

Bark at the Moon - 07/31/09



This Week's Recap

Prepped and ready to go, the Lunars make a last minute inventory of their needs and capabilities and realize that they have no way to stop the dragon from simply turning immaterial and walking away, should it come to a fight.

Ming turns to his mentor Jao Xing, a respected renegade Dragon Blood who runs the Wu Chao school in Chanta. A master of many forms, Jao Xing is familiar with Five-Fold Shadow Hand. This art aims to emulate the five elements together in harmony, and its form allows for interaction with dematerialized spirits. Master Jao Xing can teach the charm, and tells Ming the names of several students who have learned it, but in the time it would take him to learn the new art form, he could instead teach himself much better Lunar skills. But they don't have two years to wait. Kotomaro sits in the center of the wellspring of life in Creation working deals with a Deathlord.

Brug takes up a familiar chair in the libraries of several of Halta's most respected sages, where he buys himself time amidst the scrolls and bookshelves.

Buried in an ancient text regarding the combating of ghosts and demons, he finds a recipe for demon-trapping powder. This substance, when cast into the air around a dematerialized demon, can prevent it from taking material form. More importantly, Brug sees the key ingredient for the powder is Yasava bark, and discerns that replacing it with Yasava sap and Berungi berry skins will reverse the effects of the powder, turning it into a paste capable of preventing elementals from dematerializing. He returns to his home in Black Branches and instructs his eyeless artisans to begin crafting it.

Once Tse has a decent supply ready, they head out into the Wyld.

The journey through a tidy orchard whose row upon row of well-trimmed trees holds giant pods. From these pods drip amniotic fluids and toddler-sized children, which are caught in big baskets by the three foot tall insectile humanoids which tend the place.

Beyond that they are warned away by a small group of wood-skinned hobgoblins, one of which fires an arrow

at their feet. But when Lily steps forward the hobgoblins become much more peaceful and talkative, and they trade rumors and news of the Opal Court with her.

A mountain-sized compost heap gives way to the ruins of an ancient woodland empire. All that is left now are fallen buildings, overgrown homes, and voices trapped in the branches eternally whispering the secrets of the people who once lived here. Secrets like “Stacy Kellerman and Dora Robertson were cheating on Martin Buric with one another,” and “Jerry Kitch’s wife beats him.” The lack of popcorn or an easy chair sends the group traveling onward.

On the outskirts of the Opal Court they come to a city in the trees populated by people of the air. The flying men and women maintain a respectful distance, though children sometimes swoop in for a closer look. But when they reach the center of the city they are greeted with a strange sight: an ancient and crumbling statue of Tse. Around it are offerings to him, and several people of the air praying at his shrine. When they see him they take a startled leap to the air and watch from the branches above.

Brug lays out gems and jewelry around the statue and makes a quick but deeply meaningful prayer to the statue’s small god, hoping it is still alive. His eloquence and status as a priest draw the ancient god of the statue from his slumber, and the deity’s face pokes out from the face of Tse’s ancient duplicate.

They learn that Cainnec was a Lunar who died here during the Great Contagion, defending the people of the air from the Fair Folk of the Balorian Crusade. Now Cainnec is revered by their descendants. His mate, a solar named Elorri, escaped the fight, but the small god knows nothing of where she may have gone.

Above them in the branches, people of the air begin chanting “Cainnec” over and over again. This makes Tse nervous and they leave. The people of the air follow them to the edges of the field where the Opal Court’s massive palace sits, but is silent and does not bother them further.

Lily has urged Ming to meet with Japthia of the Opal Court, as a gesture of good will, and so they head towards the seat of Raksha power in the East. Inside the large gem palace the travelers are welcomed. They pass room upon room of contests, each one finding some way to venerate Valor, the favorite virtue of the court. There is even a death in a wrestling match between two human men, and the crowd watching it screams with glee at the site.

There are some angry eyes aimed their way, but the Lord is cordial, and so too are his subjects. In Japthia’s throne room they meet the Raksha, his fifteen foot tall frame seated atop a purple throne. He welcomes them there, and offers them food and drink. They accept, and over dinner the inevitable discussion of challenges comes up.

