaths fueled their creation, held as holy relics of ancestors who attained ultimate enlightenment.

The result of this is that any Faroran character has access to a wealth of hearthstones, exceeding the amounts carried by other Exalts, and is probably attuned to every

Manse to which they can claim a family connection; the majority of them, in other words, since Faroran bloodlines are so interconnected. The downside, however, is that Farorans consider such hearthstones to be holy relics. Hearthstones gained with this Background must be treated with the utmost respect, which means:

- 1) They must not be placed into any magitech device, nor any other object of unholy origin (i.e. necromantic or malfean artifacts).
- 2) None must be damaged or lost.
- 3) The character should show appropriate care (i.e. keep them clean, carry them in a secure fashion, ritually pay respects every night, etc.).

If the character transgresses, and anyone finds out, the character will lose this Background; their relations (if they're lucky) or the Priestesses (if they're not) will eventually turn up to admonish them and confiscate these hearthstones. Additional punishments may also be given, depending on the depth of the offense. Of course, much like the Manse Background used by Dynasts, these hearthstones belong to one's family, and the character may need to give them up to others who have greater need.

This Background also grants attunement to Manses, but most such places in Faror are designed to emulate nature as closely as possible and are not much use for habitation. This Background can only provide access to Terrestrial hearthstones.

x - The character can borrow a single 1-dot hearthstone, from the Manse of a direct ancestor.

● - The character has two dots worth of hearthstones available, two rated one or one rated 2, from the Manses of his direct ancestors.

● ● - The character has four dots' worth of hearthstones, perhaps one of which is rated 3, and is attuned to many of his ancestors' memorial-manses.

● ● ● - Six dots' worth of hearthstones, with one rated 4 if desired. The character can draw power from most of his ancestors' ancient Manses.

● ● ● ● - Eight dots' worth of hearthstones, one of which may be a powerful 5-dot gem. The character has been allowed to attune to the Manses of even his most honoured ancestors.

● ● ● ● ● - The character could festoon themselves with Ten dots' worth of hearthstones, if the need were great enough. His family has a surprisingly high level of enlightenment, and paying respects to all those ancient heroes can take days.

## Worth

Populated entirely by Exalted, with the majority of mundane materials easily obtained and magical materials too useful to remain in circulation, Faror defies the utility of a normal currency system. At one time, every individual was judged on their contribution to the community by the Priestesses, and allowed an appropriate amount of goods and services for themselves in return. Keeping the records of this was a full-time, troublesome job, normally foisted off on novice or apprentice Priestesses, but a few hundred years ago a magical currency was developed when an Earth Aspect called Klianadd invented "debtstones". These small gems, attuned to a great array of shining crystalline banks hidden and protected by the clergy, glow according to the amount of essence in their owner's "account". New stones are attuned with the one-time expenditure of one mote. From then on, by touching another debtstone (whose owner must willingly permit the transaction), it can shift the bank's essence-currency from one individual to another; the amount of essence in a debtstone can be judged by the strength of its light. A Faroran normally wears their crystal on a long necklace or bracelet.

This Background works in exactly the same way as the Resources Background as a representation of a character's wealth, except that it is one dot "higher": Worth 3 can buy goods of the Resources 4 level, and so on. It also gives the character a debtstone and acts as a rough estimation of a character's social status in the Valley. This makes it easy for a character to bring a large amount of "wealth" to bear

quickly; they are not easily stolen, either, as only an attuned character can control them. Of course, they're useless for dealing with anyone who doesn't have one themselves.

x - The character's debtstone is dark. Other Farorans are likely to see them as a selfish layabout, and they survive off the charity that Gaia, in her generosity, decrees be provided to all her servants.

● - The character's debtstone glows dimly. Their crystal gains enough essence from their work that it can be used to buy enough to live off, though the character's life has no luxury by Faroran standards. Other Farorans see the character as somewhat lazy.

● ● - The debtstone glows steadily. The character can live a simple but pleasant life, with occasional luxuries.

● ● ● - The debtstone glows brightly enough read by if held close. The character's crystal has enough motes to regularly purchase high-quality goods and services. They are seen as generous or hard-working, or provide something which is much in demand.

● ● ● ● - The debtstone shines like a lamp. The character can occasionally contract crafters to make unique artifacts for them, and probably provides a very valuable and rare service.

● ● ● ● ● - The debtstone blazes with light. The character is probably an elder Priestess, is an esteemed master of their field or has performed some vital task for whole Valley, and can purchase almost anything that Faror's Exalted inhabitants can provide.



## **It's the economy, stupid**

Some readers may be wondering exactly how a society formed entirely of Dragon-Blooded works. Wealth is linked to social standing, but there's space given for a free market. Everyone is so skilled that their time would be wasted on basic labours like farming food and making shoes. What is the currency based on? Are they capitalist, or communist, or what? How can they function, as a self-contained nation?

The first thing to understand is that every aspect of Faror is overseen by the Priestesses. They ensure that things go right by guiding the events that lead to potential problems: and, if that doesn't work, they *make* things work. Perhaps someone is well-liked, loyal to the community and dutiful in their labours, but through fortune, choice of profession or other circumstances aren't as wealthy as would be appropriate to such social standing? They might find that their accounts are, inexplicably, a little more full than they thought they were going to be. On the other hand, perhaps someone is being a little too slick, a bit too uncaring in dealing with their fellow farorans; or perhaps they're showing a little too much resistance to certain traditions, acting contrary to how everyone's supposed to behave. Such individuals may discover the universal truth that one often ends up with less funds than anticipated. In either case, investigation - which will only happen through inquiries made to the Priestesses, as the reserves themselves are hidden for security - will turn up purely legitimate reasons why one's finances turned out the way they did. Of course, being Dragon-Blooded, people caught on the wrong side of this system are unlikely to be stupid, and it's certainly possible to complain.

Provided, of course, that one is brave enough to issue a complaint regarding a tight-knit group whose most powerful members are Elder Exalted with access to sorcery and Charms far more powerful than one's own, and who live close enough that they could be knocking on one's door in a matter of hours. It seldom comes to that, but it remains that the Priestesses are the both the most influential group and the most powerful individuals in Faror.

The question that follows from that, of course, is whether the Priestesses are corrupt. The answer is: sort of, and sort of not. There's a reason why Gaia chooses her clergy solely from those whose personal Motivation is to serve her. Priestesses in the position of taking financial advantages for themselves to begin with will also be canny enough to recognize how such behavior could backfire against their Goddess' interests, and restrain themselves out of devotion to her. It helps that the effects of Communion, which Priestesses feel most strongly, enhance the urge to serve Gaia before anything else. However, that in turn means that they would feel no compunction against twisting the system for the ultimate benefit of their primordial Mother. Fortunately, Aa, the Elemental Dragon of Aether, keeps watch over the Priestesses; possessing ultimate dominion over thought and dreams, she helps balance the unwise fanaticism of some Priestesses against more long-term needs by issuing divine guidance. This keeps the Priestesses from being blatantly unfair to Gaia's other Servants... for the most part. Occasionally some troublemakers get what they deserve, maybe someone who's been unfortunate gets a helping hand, and perhaps now and then a highly regarded member of society might receive extra consideration for use of a particular artifact or to become the first spouse for a young Terrestrial. There's little enough harm in that.

So how do Dragon-Blooded get any grunt work done? Surely the Chosen of the Dragons do not till fields, scrub floors or muck out stables? Actually, they do. The Servants of Gaia are not the sons and daughters of the Realm, nor the dedicated soldiers of Lookshy; neither are they like the outcastes strewn across Creation, surrounded by their lessers wherever they go. Neither they nor their ancestors ever rose up against those they had claimed to serve: not once have they ever claimed to guide and protect the world by their own right, nor do they ravage the natural world from which their powers come to serve their own petty human desires. Gaia's Servants have a culture of humility, prizing their own willingness to do jobs that their cousins would consider to be beneath them. There is enlightenment and peace in providing the basic needs of society, just as Gaia herself provides the primal necessities of food and water to all life. But the Dragon-Blooded of Faror do not scorn their own gifts. With the aid of summoned elementals, food can be grown swiftly and bountifully: with Charms developed for the purpose, simple objects can be fabricated from elemental essence. The arrogant scions of the shogunate, who wear false mantles of authority like children in their parent's clothes, would not even think to wield their powers to such common good.



## Humility

Sorcery is the power of the primordials, the force that created reality. All essence-using beings can develop some faculty for the art, if they have the will, but it is an act of hubris. That power is not theirs, and some deep part of the world, a part of their own souls, rebels against their arrogance, forcing them to diminish themselves through the Trails of Sorcery before they can begin to command such eldritch forces. Gaia, however, has revealed to her followers a path to overcoming this innate resistance. By surrendering the idea that they are sole masters of their own magic, and wielding their spells in the name of a being who rightfully commands that power, a sorcerer can realize the instinct for sorcery that dwells within all primordial-created beings and learn spells with much greater ease and speed.

