

Bark at the Moon - 07/10/09



This Week's Recap

As Earth descends and Air ascends, the air grows colder. Abasi has not seen since he went with Night's Silent Mask to scout the fringes of the Wyld. True to his name, Mask ignores or deflects questions about the man's disappearance. Meanwhile, another young Lunar joins the pack: Brug, a sorcerer who is as in touch with magic as he is out of touch with the world. Preferring to keep to his studies, Brug is heard from very little until the day with Darik storms out of their shared cabin. The man has taught Brug all he will, and as with many masters before, he sends the new No Moon packing.

Brug takes the opportunity to introduce himself to the other young pack mates, and requests their aid in tracking down a manse that belonged to a previous incarnation. Though they have pressing business with the Fair Folk now that the Haltan truce has waned, they agree to aid him if he does the same, and journeys with them into the Fair Folk Freehold in Halta to plant the jade

obelisk and destroy the Rakshan outpost.

The sorcerer is greatly helpful before they even leave, summoning from their prison several humanoid entities known as the minions of the Eyeless Face. Though they are stunted socially, these remnants of the First Age prove to be strong thinkers and workers, and have rapidly built a carriage capable of carrying the 50-ton obelisk across the forests of the East.

In short measure, the group finds itself outside a large mist-filled archway in Chanta. Darik led them here as it is one of the few places where Creation-Born can enter the Freehold. And without further ado, they do so.

Past the mists lies a verdant prairie upon which is situated a vast golden crystal dome. They take it in momentarily and watch as grass beneath the obelisk turns to smoke and disappears, destroyed by the presence of the jade and Moonsilver tower.

And then the expected defenders come.

Pouring through the walls are hundreds of children. Though most of them are homunculi shaped from the Wyld and many other are mere figments of glamour craft, some are truly children. None of the brainwashed youngsters are older than ten, and they mesh almost seamlessly with the Fair Folk forces.

Also arriving on the scene is Lilac, resplendent in her gossamer plate and wielding a gossamer blade. She wheels in with over a hundred gryphons and as the band pulls themselves together into a defensive knot, war is joined.

Tse, now known as the Uncaring amongst the Raksha who were there, lays about him with abandon. Though he does not seem pleased to kill children alongside Fae, he stands to his task with no distraction.

Ming also dives headlong into the fantasy, but he restrains himself though Lunar magic and only subdues the foes he strikes. Brug calls forth magic and watches as his last batch of minions dies so that another may step into the world. These are more acclimatized to battle, and they are quickly split into two units: one for each of Brug and Ming.

High above the field a window irises open in the crystalline wall and Lily leans out. She cries tears of hope and gossamer, calling for mercy for her children. Were it not attached to a call to turn on the “beasts” attacking the dome, the plea would have touched Tse deep in his heart and drawn his rage to the surface like a song on a wave.

As Ming and Brug use their minions to fight the hordes of homunculi, Tse strikes deep into the hordes of griffons, taking to the air and diving through their ranks to slam his tetsubo repeatedly into the general’s form. She

falls, and though one of her shaped servants stands to take her place, he is nowhere near as formidable a foe, and the gryphons are routed almost as quickly as the “children” are knocked out or driven away.

Darik tells them that the journey to the next waypoint is through the gates, and that they must be broken down by the triumphant victor. Tse steps up and the gates melt at his touch like wet clay. A few seconds of his own shaping and the path inward lies open.

Inside throngs of people and Fae dance, drink, and dine at a victory table. Lily stands at the head, and offers sustenance to her saviors. They refuse, knowing that eating within a Freehold can trap a person there forever.

A grizzled human veteran of many battles hobbles up to Tse on a leg and a crutch. He congratulates the Rhino-man on a great victory, and expresses a desire to hang the tetsubo high in the Halls of Glory. Lilac’s sword shaping is crude however, and the Lunar gives a stalwart no.

Darik says that Lily is the next journey, and that only she can lead them to the next closest waypoint to the redoubt and its bonfire. Ming and Brug treat her cordially, and at Brug’s request she takes them on a tour of the Halls of Glory, where spoils of past victories lie. The tight halls make it impossible to bring the carriage any further, so the minions are left behind to protect the obelisk.

One of them is of special interest, a suit of orichalcum plate with two mounted hearthstones. One of them is a near-exact replica of Tse’s Gem of Adamant Skin, and they look forward to retrieving it later.

As they walk, Lily and Brug discuss sorcery, which the Fae calls “the Shaping

of Creation.” She shows interest in it, and also mentions that she can teach Shaping to those of Creation who are in touch with the Wyld, such as the children of Luna.

As all conversations must, this one eventually ends. Lily calls forth servants from the air and chairs are laid out. Light, music, and food fill the room; but they decline and she points the way to the Throne Room.

