

Bark at the Moon - 06/19/09

This Week's Recap

The group journeys towards the border of Creation on their way to the Jade Obelisk. With Darik at their side they move unerringly towards their goal, always aware of the shifts and changes in the Wyld nearby. They cover ground fast as each has an owl's form in their repertoire, with only Darik's not being that of a strix.

In one of many small villages near the rim they come across a woman in her best "Sunday go to church" dress debasing herself by a well, as a few men look on. One of the men tears a piece of raw flesh from its bone, and looks up at the group with a friendly smile. He welcomes them to Larjyn and, when asked, explains that the meat he is eating is his son's cheek. It seems the boy was disobedient this morning, but never will be again.

Sensing no Wyld incursion, just an inexplicable annual insanity, the group presses on after refusing the man's offer to join in the next round of "fun time" with the woman, once she's cleaned herself up.

About a mile out they hear a skittering in the trees ahead, as if a thousand tiny claws were working their way through the branches above. It is accompanied by intermittent whooshes through the air. And then, with little warning, an uncountable swarm of hatra pour out of the foliage. The tiny carnivorous flying squirrels are out for blood, and even fight amongst themselves to see who can get to the Lunars first, but it's all in vain as the group of strix (and one owl) simply picks up the pace and flies deeper into the woods.

It's impossible to tell visually when they enter the Wyld, but as some point the vines have teeth instead of thorns, and flowers have forked tongues instead of stamens. The paths taken them to a forest of bone by a lake of blood, which Darik tells them marks the site where an ancient nation chased rebels too far and got caught by a Wyldstorm.

Farther beyond that spindly trees grow impossibly tall near a river of salt where normal fish jump and splash. As they penetrate deeper into the Wyld, the fish jump out of the salt and continue swimming through the air, while the river "dries" up.

In an open glade they come across (and skirt around) a peaceful town where the food is animate and begging to be eaten. The neighboring village is much the same, though it is populated with people begging their food to eat them, which it does.

Ahead they find a forest glade where thousands of different species of forest plant grow, but from a single pulsing compost heap. They later take succor in a piney forest where the trees are pagodas and the friendly inhabitants are made of pine needles. Darik has heard of these creatures (called Pineys), and they take this opportunity to rest (though Abisi continues his nightly ritual of hiding the campsite behind an illusion).

In the dell beyond the Piney town is a village of suspicious people whose eyeless faces peer out of shuttered doors and windows as they pass into a grassy plain under a sky filled with stars in the day and a dim, dying sun at night.

The next day finds them in a decrepit, dusty, and empty husk of a First Age metropolis. After a long march they exit it through an archway into a giant tent housing a tiny flea circus where the barkers offer to let them play the games and win prizes for a taste of their blood. Several children are giggling and riding a donkey, while their neck sprout bulging fleas and ticks.

Down the road is the children's village, where the houses are made of candy and

broken glass. Children carefully chew away at exposed surfaces.

A chasm with a rickety rope bridge takes them over a river of boiling tar to a could platform floating through a raging storm.

Back on the ground after a stairway made of vapors, they glide warily over a field strewn with needles, somewhere inside which can be found a single strand of hay.

Darik warns that the Wyld is getting stronger as they fly into the mouth of a giant skeleton and out of a cave in a wintry mountainside at the foot of which is a tea house populated with unmoving mannequins wearing masks.

Gale force winds force them to walk, and they take a paper boat across a lake of fire, to an island where Cyclopes take turns chasing a man back into the house where his shrewish wife screams curses of cowardice at him.

A field where yeddim-sized lions made of fire hunt elk made of ice eventually gives way to a forest whose trees, paths, and wildlife which changes with every blink. Navigating it while flying proves impossible, and while grounded almost as bad, but they eventually find their way out by following a river of lava that lows like water nourishes trees made of fire.

The fiery trees give way to a forest where a thing's color varies depending on the angle it is viewed at, and even the slightest degree's worth of head tilt causes it to explode in a kaleidoscope of hues both dull and bright.

This gives away to a tall hill made of normal grass and regular rock. At the top of the hill is an ivory and granite spire, whose minaret top is a gleaming obelisk of white jade.

Abisi moves forward slowly to scout, and hears the faint sounds of pistons beneath the tower. Sliding doorways iris open and three ancient marvels step out. The leader is a massive man with the body of a sumo wrestler, but growing from his ankles are two small jets thrusters made of green jade. His companion, a beautifully strange looking woman steps forward as two Moonsilver tentacles sprout from her back and drape down to cover her Moonsilver power armor. The third is a well-muscled man whose right arm has been completely replaced by a tangle of orichalcum wires and rods.

The Moonsilver caste alchemical steps forward and introduces them as Death Flows Like Water, Emerald Duty (the jade caste), and Golden Hewed Thunder, their orichalcum leader. She inquires about the group's reason for being hear, and Ming explains that they have come to retrieve the monolith and use it in the fight against the wyld in Creation.

He is very persuasive, but even when Death and Gold are on his side, they cannot convince Emerald Duty to step down from the task he has appointed himself. While they are all sworn to protect the monolith, Emerald Duty has taken it upon himself to see that the network does not degrade farther, by ensuring that this monolith stays in its appointed spot. With no charms to sway him, they are unable to get him to realign his algorithms despite them being grossly out of date.

They do manage to convince the Alchemicals to allow Darik, their sorcerer and lore master, to study the schematics of the obelisk on the off chance they should ever come across the resources to make one.

In a bid to perhaps win by force what cannot be negotiated, Ming challenges the alchemical martial artist to a duel. It is accepted, and battle is joined.