Each dot in this Background reduces the cost and training time required to learn sorcery spells, but carries penalties to resist serving their patron's interests. This Background is intended for servants of Gaia, but Storytellers may also rule its application for characters who serve other primordial beings. Whatever the source, a character who ever uses spells against their patron's interests (or performs any great act of rebellion) will lose the benefit of this Background until they redeem themselves in suitably epic fashion. The Storyteller may also penalize characters for behaviour inappropriate to the Background by lowering the character's rating the next time they try to learn a spell. Characters who possess this Background at the 4 or 5 rating can forego the Trails of Sorcery completely, but such characters will also completely lose their spellcasting abilities should they transgress.

- - -1 to xp cost and -1 day/circle to training time. -1 MDV to resist serving patron.
- - -2 xp/-1bp, -2 days/circle to training time. -2 MDV to resist serving patron.
- - -3xp/-1bp, -3 days/circle to training time. -3 MDV to resist serving patron.
- - -4xp/-2bp, -4 days/circle to training time. -4 MDV to resist serving patron.
- - -5xp/-3bp, -5 days/circle to training time. -5 MDV to resist serving patron.

## Character Creation Summary

### Step 1: Character Concept

Choose concept, elemental aspect and Motivation. Priestesses must have a Motivation that reflects dedication to Gaia. Note aspect's anima powers.

### Step 2: Choosing Attributes

As other Dragon-Blooded (7/6/4).

### Step 3: Choosing Abilities

Note Aspect Abilities. Select Favoured Abilities (3; may not be the same as Aspect Abilities).

Choose Abilities (35 - at least 12 must be from Aspect or Favoured Abilities; at least one dot must be in each Favoured Ability; none may be higher than three without spending bonus points). Characters raised in Faror must all have a *minimum* of Lore 2, Occult 2, Awareness 1, Integrity 1, Athletics 1, Survival 2.

- In addition, female characters must have a minimum of Craft (any one) 2, Performance 1, Medicine 2, Socialize 1 and Bureaucracy 1.

- Male characters must have a minimum of Archery or Thrown 1, Martial Arts or Melee 2, War 2 and Stealth 2.

- Priestesses of a rank higher than Novice, in addition, must have a minimum of Lore 3, Occult 3, Awareness 2, Performance 2, Presence 1 and Integrity 2.

### Step 4: Select Advantages

Choose Backgrounds (10 - none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points), Charms (Faroran characters all start with Elemental Concentration Trance and Expression of Will, to which they add 7 Dragon-Blooded Charms, 4 of which must come from Aspect or Favoured Abilities. Faroran sorceresses can swap one Charm for two Spells if they possess the Humility Background at 3 or more.), and Virtues (5 - none may be higher than 3 without bonus points).

### Step 5: Finishing Touches

As for other Dragon-Blooded, save the following.

All Faroran characters have Legendary Breeding, as described above.

Also, Faroran characters have access to mutations through various methods. Such mutations are simply purchased directly with bonus points for a cost equal to the mutation's point cost; however, the character must have the appropriate Backgrounds (as decided by the Storyteller) to justify how they received such difficult alterations. The most common such mutation is Elemental Adaptation: Wood.

Priestesses gain the Priest Merit when they become Adepts, which applies to Gaia, Luna or to any spirit which is loyal to the Elemental Dragons.

15 Bonus points are available to be spent at any time.

# COMMUNION

## **The Nature of Enlightenment**

Gaia, the Mother of All Life, is the most benevolent of all primordials, and the one whose nature resonates most strongly with mortal creatures. Alone of her kin, the things of Gaia tend to be beautiful to human eyes, not horrifying or alien. Created to dwell in a world connected to her, the beings of Creation were designed to find peace and wholeness in her beneficence. But she is still a primordial, a being who transcends base reality. Mere mortals cannot hope to even glimpse comprehension of their ways. Only the Solar Exalted of the First Age were ever able to come close to true understanding of such cosmic entities, and in so doing, perhaps became a little less human than they needed to be. The followers of Gaia, though they enjoy her favour, are no exception.

As a human soul is exposed to Gaia's essence, it naturally begins to grow and evolve, as does all life. This brings many benefits, as any primordial power will do, but such potency has its drawbacks. As one approaches union with the spirit of Creation, an individual cannot also retain that which sets them apart. Not only does a servant of Gaia develop nature's aversion to the unnatural, but they also eventually lose their own individuality and drive, becoming as much an extension of their Goddess' will as a demon is of their Yozi master. This phenomenon is known as Communion.

The Faroran's closeness to Gaia allowed her to perceive the shadow of the Great Curse on their souls, but she mistook the mad passion for a flaw in their blood, caused by the taint of the Wyld on her elements. By risking the ire of the gods and surreptitiously Exalting a number of heroic mortals afresh, as had been done with the first Dragon-Blooded, Aa and the other Elemental Dragons succeeded in introducing uncorrupted bloodlines to those of their Mother's favoured servants, and bred the Great Curse into dormancy. Gaia failed, unfortunately, to realize the full extent of her fallen siblings' legacy. For all her primordial power, she lacks the skill to work any similar feat with Celestial Exaltations.

## **Mechanics**

Communion comes in two types: temporary Communion and permanent Communion. Both are marked on a track of 10 boxes in the same way as Limit and Resonance. Characters gain a point of temporary Communion when they spend a dot of willpower to channel a Virtue, when they attune to an uncapped Terrestrial Demesne, when they follow the urges of their Whispers and when they

use or are affected by certain Charms and Spells. They lose a point of temporary Communion when they reject the guidance of their Whispers and when they spend a dot of willpower to suppress a Virtue. They lose one point for every week they spend outside Creation (one per month in a place that borders Creation, such as a shadowland), and lose a number of points decreed by the Storyteller should they perform acts that run counter to Gaia's nature (such as massive killings, shutting themselves off from all social contact, etc). Characters may deliberately attempt to reduce their Communion by busying themselves in a city or other unnatural location for a week, then spending a dot of temporary willpower and rolling their Conviction: each success removes one level of temporary Communion, but if they fail the roll, their short period of separation causes an increased hunger for the purity of nature, and they gain a level of Communion.

Temporary Communion gives a character bonuses to dice pools related to Genesis-craft, geomancy, social rolls involving natural creatures (including many Genesis-creations), Medicine and Survival. It inflicts penalties to create or work with Magitech and to social rolls (except intimidation) involving unnatural creatures (beings of the Underworld, Malfeas or Autochthon, or magitech automatons). The size of the bonus/penalty relates to the level of Communion possessed, as listed below alongside other effects. The effects of temporary Communion are subconscious; the character is likely not to be aware of the changes, as the behaviour feels perfectly natural.

## **Permanent Communion**

Rather than occurring naturally, characters develop permanent Communion by meditating on their connection to Gaia, realizing and accepting its benefits and drawbacks consciously. Every dot of permanent Communion requires a week of meditation in an uncapped Demesne and 3xp (1bp) to purchase, after which it cannot be lost; once one's self is shed, it cannot be regained. Each point of permanent Communion fills a level on the character's Communion track, so temporary Communion will also cause a greater effect than before. The benefits of Permanent Communion are as follows:

1) Awareness of their increased or decreased faculty for dealing with certain beings creates a basic form of perception. A character with enough Permanent Communion to take a penalty when dealing with unnatural creatures is able to recognize their discomfort when it is in effect. Supernatural stealth that specifically places an Illusion or Compulsion on the observer can overcome this. This ability does not give any clue to the

## Rating

**0-2**

No change.

**3-4**

The character is visibly in tune with natural environments, and her tastes in colours and clothing reflect a shift in her personality towards warmth and harmony; however, in drawing closer to the essence of untamed nature, she also becomes less capable of restraining herself. Dice bonus/penalty is 1. Add one die to all Virtue rolls when the character attempts to act against them.

**5-7**

Dice bonus/penalty increases to 2. The character radiates a sense of closeness and benevolence, and perceives all the most beautiful aspects of nature around her. She instinctively regards spirits, elementals and other non-human sentient beings as equal to humans for the purposes of Compassion, and gains a 1-dice bonus to all Compassion rolls. She gains a magical Intimacy towards protecting and nurturing Creation in its natural state. She feels uncomfortable in unnatural settings, however: in Autochthonia, Malfeas, the Underworld, a shadowland, or a city built without consideration for geomancy, she adds one to the difficulty to regain Willpower after waking from sleep.

**8-9**

Dice bonus/penalty increases to 3. The character practically glows with the essence of Life, seeming healthier and more graceful, appearing brighter and more colourful. In natural settings, the world seems an extension of her being. Elementals become friendlier, reducing their MDVs by one to oppose the character's wishes; wild animals feel easy in her presence, feeling no fear and offering no hostility. The character now considers all natural creatures worthy of Compassion equal to that owed to a fellow human being, and their bonus to Compassion rolls increases to 3 dice. The character's Intimacy towards Creation is upgraded, becoming a second Motivation to protect and encourage Creation's natural state. The character's discomfort with unnatural surroundings increases: this adds to the difficulty of rolls to regain Willpower by 2 in such places, and they must succeed at an appropriate Virtue roll every day to stop themselves trying to leave as soon as possible. The abundance of living essence in the character's body grants them a 1-die bonus to all Dexterity- and Stamina-based rolls.