Japthia notes that Ming has grace and inquires as to whether the man has learned to shape yet. He is told that Ming has studied the Sword and Ring, and so makes a challenge of shaping and acrobatics. Each one, starting with the guest, will take a turn shaping a fantasy of some sort of terrain, which he will then navigate. The other must then follow that person’s path, though not necessarily mirroring their movements, to the other side. The first to fall while leading the way or following will be declared the loser, and be given a prize of their choosing. Japthia’s arm pans across several assembled human slaves to illustrate what the reward is.

Ming begins, and decides he will try to show Lord Japthia that shaping is not only for the Fair Folk by making it as difficult as possible for the lord to wipe away his fantasy. He puts forth a valorous effort and creates a fairly easy path for himself. As expected, the Lord follows him through it easily.

But when it comes Japthia's turn to create a new fantasy, the Raksha waves his hand dismissively, expecting the glamour before them to melt away. It does not, and instead the Lord is forced to try again, furling his brow in effort as a few of the braver (or less intelligent) Fair Folk watching snicker.

He manages to push aside the fantasy this time, and creates a field of poles which he bounds and bounces across easily. Ming follows, stumbling once but not falling, and then reshapes the area again. This time he creates a field of spikes which point all different directions, but sets it up so that the safe path through duplicates the steps, leaps, and strikes of a Tiger Style kata. His years of training in that art walk him through easily.

Japthia bounds through the course with ease, but again has trouble with the fantasy. Hoping to end this contest before he is embarrassed further, Japthia creates a swaying rope over a vast chasm, which he hand-walks across with ease. Ming follows, using his feet to be careful rather than showy, and makes it as well. He again summons up his valorous desire for competition and changes the chasm into a field of sparring dummies so lifelike it is almost solid. He dips, hits, and rolls through it; followed easily by Japthia.

The lord of the Opal Court stands tall, wraps his will around his muscular arms and starts to pull apart Ming's fantasy world. But it doesn't break and so he pulls harder. It still won't break and

eventually the shamed lord draws his 8' long broad sword and chops the dummies apart before his disbelief turns to terror at the thought of what this man has done to him. Gripped by bedlam, he storms his way deeper into the palace, leaving behind a victorious Ming, the young woman he chooses as his prize, and several laughing rivals in the courts.

Seeing how the first fared, the others are less inclined to extend challenges, but it is the way of the courts, and so it eventually comes. Tse and Brug both refuse, raising snickers and jokes of cowardice, plus a few predatory looks of wolves sensing weakness.

Though Lily had secured them lodging, she tells them that Japthia is not a forgiving soul, and indeed he hopes to lead the second Balorian Crusade against Creation, so they choose the course of discretion and take their leave.

The path into the Middlemarches leads them to a slowly flowing river where they hitch a ride aboard a sentient trading barge, which drops them on the shore by a vast forest whose branches do not end in leaves. Instead each one ends in a tiny, naturally growing wooden child's toy. Amidst the toy soldiers, planes, and building blocks they set up their camp for the evening. Ming uses his hearthstone to build a home from the earth for them to sleep in, and Lily waves her hand to summon two hundred of her crafted minions to stand guard for the evening. At Kro-Tan Aura's request, Ming makes their child a second home, so sie need not risk seeing or hearing hir parents practicing to make siblings. Brug takes to his spirit form, and burrows himself an armadillo-sized hole to sleep in.

As expected, Lord Japthia and his cronies arrive in the middle of the night. The five hundred cataphractoi they

bring with them is somewhat less expected.

As the third moon rises above tree level, the land is blanketed in light and the air is filled with sound. Lily's lizard men are screaming alarms as the attacking force pours into the sparse forest.

Brug crawls out of his hidey hole and shifts back to his human form, drawing forth the barless cage from his backpack. He scans the area for a geomantically suitable spot and then lays out the rug just as Japthia's troops begin their assault. A pillar of white light appears atop the artifact, and he calls forth his minions.

The Fae lord's cataphractoi ride atop lesser wyld horrors, while he himself is astride a monstrous behemoth. The Raksha stands atop the back of the swift-moving beast and performs a dreadful kata. He tells the tale of his inevitable victory over the intruders from Creation, and so convincing is it that half of Ming's lizard men immediately drop their weapons and bow their heads in defeat.

On the other side of their camp General Felosia, Japthia's second in command, rides into the camp. He and his unit strike at Kro-Tan Aura's honor guard while Tse strikes back at them from within the ranks of Ming's unit.