Emerald Duty's ankle jets fire and a halo of green appears around his head and grows into a jade walled anima banner. He drops into a mantis stance in midair, and lands lightly atop the ivory tower. Ming also prepares himself, shifting to his river dragon form and dripping Moonsilver from his claws.

The two clash again, and blood flows from Emerald Duty as one of Ming's ribs cracks. Death Flows Like Water gasps at the use of lethal force in the duel, and the other two Alchemicals prepare for battle. But Emerald Duty holds up his hand and they stay back, ready to leap should any more blood flow.

Ming snakes out a curled up claw, but the unfamiliar position sets him off balance and Emerald Duty takes advantage. He unfolds from his stance and grabs Ming by a mighty nail. A twist and the Lunar finds himself on the ground, the bruises he just healed returning.

The back and forth continues and Ming sees an opening. Unable to connect with held back strikes, he waits for the jetting alchemical to get close and then strikes, biting the man's head clean off.

Death and Gold instantly spring into action, as does their as yet unseen ally. Black Star at Night, a starmetal cast alchemical, was hidden atop the spire in his ashigaru armor. He strikes as his friend falls, his arm-mounted essence cannon and his throat both crying for vengeance.

In moments Ming is down and dying, but his friends did not stand idly by.

Death Flows Like Water and Golden Hewed Thunder both fall to Tse's tetsubo, and then the two meet atop the spire to kill the sniper.

As the two tear apart their fallen foes for magical materials, and strip them of their First Age artifacts, Darik summons a crocodile-headed cannibal spirit and binds it to his will. Against the Sobeksis's desire, it is forced to use its magic to close Ming's wounds and bring him back from the brink of death.

They look up at the 50 ton obelisk and begin to formulate ways to get it down and safely back home.

Alchemicals

Alchemical caste exalted are the children of Autochthon. They grow and metamorphose in the vats of Autochthonia, and are sent out into the world at their creator's and their society's behest. But they are not mindless machines.

A conglomeration of magical metals and semi-human flesh, the Alchemicals sometimes find themselves hunted for their parts, especially by Eclipse and Moonshadow exalted, who can sometimes install the charms in themselves. The bodies of fallen Alchemicals are valuable to anyone though, being worth a Resource 5 purchase or functioning as the base materials for an appropriate artifact.

Fair Folk Freeholds

As the likelihood of them assaulting the Freehold in Chanta increases, Darik spins tales of freeholds he has heard of and read about. From them, the following recurring truths can be gleaned.

In many ways a Fair Folk Freehold is itself a being. They can even be sentient. But in other ways they are just an extension of their masters' will. But in any case, at least one Fae must give of its hearts essence to create the bonfire that serves as the heart of a Freehold. Other graces can be attached to a freehold, and will enhance its power accordingly.

A freehold takes up a number of waypoints depending on its size, and if strong enough, the owner of the freehold can rearrange these waypoints as he sees fit. Amongst them though, are one to five special waypoints which represent the essence of the freehold itself.

Every freehold contains an arcane redoubt, the home of the bonfire and center of a freehold's power. The Raksha which gives itself to the creation of a freehold turns to

bone and ash, temporarily destroyed. It can only be revived by extinguishing the fire it fuels. Any Fae with permission can attune to a freehold's bonfire by hurling his own heart grace into it. This does not destroy the Fae, but leaves it very vulnerable to anyone who would take that grace from the blazing fires. Attunement acts in many ways like attunement to a manse, and also shares with other owners the ability to create banners and cysts (the Wyld's version of hearthstones). Attuned Raksha can also view anywhere inside the freehold or around its banners as easily as if they were there. What's more, they are given great prowess in shaping the freehold's Wyld nature.

Should a Fair Folk embed its ring grace (xxx) into a freehold, the place gains a Fountainhead. A freehold with a fountainhead is a living being, sentient and predisposed to respond to its masters' desires. A sentient freehold's keeper can channel her Ring shaping actions to any place within the freehold.

A freehold's majesty takes on physical form if it is given a cup grace. The Glory resonates throughout the place, leaving mortals and immortals alike forever missing its presence should they be away. A Raksha which becomes the freehold's pride can lock away other Raksha from respiring essence in the freehold, and channel his cup actions through the freehold much like the Ring of a keeper. Creation-born creatures who accept the hospitality of a Glorious Freehold usually find themselves staying and accepting that hospitality forever, or at least until the Fae tire of their new toy.

A freehold gains a Stronghold if granted a sword grace. Any Raksha who then becomes its general can rearrange the waypoints as he desires. He can also channel his sword shaping actions throughout the entirety of the freehold.

A freehold given a staff grace grows a Throne Room for itself (which may or may not appear as an actual room with a throne in it). A freehold's throne room allows Raksha to bind themselves to the freehold's purpose, creating Oaths. Oaths properly phrased can become real inside a throne room, and grant the speaker power for as long as their bindings are kept, but promise death should he Fae's word be broken.

Rules of the Game (house rules introduced, rules questions raised and answered, etc.)

Regaining Willpower:

Exalts roll their highest virtue every day in order to regain Willpower, instead of always rolling Conviction.

Mass Combat:

Unless one side is immune to fatigue, we're ignoring the extra rolls created by the fatigue rules in mass combat.

Gem of Adamant Skin:

This only protects from wounds. Damage taken from poison or other non-external sources is not reduced.

Creature stats:

Creatures from the core book are not in line with those from the setting books in terms of stats, so are not allowed. Creatures from other books are available, and can be re-skinned as desired.

Attack Speed:

Attack speed has a minimum of 3.