**10**

The character is overwhelmed by the incredible beauty and unity of Creation, and the wonderful breathing essence that embraces her soul. The character's original Motivation becomes an Intimacy, replaced by the imperative to protect and serve Gaia's interests, and remains so for as long as the character stays at this level of Communion. Animals native to Creation gather around the character to bask in her presence, and actively defend her from harm. Dice bonus/penalty increases to 4. The character adds mines, large-scale constructions and similar affronts against the natural state of Creation to the list of places where she suffers penalties for unnatural surroundings, and treats any mental influence to help maintain or protect such places for its own sake as an unacceptable order. Natural places (such as forests, swamps, deserts, mountains and especially Demesnes) now receive equal consideration for the purposes of Compassion as people do. The character now automatically succeeds at all Compassion rolls, and is unable to suppress her Compassion except for reasons that are also Compassionate; love for Gaia trumps all other forms of Compassion. Her bonus to Dexterity and Stamina rolls increases to 2, and spreads to enhance Appearance as well.

character of an unnatural being's identity, just that they are not "right".

**2)** The dice bonuses offered by temporary Communion become full increases. In other words, the character does not simply add dice to rolls with (for example) their Compassion for high levels of Communion: their Compassion (and Dexterity, Stamina, Appearance and so on) are permanently increased. One significant effect of this is to raise limits on Artifact production and Manse design: a character with Occult, Lore, Craft (Genesis) and Medicine 5 can normally create Genesis-Artifacts up to only level 3, but if they have four levels of Permanent Communion, their limit increases to Artifact 4. The same again for designing Manses. Of course, this permanence also applies to the penalties inflicted by Communion.

**3)** The character's humanity becomes less certain: the human form is derived from the Jadeborn, who are beings of Autochthon. When the character's anima power activates, the character's body floods with Gaia's essence and is altered to a shape more in tune with her nature. This change in shape takes five ticks to fully manifest but does not count as an action or a charm use, and lasts one scene; if the character wishes to activate their anima power without changing shape, they must spend a dot of willpower to suppress it. Every level of Permanent Communion gives the character one mutation point to use in designing their character's alternate form; at low levels, these mutations are simply elemental in nature, but at high levels the character evolves a draconic appearance. This alternate form is set and can only be redesigned when the character gains a new level of Permanent Communion.

**4)** The character's increasingly primordial nature protects her from external Shaping effects, including Wyld mutation. Every two levels of Permanent Communion adds 1 automatic success to her rolls to resist such effects or adds one to the difficulty of rolls to target her with such effects. The character can choose to willingly accept transformations. It also causes her to gradually fade from Fate, similarly adding 1 to the difficulty of all rolls to detect or affect her destiny for every two levels of Permanent Communion.

**5)** At Storyteller discretion, other varieties of benefits and drawbacks may apply. The character may feel flashes of

Gaia's emotions, thoughts and memories (though this is better represented by the Whispers Background), or find themselves more noticeable to other primordial beings. Characters with very high levels of Permanent Communion may be followed by visible signs of their connection to the Mother of All Life, such as flowers turning to face them or small plants growing from barren earth in their footsteps.

### **Communion Break**

Normally, Communion (temporary or permanent) only goes up to 10. However, Charms and Spells that add temporary Communion can add up to 5 extra levels above this limit. The character suffers no extra effect up to that point; however, when they gain Communion that would put them beyond a rating of 15, they suffer **Communion Break**. The Storyteller immediately selects one of their Intimacies and replaces it with another that is broader and more appropriate to Gaia's ideals and goals. Their Communion rating is then reset back to 10.

Such Intimacies tend to be vaguely related to their predecessor ("my family" may become "humanity"; "Fighting the Fair Folk" may become "Fighting the Wyld"), but they themselves can be replaced again with even broader Intimacies (so "humanity" becomes "living things" and "fighting the wyld" becomes "fighting threats to Creation"). Characters may counter this process by spending experience and appropriate time to build new Intimacies. However, for those who are particularly egregious, the Storyteller may eventually declare they are too far gone and give them the supernaturally reinforced Intimacy to "Gain Permanent Communion", which they will then be forced to do whenever their Motivation and experience point reserves permit them. Only effects which break all unnatural mental influence can cure them of this compulsion.

Once they then reach Permanent Communion 10, they lose their original Motivation completely and will have become nothing more than an extension of Gaia herself, with only their appearance and memories to offer any semblance of the individuality they once had. Thus, the Storyteller may assume control over them whenever they wish, and may well rule that they are no longer a playable character.



# MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

*Once, there was a maiden, who was a song.  
Like all songs, she had a dance in her heart.  
Her brother, the king, wanted to see the dance,  
So all the siblings built a stage.*

*She sang, and danced.*

*The music danced to her.  
She existed in her song  
As her song existed for her.*

*As her feet hit the stage,  
The music beat like a drum,  
And became Earth.*

*As she leapt,  
The music soared higher,  
And became Air.*

*As she fell to the Earth,  
The music flowed around her,  
And became Water.*

*As she turned,  
The music died, and lived again,  
And became Wood.*

*As she rose,  
The music blared with passion,  
And became Fire.*

*Its sparks rose into the Air,  
Carried by the music,  
And lit the dance.  
Which shone, and became the Sun,  
The Moon, and the Stars.*

*And she stopped.*

*"Why are you still?"  
Her brother asked.  
"The song still plays."*

*"If the dance goes on," she said,  
"The dance, then, will end.  
The music will end."*

*She spread her arms to catch their eyes.  
The music that sung the elements  
Is a shimmering cloth.  
"These are my children," she says.*

*The maiden is a mother.*

This is the story told to Faroran children about how Gaia and the other primordials created the world. As they get older, of course, they question the inconsistencies in it. If she stopped dancing, how is it the dance goes on as well? How is the song supposed to be Gaia herself and just something she's wearing at the same time? What is the business about the stage supposed to be? If the dance is going on anyway, why can't she dance the part she hadn't done yet? How could she omit that part anyway, if the whole song was her existence begin with?

The short answer, of course, is that it's all metaphor. The somewhat longer answer is that it's metaphor about events that were carried out by primordials, beings whose deeds are difficult to describe in mortal words, and that those events took place before there were really any such things as "events" or "places". What the story does is give a general sense of the nature of the beings and actions involved. And, of course, it is another piece of lore that points to the primacy of Gaia in all things and the connection she has to every part of Creation.

And that's what's important.

## **THE CULT OF GAIA**

The worship of Gaia goes back past the history of humanity, extending into the barest whispers of myth that reach from before the First Age. Faror is the last place in Creation where her cult resides in any strength, and this chapter describes that religion, exploring its tenets, beliefs and practices. It also describes the Priestesses of Gaia: their organization, training, lives and traditions, as well as the mysterious powers their Goddess has granted them. Because Faror is a theocracy, many aspects of governance and history are also tied tightly to these matters, and so are detailed in the following pages. Finally, it introduces the Aether, the First Element.

### **The Nature of Life**

Life creates life.

All living things dream, feeding off the potentiality of the Wyld that lies dormant beneath reality. Luna gathers these dreams together, creating pools of thought connected to the greater dream-world. As these fill, they overflow and join together, like joining to like, and spill across the dreams of other living creatures as they sleep, collecting as they go the parts that define them. Drifting in and out of the dreams of beasts, they take on their shape, give them motion and vitality, and carry a part of each life back with them. They strive and feed until, in time, these living

dreams gain such mass that they collapse in on themselves, crystallizing into the form of a soul. Some are drawn into the world, joining with the essence of Creation to become elementals and small gods; some become human souls and are drawn to the cycle of reincarnation. Through each successive life they pass, guided by destiny, spiraling upwards in purity and strength, struggling against the pull of the mundane. If they persist past the lures of the Underworld or Oblivion, they become strong souls, heroes' souls with mighty destinies, fit for Exaltation. And, if this last stage is passed, they transcend mortality, and become one with the greatest soul, of Gaia herself.

This flow of souls sustains and strengthens Gaia. In turn, the stronger she is, the more her Dragons can give motion and vitality to the world to which she is bound. Stone becomes more durable, rivers purer, wind fresher, flames hotter, and grass greener. More living things are born, and they dream. And the cycle begins again.

### **The Primacy of the Goddess**

The Cult of Gaia is probably the closest thing in Creation to a monotheistic religion. Technically, the Dragon-Blooded are the servants of the Elemental Dragons, but they in turn are but servants of Gaia; thus, the Terrestrial Exalted owe their ultimate loyalty to her. To the Farorans, all the gods, too, are simply her servants, or at least that's how it should be. When Gaia allowed the gods, and her brother Autochthon, to war against her other siblings for the good of her children, the Unconquered Sun decided that, by virtue of his perfection (and since his Exalted had won the conflict), he was rightfully the lord of the world. Knowing that opposing the Sun could only break Creation further, Gaia gave him his victory, and humbly stepped back to watch the world go on.

But when the Sun's Chosen began to endanger the world, and the Sun's bright eyes were clouded, she began to become wary. That was when she sent her servants to revive her ancient faith, secretly imparting knowledge and power to her favoured followers so that, if it came to the worst, they could shield her from the Celestial Exalted. So, then, the champions of the Sun and Stars failed to shoulder the weight of the world, and the First Age ended with the Usurpation. Throughout the Shogunate, the Sidereals and their pawns failed to maintain the strength of Creation, and they and the gods became weaker. The Unconquered Sun and the Maidens turned from the world, and in so doing sadly proved unfit to guide Creation. Now Gaia, attended by Luna and the Elemental Dragons, must put the world aright again and bring it back

## **The Mother's Will**

There are four main commandments ("Streams") of Gaia's Spirit River, which are then interpreted by the Priestesses for the instruction of other Farorans.