In the King’s Hall, a Fair Folk lord sits on a throne of gold. Around him several human and Fae nobles laugh and cheer as they watch a shadow play on the wall. The dark shapes glide across a battlefield, through halls, and finally before a throne of king, revealing themselves to be Tse and Ming.

The king congratulates them on their victory, but cannot tell who was the stronger warrior, so he offers them a chance to prove themselves. They are given the opportunity to duel for his daughter’s hand. Though the thought of the challenge tugs at Tse, he has reached the Limit of what he will stand in his quest to destroy the Freehold, and leaps at the king, tetsubo raised to kill.

Eyes wide at this, Darik cries out that he cannot be allowed to harm the Vizier, who is the next journey.

The king dives behind the throne, and Darik steps forward. His eyes turn to snake-slitted orbs and begin to draw the warrior’s thoughts into them, but the Lunar’s conviction is too strong.

In the reflections on the back of the throne, Ming sees Lily’s face appear. The beautiful Fae princess entreats him to take up the duel and win her hand so that they can forge an alliance unlike any the world has ever seen. Her words have weight here in the pseudo-Wyld of the Freehold, and he agrees. Silently he

changes to his war form while the angry Full Moon brings down his weapon to crush the left leg of the king.

Darik keeps trying to drag the beast out of his friend and calm the situation, but over and over he finds his force of will unequal to the task. But Ming’s strike from behind gets the man’s attention, and battle is joined.

The two wail on each other mightily, but Ming is shortly shown the stronger. A joyful Lily steps out from a curtained hallway and congratulates her champion before offering up the vizier’s cloak to them.

The human disguised as a king writhes on the floor in agony next to the robed man who continually, albeit uselessly, tried to drag Ming away. At Lily’s request the man removes his robe, revealing nothingness beneath it. Though the man walks and talks as normal, wherever the robe covered shows no body, only air. In turn they put on the robe and disappear, reappearing near the Freehold’s fountain.

Standing over a glistening pool beneath false moonlight, Lily again congratulates her champion, and show him a pair of gossamer wedding bands. She slips one of them onto her finger and swears that she will not rest until the Wyld and Creation have learned to live in harmony.

As she speaks, her face becomes more real, and her body fuller. Ming talks further with her, and she dips a finger into the waters to swirl the reflection of the sky away.



When they are still again, scenes are playing out.

Ming watches their assault of the gates, his duel with Tse, and beyond. A golden archway appears within the water and on the far wall, and he sees them all step through. On the far side the vision gets hazy, but he makes out the form of Free Spirited Arvia, bound to a post and about to be thrown into the bonfire by Lilac and several hooded beings who act at her will.

The vision fades, but not before the Lilac within looks outward. As the water

swirls the pictures away, it rises into the form of a gigantic cobra. The snake gives a silent hiss then lunges at Tse, engulfing him. Moments later a wet Tse smashes his way out of the beast's belly and laughs as yet another attempt to steal his weapon has failed.

Lily points to the arch and takes up her beau's hand. "Whenever you are ready." Ming tells her point blank that Lilac's trespasses will have consequences on the Freehold, and Lily agrees that it is just.

Wyld Shaping (General)

When in the Wyld, Fair Folk and the Unshaped do more than just interact with their environment, they become it and bend it to match their personal stories. This act, called Shaping, is the basis of their charms, assumed bodies, and indeed their entire society. With it they travel through the Wyld, use the Wyld to travel through Creation, and mold worlds out of chaos.

Most shaping in Creation requires gossamer: harvested dream stuff available in the Wyld or through sleeping Creation-born. As it is only partially real, shaping which involves glamour can be resisted by those born in Creation, though the power of the Shaper determines the difficulty of seeing through the ruse. Glamour resistance is an all-or-nothing affair. Either the effect is false and cannot affect you, or it is completely real.

The simplest and most versatile of Shaping actions is the creation of Fantasy. A Raksha who shapes a fantasy twists the Wyld into an attacking army, erupting volcano, or anything else she desires. As the name implies, this is completely unreal. Anyone who comes in contact with a fantasy can choose to alter it (if he can Shape), ignore it, or take part in it. Taking part in the fantasy allows one to act in ways that would normally be impossible, if they match the shaped desire of the creator. Ignoring the fantasy is a simple matter of will for those capable of stunts or charms, requiring only the expenditure of a little bit of personal Willpower, though actions in opposition to the fantasy become more difficult.

Beyond simple fantasies, Raksha and those they teach can reshape the Wyld around them into reality, though only the most powerful beings are able to shape it in a way that affects Creation-Born or higher species in the Wyld. This has the same general powers and effects as Sorcery, with the strength of the effect determining the difficulty of the shaping action.

In addition, Raksha can use Shaping for more mundane, but highly useful, pursuits. They may survey surrounding waypoints, or hide from those who do. They can even slide

a waypoint along the edge of Creation, moving it around the Rim and thus enabling rapid travel.