### *- Preserve all Life*

On the surface, this is a simple command to avoid killing. In specifying "all", however, it also reminds one that lives must be balanced against each other, and a small amount of life lost must be permitted to protect the larger. Of course, since Gaia herself is Life, it is also a commandment to protect her.

### *- Seek Completion*

The definition of "completion" is the most troublesome aspect of this. The ambiguity of the word - wholeness, fulfillment, contendedness, perfection - is deliberate. Thus this Stream commands several things: that the Servants of Gaia seek their own desires; work to stay healthy and strong; seek to grow and approach perfection; and continue the path of reincarnation towards eventual unity with Gaia herself.

### *- Remember the Strengths of Others*

Basically, this encourages individuals to keep in mind the value of other people. At the same time, it reminds one that, although they may themselves be powerful, there is always someone with strengths they do not possess, and you should heed your superiors. And, again, it is an urging to be cautious around people who possess great strength - like the Solar Exalted. A few Servants of Gaia interpret this Stream as the basis for a system of honour; to remember those who have aided or bested you.

### *- Honour Creation*

This refers both to the world and to the actual act of creating. The first meaning is rather self-evident in its instruction, though it has some space for interpretation. The second is more complex, honoring craftspeople and artists but also encouraging veneration of one's ancestors and, of course, Gaia herself, who created the world. It also has a subtler meaning, carrying a message of historical awareness - the past that creates the future. In that, it reminds one to understand that people are defined by their history and situation.

There are also many lesser Streams, derived from instructions Gaia has given to her Priestesses in other matters, which are prone to changing as time goes on.

to the hands it was made to rest in: those of a primordial.

The Farorans do not accept the Unconquered Sun as Lord of Heaven. He and the other Celestial Gods suffered delusions of grandeur, neglecting their proper duties and thus misguiding their Chosen as to their proper roles. Only Luna - who is correctly subservient to the Mother of Creation - is worthy of true respect, but she and her Exalted are charged with protecting Creation from external threats, not correcting problems within it. The lesser gods have become corrupt without the sun, and Gaia's brothers and sisters - never as loving or wise as she - are now either crippled, sickened beings, maddened by their humiliation at the hands of the gods, or dead and dreaming of oblivion. Even clever Autochthon has fled.

But Gaia remains whole. She retains her primordial authority to command the gods; only the Exalted can oppose her. She seeks the answer to all ills, and it falls to the Servants of Gaia to become many enough, and strong enough, and wise enough, to protect their Goddess from the Chosen of the Incarna when at last she returns.

Only then can Creation truly become the beautiful world of natural vitality and joy that it should always have been.

## **The Voice of the Past**

Yet Gaia is more than all this: she is her servants' afterlife.

Farorans who attain ultimate enlightenment and pass on from this life by using a self-sacrificial Charm, or who achieve ultimate Communion, are absorbed into Gaia herself; their spirit joins to the Dragons that are manifestations of her spirit. Their memories, power and personalities are small compared to her vast soul, but still, they continue to exist as a part of her. When Gaia speaks to her servants, she does so not as a distant deity, but from the close, personal viewpoint of a family elder, befitting her status as Mother of All Life. Thus, in subtle ways, the cult of Gaia is both divine and ancestor worship.

## **Following the Faith**

When Gaia first chose her most faithful servants, she clearly defined the nature of their relationship, swearing a mutual Oath of fealty with them. She would provide her favour, her knowledge, and her power; in turn, they would stand ready to protect her and all her children from any threat, to act for her and to do as she desired in all things. And, so that they could follow her wishes at all times without forever calling on direct guidance, she passed to her Priestesses a set of guidelines and instructions, which form a philosophy called *The Spirit River*. Worship of Gaia

is not just for Terrestrial Exalted, however; in a perfect world, all beings would enjoy the guidance of Gaia's divine wisdom.

### **Base Humanity**

In the eyes of Gaia's followers, mortal humans are essentially children. Once, this was all they could be, but when the old order of the primordials was overthrown, Gaia and the Gods saw fit to permit fragile humans to become something more. Now all mortals can eventually be Exalted, in this life or another; but as they are, they are small, weak and ignorant in comparison to their elders. Unlike their counterparts in the Immaculate Order, however, the Priestesses of Gaia hold that it is in the nature of life to seek eternally for the betterment of their own lot, and that it is a virtue to achieve that. Desire - for food or for wisdom, for death or for faith - is the driving force for all deeds, noble or ignoble, a core aspect of the constant motion and change that characterizes living things. The transition from the common masses to the stature of a heroic soul can occur during one's lifetime, and indeed, is the ultimate goal for any mortal who seeks enlightenment.

But for the majority of humans, it will not be possible. The Priestesses' policy is simply to steer mortals from that which can disturb the cycle of reincarnation (the forces of oblivion and the underworld are most obvious in this, but unenlightened behaviour is also discouraged), while making available the teachings and knowledge that mortals can use to improve themselves. It remains that ordinary humans are not permitted in Faror, however.

### **The Chosen**

The Priestesses' attitude towards the Exalted varies significantly, depending on their type.

Their fellow Terrestrials in the rest of Creation are seen mostly with pity. Divided from Gaia by the religion of the Solars in the First Age, and then made to dance on puppet-strings for the Sidereals, they have become lesser beings, weaker in blood and small in enlightenment. Falsely led to believe they can rule over Creation themselves, they constantly trip over each other as they pursue their own selfish desires. Were Farorans to interact with their cousins, they would likely treat them as adolescents (as Farorans themselves are, after Exaltation but before the rite of passage for adulthood) and attempt to convert them to the veneration of Gaia. Terrestrials with low Breeding would have the most difficulty in such relationships, being treated with pity or even contempt.

Lunar Exalted are held in high esteem, for Luna herself is seen as equal in standing to the Elemental Dragons; essentially, her Exalted are the servants of a servant of Gaia and, as such, are equivalent to the Farorans themselves in holiness and enlightenment. The difference is that they are intended by nature to protect Creation from external threats, while the Terrestrial are intended to maintain Creation from within; this is why Lunars are more powerful and, in balancing that, less numerous. If one takes the view that each Aspect represents a facet of Gaia herself, as many Priestesses do, then Lunars are essentially another Aspect (Some philosophers even say all the Celestial Exalted are such, if one takes the view of the sun, moon and stars beings expressions of another three Elements of Creation). Of course, the Lunar Exalted are more individualistic, more inclined to their own will than the will of a greater being, but such is the nature of the beast-spirit they embody. Sadly, the Lunars suffered terribly in the Usurpation and many of them developed a visceral hatred of the Terrestrial Exalted; for caution's sake the servants of Gaia must carefully gauge an individual Lunar's feelings and trustworthiness before revealing to them the secret of their own existence.

The Solar Exalted were the reason Faror and the other secret places of Gaia's servants were created. The Priestesses teach that the Solars are primarily righteous beings, but are prone to the same temptation of power and hubris that led their patron to take dominion of heaven and earth. And as servants of the Unconquered Sun, they believe in his misguided claim to rulership, thus seeing themselves as rightful lords of Creation in his name; sadly, they do not comprehend that the weight of such responsibility would drive any being less than a primordial to madness, as it clearly did in the First Age. If it were possible to disavow them of this belief in their right to rule and convince them to embrace Gaia's infinite compassion, they would be a mighty force for Creation; but as it stands, they are simply powerful beings, deadly to the enemies of Creation but equally dangerous to the world itself. Their religion does not persecute the Solar Exalted as Anathema, but Farorans are taught to treat them with exceeding caution.

The Sidereal Exalted are known to the Priestesses of Gaia only in what their Goddess has told them; teaching others much about the Chosen of the Stars is difficult. Still, the basics of knowledge about the Sidereal Exalted are known in Faror; that they serve the Maidens, act as go-betweens between Heaven and Creation, employ incredible martial arts, and so on. Originally, the Faroran's religion was vague on them: they were considered as being much in the same



place as the gods themselves, performing a function that helped keep Creation whole. When the Usurpation happened, however - and more, when Gaia revealed that the Sidereals had had their hand on the reins - the Sidereals were vilified by the servants of the Goddess of Life, arrogant puppetmasters who pulled the majority of Terrestrial Exalted away from their true purpose in order to suit their own short-sighted ends.

The Abyssal Exalted are the enemies of Creation and of Gaia, a direct and powerful threat against the primordial herself; any loyal servant of Gaia will attempt to thwart their goals as best they can, perhaps not always considering what exactly those goals are before doing so. Characters with the Faroran version of the Whispers Background can detect Abyssals nearby through the taint of their Resonance with the Neverborn; those with the Abyssal version can, equally, sense characters who have a Communion track. As servants of primordials, however, they may be considered by some more sympathetic Farorans to be pitiable, helpless puppets driven to a form of insanity by their never-dying masters... at least, perhaps, until they actually meet one.

Gaia maintains some small contact with her imprisoned siblings and, so, her servants may become aware of the Infernal Exalted. They, like their pale cousins, would be enemies, even though there are some uncomfortable similarities. The Alchemicals, too, are servants of another primordial, though they perhaps have a better chance to coexist with the Farorans themselves - if they can be convinced to stop plundering for Autochthon those things which rightfully belong to his sister.

## **Spirits**

The gods were once the servants of the primordials, whose duty was to maintain Creation. As one might expect from a group who worship one of those titanic beings, the Farorans are less than enthused that most gods in the Age of Sorrows now think otherwise. On the other hand, many small gods are relatively humble creatures, who seek only to perform their duty and suffer only the failing of having a limited view of the world: just as unenlightened humans may see the world only in the base terms of money, sex and power, so too must spirits make their decisions based on an innately distorted perspective. And gods, for all their power, are not prone to learning new things.

The Priestesses have an advantage over their Immaculate Order counterparts in dealing with the gods: the effects of Communion make them supernaturally sympathetic and

likeable, and at sufficient levels this overpowers the innate disrespect that gods feel for Terrestrial Exalted. The Priestesses often have more success at direct diplomacy with spirits than Dragon-Blooded in the rest of Creation.

Elementals fare better than gods, at least in their reputation: they even get a measure of reverence, born as they are from the essence that forms Gaia's body. Unfortunately for them, although they are respected as servants of the Elemental Dragons, they are clearly defined as lower ranking servants than the Farorans themselves. Summoning Elementals is the most common use for Terrestrial Circle Sorcery among the Priestesses - who, of course, are all sorceresses - and so nearly all these women are in the habit of thinking of elementals as servants, and will likely act that way towards any elemental less than a dragon even if the individual spirit is not currently bound by sorcery. The Priestesses maintain several Cselenite pacts with elementals near the Valley.

Demons are a tricky subject. On the one hand, they are innately hostile to Creation, and many will gladly take the opportunity to vent the anger and shame of their masters with destruction and corruption. But, on the other hand, they are pitiful; they cannot be blamed for the results of their suffering at the hands of the Exalted. Generally, the Servants of Gaia avoid demons entirely: the only ones who actually summon demons with any regularity are the Devotees of Remorse, a society within the Priestesses, who do so for... peculiar reasons.

Gaia's own lower souls, being inhabitants of the Aetherworld, are described in Appendix I. Normal Farorans rarely encounter one; Priestesses preparing to work on a Demense, however, will always contact the kami who is bound to it. A small number of individuals throughout history have had companion kami, as well. For the most part, they are revered enough to be left to their own devices, as is wise.

Ghosts suffer much the same attitude from Gaia's Priestesses as they do from the Immaculate Order; only their religious mandate towards compassion makes them any less unpleasant for a hapless spectre to encounter. Thanks to their conveniently handy Aether Manse, Farorans never become ghosts so long as their bodies are recovered and interred within; exposure to Aether will push all but the most powerful of the restless dead on their way into Lethe. Enough of Gaia's servants are familiar enough with this idea that, if they found themselves returned as a ghost, they would probably attempt to reach the Manse on their own.

# THOSE CHOSEN BY GAIA

## Becoming a Priestess

There are two things required to become a Priestess of Gaia. First, you must be a woman; second, you must be utterly devoted to her. All well and good, any philosopher might say, but how do you measure devotion? Religious orders all across Creation have measured their members' faith with an enormous range of trials, from the kneeling penitents of the Immaculates to the coal-walking cultists of volcano gods. But Gaia... all Gaia needs to do is look into your heart.

During the passage into adulthood, Aa, the First Dragon, watches young Farorans closely, seeing not only their

actions but their emotional response to different situations. She provides visions and Whispers to guide them, and in so doing, draws them spiritually closer to her; the closer they come, the clearer she can see what drives them. And when she sees a young woman who loves her Goddess - more than anything else - she makes it known. The Priestesses who welcome the young Servant of Gaia back to Faror can hear the tone in the music of Creation that sings of Gaia's approval, and understand that the young Exalt is ready to join them. Mechanically, Aa simply sees the Dragon-Blood's Motivation: if their goal is to support Gaia (including such Motivations as "Serve Gaia", "Protect Gaia" or "Bring all Creation to Gaia's service"), then they are taken to become Novice Priestesses. The adolescent Terrestrial themselves do not

### Rank

*Apprentice Priestesses* are considered to still be developing true wisdom, but are stronger, more knowledgeable and more responsible than the Novices. An Apprentice has learned Terrestrial Circle Sorcery and resumed her old identity, and is expected to get married like any other unattached Faroran, but has not yet raised a child of her own to adulthood. She has little authority in most matters, but may be placed in charge of Novices. She must continue to defer to all her elders, but has more leeway to choose her own studies and will be trusted to assist in the older clergy's more supernatural work, perhaps even to take on smaller projects of her own. Apprentice Priestesses may even be sent outside the Valley to provide sorcerous assistance to the Wardens.

*Adept Priestesses* have raised one of their own children to adulthood and, in so doing, experienced all the fears, hardships and rewards of that journey. Only by doing this, the Priestesses say, can one come to really understand a fraction of what Gaia feels for the entire world, and the immense bond that she has to every living creature. This is wisdom, and it is the reason why men cannot join the priesthood. What a father feels for his offspring, while it may be as profound, is simply not the same thing... or so is said. Adepts are fully trained Priestesses and, once raised, take on all the rights and responsibilities thereof and can pursue careers and other ends in their goddess' name.

*Elder Priestesses* have worked hard to prove themselves devoted to Gaia, and she has repaid them with the elevation of the soul that allows them to channel Providence. These women have a legitimate claim to being the most powerful Terrestrial Exalted in Creation: they are capable of reshaping reality on a level equal to Sapphire Circle Sorcery, and have been enhanced by the effects of Communion so as to have a deeper understanding of Genesis, geomancy and the hearts of living creatures than any champion of the Realm. Elder Priestesses, however, spend more and more time contemplating abstract metaphysical puzzles and personal projects, and so put less effort into working on practical things such as building Manses, growing artifacts and so on. This is perhaps just as well; the effects of high Communion also mean that Elder Priestesses can have... strange views on who, or what, deserves their attention.

Finally, the *High Priestesses* are hand-selected from among the Elders (usually) to oversee Faror as a whole and to guide all the Servants of Gaia with their enlightenment and wisdom. When a new High Priestess is selected, it is not a matter for ritual or judgement by her peers: she is seized and lit from within by the bright light of Aether, obviously Chosen. Stopping for nothing else, she starts heading directly towards the nearest Aether Manse. The world itself aids her as she goes: stone walls pull themselves aside and water supports her feet as she crosses rivers and lakes. Once there, she pauses, and closes her eyes; then her body disappears on the spot. Those who have been fortunate enough to observe this gather her fallen belongings with reverence, for they become holy relics. As for the Priestess, Aa takes her away to meet with Gaia herself. When she returns, she has been altered; High Priestesses display many strange abilities that Terrestrial Exalted do not otherwise possess. Taking the shape of animals, causing or curing disease with a word, and reading minds are all historical examples of what they can do. They're not really quite human anymore.

make the choice. Older women who do not become Priestesses can petition to seek Gaia's approval again, but only once every 10 years; since a change in Motivation is a rare and profound alteration of a character's outlook and attitude, most such petitioners fail.

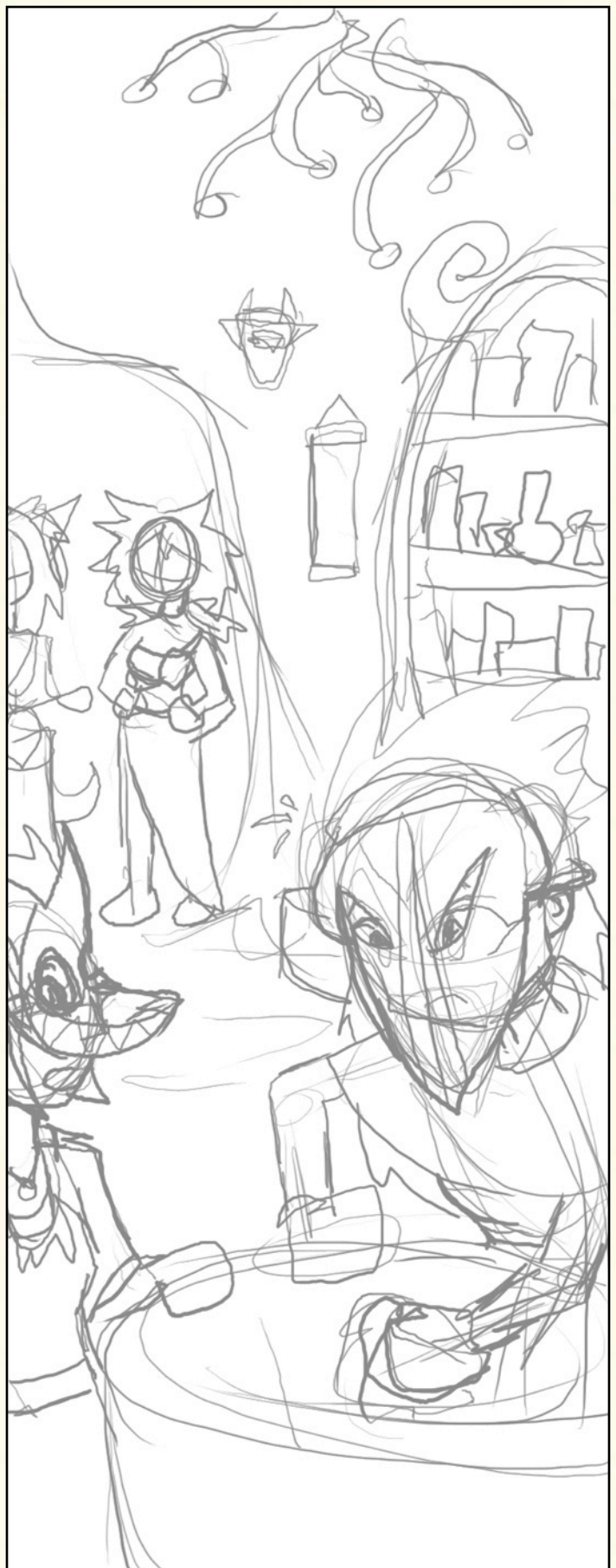
Once accepted, a Novice is taken to the Island, the Aether Manse in the middle of Faror, to begin training. They must drop their identity and take a new name, wearing a mask over their face at all times and often going through a complete alteration of their appearance with the help of exercise, diet and cosmetic alterations. They stay there, possibly for years, until there are enough of them that they can leave the Island without any possibility of their identity being revealed. The reason for all this is security: Novice Priestesses study a lot of secret knowledge, but do not yet have the supernatural abilities that would protect them from skilled persuasion. Removing their identity separates them from the social connections that could be used to lever information from them, and makes them dependent on higher-ranking Priestesses for emotional support, thereby ensuring that an elder woman will almost always be in a position to watch over them. Of course, it also helps implant the idea in their minds of being elevated above other Exalted.