Shaping is not restricted entirely to the Raksha. Should a Creation-Born convince a Raksha to craft a Grace for him, he can then learn to Shape the Wyld exactly as the Fair Folk do. Doing so grants them access to Shaping Combat and the benefits thereof, but also makes them somewhat more vulnerable to it, as they give up their enhanced resistance in exchange for power over others and the Wyld.

For the Raksha, Graces define their personalities and which virtues they feed upon. They also act as both offense and defense in Shaping Combat. For the Creation-Born, only the latter matters.

Wyld Shaping (as an attack)

Wyld shaping is more than just a convenience for the Raksha, it is a way of life. Shaping combat, the attempt to supersede another story with your own, is the heart of Raksha society. To that end, Fair Folk (and Creation-Born with Graces) engage one another in Shaping Combat. Unlike regular combat, a shaping combat is a long and often drawn out affair, as each participant skillfully reweaves the structure of the Wyld around himself and his opponent. What this means to Creation-Born is that a single Fair Folk can only ever generate one Shaping attack per scene whether in Creation or in the presence of a Creation Born.

Because they are themselves made up of the fabric of the Wyld, Raksha are both weaker and more resilient to shaping attacks than creation born, avoiding and absorbing them not unlike a swordsman might parry a blade or take it on his armor. Creation-born, on the other hand, have a stronger innate ability to ward off shaping attacks, but practically no ability to withstand them once they've struck home. While it may take several somewhat easy attacks to fully incumber a Fair Folk, it would take but a single well-aimed attack to do the same to a Creation-Born.

For all shaping combats, the true target is the opponent's Graces. These are both metaphysical and physical objects which define a Raksha. The intricate puzzle box which contains a Fair Folk's sense of self is as much a Grace as the handwoven basket wherein a Raksha carries her Compassion. These physical representations are mostly indestructible in the manner of artifacts, but can be stolen, traded, or given away.

The Cup grace surrounds a Raksha's Compassion, and is attacked by shaping environments of indulgence and entertainment. A lost cup combat *ravishes* the victim, leaving them unable to exert the virtue named by the victor. For instance, ravishing Compassion may leave the victim unable to muster concern for a specific person or place, while ravishing Temperance designates a passion that can no longer be reined in, such as rage or lust. A ravished creature cannot be ravished again, nor make Cup shaping attacks of her own until the ravishment is healed (similar to healing Crippling wounds for mortals).

The Ring Grace wraps in on itself to symbolize a Raksha's Temperance, and is attacked by the creation of intricate dreamscapes with innate physical laws. A successful strike by a Ring attack creates an incumbrance upon the loser. This task must be one that the

character can perform without spending irreplaceable resources, and cannot conflict with a prior incumbrance. Apart from that, the only things limiting incumbrances are the imagination of the victor and the lengths he feels he can go without pressing a willful victim into resisting.

The Staff is the manifestation of a Raksha's Conviction, which he leans upon in his long travels in the Wyld. A staff shaping contest crafts social milieus, where each Raksha attempts to enforce their own structure on the other. The loser finds himself unable to exert her will through Staff shaping attacks, and unable to defend her Graces. All further Staff attacks which get past can target other Graces instead.

The Sword Grace, as its name suggests, is the unbreakable arm of a Raksha's Valor, through which he asserts his dominion over the world around him. It is opposed by scenes of combat and trials by fire. Loss to a sword shaping attack allows the victor to take any one possession of the loser, including a Grace. Only a Raksha whose Sword Grace has been taken can have his Heart Grace taken, which leaves him at the mercy of the captor. A momentary act to crush the Heart Grace in his hand suffices to cement a permanent victory through death, but most Raksha prefer to keep their vanquished foes around to torment and use as their whims dictate.

OOO Status

Ming:

The huge warrior has been incumbered by Lily to take her hand, and he has yet to resist. To resist the compulsion to be by her side for a scene costs 1 Willpower. To make it easier to resist later he has to spend 2 Willpower, and once he has done so three times he is free. Until the incumbrance is lifted, he cannot suffer from any other incumbrances that oppose this one. This is different from what I said in the game, but I was mistaken. Its Ravishments that can only happen one at a time.

Thanks to Lily's Wyld Stunt, Ming has a pool of 4 successes which he can spend in the battle against Lilac. Once spent, they are gone.

Tse:

Tse is incumbered by Lilac to challenge Ming for Lily's hand. He has resisted is with 2 Willpower twice, and only needs to do so for one more scene to be free.

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:

In accord with the flavor text, 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.

Combos:

Adding a charm to a combo d require relearning it, just paying the difference in cost between the two.

High Dice Pools:

If a pool goes over 10, extra dice can be divided by 2 instead of rolled, leaving just 10 or 11 dice to roll. If it's a damage pool, divide by 3 instead.

Craft:

For Exalted (and some supernatural creatures), combine all elemental crafts into a single skill.