Perhaps to counter this sense of privilege, Novice Priestesses do most of the scutwork amongst Gaia's clergy: they're lucky to be allowed to help with magical craftwork or geomantic projects, instead being more usually engaged in minor but tedious errands and personal service for their elders. They often study many facets of magical practices and religious lore, but the main goal for all Novice Priestesses is to learn Terrestrial Circle Sorcery; once that is done, they may finally drop the mask and reassume their old identity, as Apprentice Priestesses.

## **Practices and Traditions**

Aside from religious law, the Priestesses have a number of traditions of their own.

Originally, Priestesses only wore a mask during their Novice period, and if they kept their mask, it was only as a memento. But when the First Age ended, Gaia's clergy had to change; many would say for the worse, as survival demanded that Priestesses do things that they felt uncomfortable or ashamed to do. For the most part, this change was about combat and killing; before the Shogunate, the priesthood had been very strictly pacifistic, requiring its members to offer no violence under any conditions. But that was not the only shameful thing that they found they had to do.



To understand best, one should hear the story.

Taktinnah, the Deep Oasis, was the secret settlement of the Servants of Gaia near the Elemental Pole of Fire; and Cahlan, their Chieftain, was probably the most renowned man to ever exist as a follower of the Mother of All Life. He was wise, kind, charismatic and strong; a stronger warrior, many say, than any other Terrestrial Exalt to ever exist. But he carried out his life and his duty in a way such that everyone admired him; and the only time he ever failed to obey Gaia's will was, itself, done to serve her interests. When the Usurpation happened, Cahlan was one of those who wanted to take the chance to put the reins of Heaven in Gaia's hands; once they were sure the Solars were gone, he was equally certain not only that they could succeed, but that doing so was the only way to prevent Creation from suffering at the hands of the inept humans who were even less suited to rulership than those they had displaced. But Aa made it clear that Gaia said no. So Cahlan challenged her.

He said that Gaia was afraid. That as a primordial, the ancient past was as a single day gone, that she still feared the Solars and the fate that had befallen her siblings; that it was that fear that made her decision for her. Blasphemy; and yet, Gaia did not reject him. She would not speak to her Priestesses about him, nor did her mark disappear from where it blazed brightly above his heart. Gaia herself, it seemed, was not totally confident in what she wanted. But she had said that her Servants were not to move to take Creation, and she didn't make any motion to cancel that command. When Cahlan went forth with those who supported him, they were only two hours into the desert before they crested a dune and found themselves faced by five women: the High Priestesses of Taktinnah, and each one covering her face.

Cahlan understood. He and his group could have overpowered them, perhaps, but he never gave the order. He simply watched and waited, sadly, and together the masked Priestesses cast a spell that transformed him and his followers to lifeless stone.

Ever since then, the Priestesses of Gaia keep their masks. When they must fight, or do anything else they find distasteful, they put them on, assuming another identity to prevent their own name and face from being shamed in Gaia's eyes. It is a gesture of sorrow and reluctance, but also of determination. In the Age of Sorrows, all the Servants of Gaia know to be wary of any Priestess who wears her mask in such a fashion that it can be quickly moved over her face.

## **Diet**

Aside from a religious stricture against killing, Priestesses tend to develop a deeper emotional aversion to killing animals - and eventually even plants - as they increase their Communion with Gaia. It was only natural that, eventually, they started to stop eating meat; in time, they began to stop eating vegetables as well. Today, Priestesses tend to eat nothing but fruit and dairy products, which are both "intended" to be eaten. Of course, this practice doesn't come from Gaia herself. Humans are hunters and it's natural for them to prey on beasts and harvest plants for food. The Priestesses do not do this because the more enlightened of them feel more comfortable that way, and the younger Priestesses copy them out of respect. This emulation is not any form of social competition...

...And if you believe that, there's some property dealers in Nexus who'd like to talk to you.

## **Sorcery**

The Servants of Gaia have a unique advantage in viewing their sorcery as divine. Throughout the history of other cultures, sorcery has always been a personal pursuit; even in the First Age, when almost every Sorcerer had membership in some academic group, common people still viewed sorcery as strange and, as a result, sorcerers were often naturally reclusive. Even the mighty Solar Sorcerers most often followed the craft for private reasons, seeking new spells for the betterment of their own goals and only rarely sharing their knowledge with others. Sorcery, even at its most respected, was an exercise in personal power, and the Trials of Sorcery naturally gave its practitioners a sense of entitlement to the power they had "paid" for - particularly if their spells were earned through long study, research and personal danger. Reluctance to give such hard-won power away is only to be expected.

In Faror, however, sorcery is a religious experience; all "correct" sorcerous knowledge, it is believed, comes from Gaia (This "correct" style is Salinan Sorcery, but the Farorans reject Salina as its founder and refer to it as Tellurian Sorcery). This makes its practitioners less inclined to be possessive, which when combined with the effects of Communion, the rarity of significant privacy in Faror and the natural co-operation of the Dragon-Blooded, means that those Servants of Gaia who practice Sorcery are much more inclined to share knowledge and work together on the subject. And with co-operative sorcery cast into the mix, Farorans have developed a mental image of sorcery being at its most powerful when sorcerers act in groups, creating an additional social impetus. The upshot

of all this increased socialization, along with the occasional direct guidance from Gaia, is that the Servants of the Mother of All Life have access to a unique applications of Sorcery found nowhere else in Creation today.

**Alchemy Spells** are part of an ancient field of study using Sorcery as a progression of thaumaturgical alchemy, mostly lost to the world due to their strange nature and the more complex information required to use them, and which linger mostly in the remnants of First Age relics such as the Crucible of Tarim. The spells themselves are simply catalysts, each with an accompanying formula of ingredients and preparation methods. They act to draw out and amplify the power of the essence in the ingredients and concentrate them into a new form. The products of such spells tend not to have powers as great as most sorcery of the spell's level, but they are usually contained in a portable and easily used form and, since the spell is only a step in their creation, incapable of being undone by countermagic.

### **Dreamwalking**

In addition to their sorcerous powers, the Priestesses are privy to the secrets of Aa's own Twilight Realm, the World of Dreams. Through the guidance of the Aether Dragon and her servants, they can learn to travel that other world in their sleep... as, in truth, any essence user could. Further information is contained in Appendix I.

### **What do they do?**

As in all religions, the Priestesses of Gaia serve their society as more than mere spiritual liaisons. Priestesses can employ themselves any way a normal Faroran woman can, as performer or architect or farmer. There are also, however, a number of jobs that are almost always carried out solely by Priestesses.

### **Governance**

Because Faror has seldom had a high population, its system of government has been free to stay relatively loose and undefined. There is no formal system for suggesting, debating and ratifying laws; ideas for improvement come up in casual discussion, get passed around, gather information and alterations and social impetus, and build until one of the High Priestesses, or the Chieftain, takes an interest. The Chieftain can suggest the law to the High Priestess of the current season, who can make it part of the lesser Streams that define Faroran law. Other High Priestesses can do the same, or simply wait until their season comes around. This interesting state of affairs means that the laws change, usually in small ways,

### **Providence**

Beyond their permutations of Terrestrial Sorcery, which they share with other sorceresses of Faror, Gaia's priestesses hide a greater power that is reserved only for themselves. Just as Necromancy, taken from the Neverborn, is used now by the forces of death, and as the Alchemical Exalted can use Autocthon's Pattern Weaving, so too do the wisest of these women have Gaia's own unique gift, a power known as Providence.

Providence, though appearing similar to sorcery from the layman's perspective, is fundamentally different in nature, being the practice of channelling Gaia's primordial power. Nor is it, however, a simple prayer-and-respond. First, students must learn "acceptance": in other words, they must become aware of their connection to Gaia, and become capable of giving themselves over entirely to their Goddess' will. This is Providence's equivalent of sorcerous initiation. In casting the Spell, the "Providentress" allows the primordial to reach through and take control over her essence, and performs a "form" - a set of specific, pre-learned actions, often seeming similar to singing or dancing - which helps that essence, formed into a spell by Gaia, to flow through their body and out into the world to take effect. This means that Providence Spells (as they are commonly referred to) appear much like Sorcery or Necromancy Spells, with a very precise set of actions bringing about a slow, powerful, specific result. Gaia requires a lot of essence to work with, however, much more than sorcerers or necromancers need for their Spells; the essence cost of Providence Spells, therefore, is extremely high, so much so that for many users it will be unfeasible to cast them without using co-operative sorcery.

This allows Gaia to wield her power over Creation without returning from her journeys beyond reality, and to do so without alerting the gods to her interference in the domain they've claimed for themselves. In the Loom of Fate, Providence is indistinguishable from sorcery.

Providence is essentially an exercise in supplication, acting as a mere vessel and power source for a much greater being. So, because Gaia has her own nature, it follows certain themes and limitations of its own. It is equivalent to Sapphire Circle Sorcery, but only very roughly. Providence, as well as Alchemy spells and new Charms, are described in more detail in Chapter 4.

every three months. The only way to actually veto (rather than amend) a law is for a High Priestess to claim that it does not serve Gaia's interests, in which case Aa will be contacted directly for a judgement. Bothering one of the Elemental Dragons for such secular concerns is never done lightly.

The Faroran justice system, such as it is, is primitive by the standards of most civilized people: those who transgress against any law are simply judged and sentenced by a council of five Priestesses, one of each aspect. Among them, one will be chosen to be sympathetic to the accused and one to the victim; if possible, they will be family. They conduct the entire trial, discuss, and decide appropriate measures amongst themselves. The only way to oppose their decision is to appeal to the High Priestess who is currently in charge, which of course means that the relative success of appeals changes from season to season based on their personal views on crime. In the case of serious crimes, such as murder, rape, treason or sacrilege, suspects are judged by all the High Priestesses, who use powerful Charms and Spells to divine guilt or innocence. And, of course, the ultimate judge is the primordial Goddess herself, who simply removes the Mark of Gaia from those whom she has rejected. Such poor souls are exiled. Punishments employed by the Farorans are varied, ranging from simple recompense of lost goods with other goods or services, to lengths of indentured servitude, on up to the laying of a magical geas on the perpetrator. Excommunication is always accompanied by exile. Farorans do not practice the death sentence for anything less than crimes against Gaia herself. The definition of such crimes is open to interpretation, however; simply learning Necromancy is one such.

All Priestesses operate off a central supply of funds (symbolically owned by the High Priestesses), into which they donate all their own earnings and receive a stipend for themselves, based on their rank and needs. Priestesses tend to not run low on resources.

### **Counsel**

Whereas the Immaculate Order demonstrates its power through their powerful martial arts, the Priestesses of Gaia rely more on powerful social Charms to maintain their elevated position and to keep the peace. Thus, nearly all Priestesses are adept in such arts, and those that specialize are formidable. Everyone in Faror knows that the Priestesses make it their highest priority to serve their primordial Goddess, and so this endows them with a sort of trustworthiness: not that they have no agenda of their own, but that everyone knows what that agenda is.

Combined with the cultural deference towards them which is ingrained during childhood, and the natural sense of closeness and benevolence granted by high Communion, all this means that when someone in the Valley has a problem, their instinct is to speak to a Priestess about it. A number of the clergy specialize in mental health and provide such consultation full-time, along with other therapies. Those few foreign visitors the Valley has had are often surprised to discover that the closest thing to prostitution among these Dragon-Blooded is actually one such method of treatment, and this is one of few areas where men can have a part in duties normally reserved for the priestesses.

Priestesses are also often much more knowledgeable than normal Farorans on supernatural matters such as gods and geomancy. Almost all projects of any considerable size will have been advised by a Priestess before their completion.

### **Confession**

Gaia's compassion is infinite, her sympathy boundless, and her capacity for understanding without peer. Human beings, even the Exalted, are shaped by their environment; with the world in its unfortunate state, it is only natural that, sometimes, this will cause them to transgress against the proper way of things. When this happens, it is best for these unfortunate individuals to unburden their soul of guilt and seek Gaia's forgiveness, and the way this is done is by discussing one's wrongdoing with a Priestess. In so doing, they may lift the shame from their shoulders, will gain important moral guidance to prevent further incidents, and can be instructed in the proper manner of correcting their error and making reparations.

It also means that the Priestesses know a lot more about what's going on than everyone else.

Confession, for the purpose of surrendering one's personal secrets, is also one of the traditional sacrifices Farorans offer to learn Terrestrial Circle Sorcery.

### **Shamanism**

Finally, like almost all religious orders in Creation, the Priestesses are tasked with the responsibility of mediating between gods and humanity. Fortunately, Faror itself is built in such a way that its spirits are very amicable: the perfected geomancy ensures they have a steady supply of essence, and the aesthetic of Faror, so beautiful to beings born of Gaia, is just as soothing to the gods as it is to mortal creatures. Artworks designed to be pleasing to the eyes of nature spirits are in evidence throughout the



valley, in the form of standing stones shaped as if by wind and rain into wondrous shapes, or fields of flowers that paint spirals of colour across the forest floor. There are even air manses, the sources of winds that blow across Faror, where musicians play songs that please the ears of the gods.

The upside of all this is that the gods of Faror very rarely cause trouble or intrude into the affairs of the Exalted who live there; they are even inclined to be helpful in small ways, manifesting themselves to guide lost children or to provide advice. The downside is that they are, not to put too fine a point on it, quite lazy. The majority of the work the Priestesses do with the spirits of the valley is to keep them doing their duties, to the point where there are always a few groups of Priestesses walking a circuit between the various small spirit courts.

## **Societies**

Like any sizable organization, particularly one made up of Exalted, Gaia's priesthood is divided into several different factions and schools of thought. There is both overlap and antagonism between these various interests; as a whole, however, conflicts tend to play out in a social arena. Because Gaia's clergy develop a spiritual connection to her, many of them take on aspects of her personality as they draw closer to her, and so some of the groups they form can be thought of as representing facets of their primordial Goddess' mind. Or it may just be them: they are, after all, Exalted.

## **Transhumanists**

Humanity was modeled after the perfect form of the Jadeborn, who were the favored creation of Autochthon. In other words, although all living things are her children, the human form was not created by Gaia. It is perhaps little surprising then that, with the mastery of Genesis that she grants to her followers, many of her most fervent Priestesses seek to become something greater than simply human. The most obvious step is to complete the transformation that comes with Communion with Gaia, adopting elemental and draconic shapes into one's own body; those who pursue this path often point to the ancient Dragon Kings, who (having invented geomancy, and who were able to wield the elements) were clearly favored by the Mother of all Life. The natural evolution of elementals into dragons as they grow more powerful is also used as a point in such arguments. Some among the Priestesses, scholars of Creation's prehistory, claim that ancient "primordial dragons" existed in the first days of the world and may have represented some form of ideal or function of life itself.

Some transhumanists believe that all civilization - as brought forth by creatures that are humanoid in shape - is to be cast aside, as hands that grasp and manipulate will only bend Creation further from its natural state. These women seek to transform themselves permanently into animal forms, and a small number of them have succeeded. But then, some have no final shape in mind at all, and seek only to strip the human form from

themselves while making other improvements. Both of these groups are generally seen as extremists.

## **Sleepers**

The women known as Sleepers are those who focus on exploring and using the World of Dreams, which is described in general later in this article and is further detailed in Appendix I. The greatest of them are Priestesses, but there are also many other Farorans who also act together with them, since any essence-channeling being who dreams can learn the Dream Arcanoi which will allow them to exert some control over the twilight realm. They believe that access to the Aetherworld brings them closer to Gaia, and are often disturbingly knowledgeable.

## **Primevalists**

Primevalists take the ideal of the "natural state" to its extremes, and reject civilization. For some, this simply means sleeping outside or gathering food from the wild, trusting Gaia to provide; for the most extreme, it means making no home, using no tools beyond sticks or stones, wearing nothing but painted mud and the detritus of the forest, and not even speaking for anything less than the most urgent matters. Such Priestesses are known to be unpredictable and have strange ideas about morality, often giving the impression of scorn towards or even outright hatred of civilized behaviors, but they are also the most likely to develop secret Spells and Charms known to no one else. Their sorcery often seems to be somehow more powerful, and thus, they are often subtly feared.

## **Devotees of Remorse**

Perhaps more frightening than the primevalists, however, are the Devotees of Remorse. This society is formed of those Priestesses who have become afflicted with their Goddess' shame. In their dreams they see her primordial brothers and sisters suffer in exile, and in the back of their minds they hear her weeping for those that died. Amidst the beauty and richness of nature found in Faror, they are easily spotted by their clothes of black and dark hues that cover them from head to toe. Ranging from merely sorrowful to grim, dour and depressing, they are a living reminder to their culture of that first great crime that all Exalted committed. They don't mind talking about it, either.

The Devotees are the only women in the Valley who regularly summon demons. Driven by the primordial emotions inflicted upon them by their connection to Gaia, they call not only on the infernal creatures of the First Circle, but on the greater souls of her siblings by

using thaumaturgical methods. Occasionally, they even travel to Malfeas itself. Through such means they act as messengers between Gaia and the Yozis, and on her behalf do everything they can - everything, of course, that would not endanger Creation - to make restitution and to heal them of their madness, futile though the effort is. Hence the purpose of the heavy clothes they wear: to hide the various scars they suffer from demonic abuse.

Despite their poor reputation, the Devotees are often valuable for their knowledge of demons, and as individuals tend to be mentally and physically tougher than other Farorans. They are often capable healers, as well, and aren't oblivious to any information about the yozis' doings that they may come across...

## **The Chimera School**

Like any wise Dragon-Blood, the Priestesses recognize the advantage of knowing Celestial Martial Arts. As women, however, the study of supernatural styles is limited by tradition to those Priestesses of the Water Aspect. As well as taking part in the wider culture of martial arts that is dominated by Faroran men, these women also maintain their own small school, teaching the Dreaming Pearl Courtesan style. They consider this style to be closely linked to Aa and to the study of the World of Dreams, which is the domain of the First Element.

## **AETHER**

*Aether is the Breath of Creation. Aether is not real, but all that became real comes from Aether. Aether is everything. Because it is everything, it is not anything, and thus it is nothing. Aether is the dream and the desire to live. Aether is life.*

Before time, the primordials crystallized a portion of the Wyld into a form more suitable to their needs. This portion of not-wyld was pure and clean, but also static, unchanging; a sea of mind with nothing about which to think, without any definition save for what it was not. But when Gaia sang her song, much of this not-wyld woke, and began to dance to her music. It became motion, became sound; became life, thought and the passage of time. And when she danced herself, this ocean of potential shaped itself to match her beauty. It birthed the elements to match those that formed her spirit, and those elements were woven together, as if a garment for the primordial to wear, to form the world.

Aether is difficult to describe. Elder Priestesses of Gaia use the metaphor of a crystal held against the white light of the Unconquered Sun: in passing through the crystal,



the light splits into different colours. None of the new lights are white light; no trace of whiteness can be seen in any colour. But when they come together through another crystal, the white light returns. All of the colours existed in the white light, waiting to be defined, and each colour is a piece of white light; yet white light is not coloured light, and coloured light is not white light. As the white light is to the coloured lights, the Priestess explains, so is Aether to the elements of Creation.

At the behest and guidance of her siblings, Gaia bid Aether to become all things that have form, including the sun, the moon, the stars. Thus, at the beginning of Creation, there existed three elements of the Heavens and five elements of the Earth. But the primordials found that, as the world balanced itself between these extremities, those things that were not purely of one element began to try and regain the unity of Aether; and, failing to attain that purity, they fell instead into the Wyld from whence it came.

But the primordials discovered that, when the elements had combined in very specific ways, the things that combined them would move and strive in time to Gaia's song, becoming alive and able to resist this dissolution. From the inspiration of these Firstborn beings, mortal creatures were crafted of the five Terrestrial Elements; when the primordials combined the three heavenly elements, they found that it, too, created living creatures. Yet they were surprised to discover that all these beings, especially those of the heavenly elements, somehow began to collect essence and create small fragments of Aether in themselves. Those fragments of Aether, to the increasing fascination of many primordials, behaved in a similar manner as their own lower souls. They were thoughts.

Thus, the gods were created.

After toying and experimenting for unrecorded ages, the primordials decided that they wanted rest. From the finest samples of all the elements that existed, the primordials created Yu-Shan, in which Autochthon created the Loom of Fate to guide and define Creation and to remind it that it was not Aether, and for the gods, they combined the three celestial elements and the five terrestrial elements together to form mortal creatures that could think. These small creatures could send their thoughts to the gods in the form of prayer, and thereby sustain the gods' existence. The primordials departed to Heaven, and left the Blessed Isle for the gods to inhabit.

The world was now complete.

But Aether still existed.

## **The Secret of Creation**

The essence of the Wyld is constantly being drawn to Creation. Tiny tendrils of its potentiality and power touch against the minds of living creatures, where it is consumed; under the pressure of their minds' and bodies' elements striving to live, it crystallizes into a fragment of Aether. These fragments of Aether become thoughts, and when creatures sleep, they collect together to become dreams. Rising in a fog of mind, these dreams are gathered by Luna; they grow and flow together, and when their weight becomes great enough, the Silver Lady opens the way to the great sea of Aether that remains from the birth of the world. In this manner, that ocean of essence is fed with a thousand brief streams every night.

In their dreams, all living creatures are connected to this powerful, unreal place, which Gaia's Priestesses refer to as the Aetherworld. Their thoughts and emotions send flickers of form and definition out over its raw potentiality, like the wind blowing across the ocean, creating waves of shape and form over its surface that resemble the waking world. Occasionally, dreamers find their way out of their own dreams through Luna's doors and into this primal realm; if they are fortunate, they do not encounter the more malign of the spirits who can traverse this place, or suffer the attentions of the Fair Folk who hunger to feast upon it. If they have wit as well as luck, and the favour of Aa, they may even find knowledge, here, and more.

The World of Dreams and some of the creatures that reside in it are described, in further detail, in Appendix I.

### **Using Aether**

A large number of Aether Charms are described in Chapter 4. To learn them a character must first have learnt the Aether Initiation Charm, or to be bound to a character who has done so through the Providence Spell *Two Hearts Met*, also described in that chapter.

Faroran characters are required to keep Aether a secret and so generally are expected not to use any Obvious Aether Charms unless it serves Gaia's needs directly (Or in the event that her servants have decided to do away with the whole concealment thing altogether). Aether also reacts very poorly to the essence of the underworld and vice versa; contact will mutually annihilate both, destroying artifacts and draining essence from creatures who use them.

# THE AETHER ASPECT

Aether dreams. From dreams all things are conceived: it is where inventors and artists draw their inspiration, and from which the greatest heroes bring their strength. All things have their place in dreams, including things which have never before been known. To desire is but another aspect of dreaming, and without desire, there would be no motion or change at all: even the Neverborn, who wish only for the cessation of all things, must dream. In dreaming they are driven to act, and in acting one takes on an aspect of life. So too is it with man, beast, god or machine. To live and to dream is one and the same.

The Aether Aspect of the Terrestrial Exalted has been seen in Creation for only the briefest times, when the greatest Priestesses of Gaia, enlightened in essence and wise with years in the arts of healing, take on the *Most Beneficent Seed of the Aether Dragon*. This transformation is a profound spiritual experience, during which one perceives their own connection to the world of dreams and can draw upon what seems a limitless supply of essence. To exist in this way is a struggle, and those who have failed to maintain the balance between dream and reality simply... disappear. Many Priestesses believe that the Lucid Dragons represent the uttermost power for a Dragon-Blooded - Exalted of the Exalted, in a way - and that true, permanent adoption of the Aspect is what awaits should one complete the development of *Transcendant Gaian Harmony*.

For the Chosen of Dreams, there is no stillness save in sleep or death; whether it be slow or quick, they are always in motion. They see permanence - of mountains, of goals, of reality - as an illusion, revealed as falsehoods by the passage of time, merely part of the great cycle of destruction and creation that is life. Their sense of time itself becomes strange, seeing the future and the past as being closer or even as being no distance away at all. They can show any or all of the personality traits of the other Aspects, being as certain as Earth, driven as Fire, mercurial as Water, as lofty as Air or as caring as Wood. They may show none of these characteristics. But they are always driven to protect and nurture those things born of Gaia.

**Aspect Markings:** Because all known Aspects of Aether have been merely a temporary transformation, their markings have been difficult to pin down. The most noticeable is that they have no shadow, and that when they expend essence, they take on an inner luminescence. If a true, permanent Chosen of Dreams existed, they would have a sense of lightness and the unreal about them, and have a variety of the strange characteristics that one might expect from a creature of dreams, some of which may even qualify as mutations. Aether Aspects always appear beautiful, however, with a minimum of Appearance 3.

**Aspect Anima:** The anima banner of an Aether Aspect is a dancing, spinning torrent of yellow-white essence, accompanied by the sound of music which compliments the mood of its originator; when other Terrestrials nearby are also showing their anima, the sounds they make become part of this symphony. At the totemic level, various images and shapes take form in the surging field of energy, but these images reflect the mind of the observer, drawing from their memories and dreams, and never appear the same to any two people.

At a cost of five motes, the Aether Aspect can open the gate to Gaia's heart that rests at the centre of all living beings, allowing them to draw on the essence of the entire world - so long as they continue to move and strive. For the rest of the scene, the Dragon-Blood regains a number of motes every tick equal to the level of stunt they achieved on their last action.

Note that Aether Aspects do not need to pay any elemental surcharges, even for Aether Charms.

**Aspect Abilities:** Should a true, permanent Aspect of Aether ever exist, they would consider all Abilities to be Aspect Abilities.

**Associations:** The colour yellow, the Maiden of Hours, the coming season and the upward direction.

**Sobriquets:** The Chosen of Dreams, Lucid Dragons, Children of Aa.