Tse's assault only lasts a second though, as a giant wormlike beast burrows out of the dirt beneath his feet and swallows him whole. The creature tunnels quickly back to his mistress and dumps the Lunar into a clearing over 30 miles away, as Cahlena the Huntress levels her bow. Having always wanted to hunt a Lunar, and having seen Tse's cowardice and weakness in refusing to prove himself in the challenges of the Opal Court, she knows he will be a difficult, but inevitable trophy. Sweat drips from

her hand and freezes on the side of the bow as she releases two arrows. They fly with effortless ease and strike the Lunar, chilling him to the bone and setting off uncontrollable shivers.

Brug calls to his minions to form up on his flank, while Kro-Tan Aura returns fire. Hir Fae parentage shows as her essence pulses from her hands and reshapes one of the opposing cataphractoi, leaving it writhing in pain.

Tse takes to the air and rockets towards the huntress despite the cold, but her calculating glare never falters. An arrow presses against his chest and is almost released, but a rapid barrage from his tetsubo drops her to her knees and then to the ground, dead before she gets a chance to gloat. The cold iron bauble in his blade thrumming as if alive and happy, Tse begins sprinting for the distant forest tree line to rejoin the fray.

Japthia's hands wring and twist almost faster than the eye can see, and each iteration creates a small flock of large crows. The crows spread out amongst the cataphractoi and swelling the warlord's ranks. Though they never interact directly with the lizard men, the dread they spread is palpable.

Falasia continues his assault on Kro-Tan Aura's honor guard, and Ming rallies the troops, pulling some of them out of their awed submission. With his ranks partially replenished, he takes the attack back to Japthia. Brug finishes pulling his minions together and gives the order to ready bows while Kro-tan Aura returns fire on Japthia's general.

Tse dives from the sky like a meteor, slamming into Falasia and knocking the general off of his mount, but not before the Fae's troops drop a beating on Kro-tan's unit, sending several of the lizard men into retreat.

Ming rolls his unit over a hill to get better position, then charges in to divide and conquer, splitting off some of Japthia's cataphractoï from the main unit. Brug's arrows pound into Falosia's unit, not doing much damage but forcing them to keep their heads down.

Falosia stands and dusts himself off, then challenges tse to a man-to-man fight. Tse accepts and falosia leads with a flurry. His rapier trails mist from the blade, but hits with the force of a sledge hammer. Tse returns fire with his tetsubo, but Falosia's free hand tosses gossamer into the air, forming a solid shield that deflects the Moonsilver gore maul. The giant weapon rapidly melts and reforms into a sai as Tse goes on the defensive.

Falosia twists his body like rubber, coming at Tse from impossible angles. When the impressive display is done, the fair folk general has coerced Tse's blade from his hand, and now holds it in his offhand, ready to parry with (though not being attuned to it, the sai is akin to a 10 pound rock). Tse commands the blade back into the form of a giant weapon, making it even more unwieldy,

then flees the field, unsure what to do without his artifact at his side.

Ming continues to whittle away at Japthia's large force, as Brug positions his troops for a charge. Tse remains in the fight, attacking Falosia's unit while avoiding the Fae himself, but without his weapon his heart isn't in it.

Falosia scatters Kro-Tan Aura's troops to the winds, forcing the Fae-blood to join ranks with his father. Unfortunately, that frees the youth up to act as a sniper instead of a commander, and Falosia is soon driven from the field by the repeated force of Kro-Tan Aura's corrosive essence blasts.

Japthia's unit is soon dismantled as well, and the fair folk lord converts the ground at his feet into a whirlwind, fleeing the field almost as quickly as he fled before Ming's shaping skills.

Rather than give chase, the creation-born and fair folk queen take this chance to pull the units together, banish them back to Elsewhere, and header deeper into the Wyld.

OOOC Status

Ming:

Lily's hold over Ming has solidified, and he is now addicted to her beauty. After a month of being apart, he must roll Willpower difficulty 4 or want to return to her. He can spend 1 Willpower and get a point of Limit to resist for another month, and after 3 points are spent he is cured, at least until she turns into the hottest thing he's ever seen again.

He is also addicted to the powers she bestows upon him. This uses the rules for Wyld addiction (core page 288), but he doesn't have to seek out the Wyld: Lily's boons suffice. The boons she is granting him are:

- 1 mote: get a 2-die bonus on any action that fosters camaraderie between Creation and the Wyld
- 5 motes: give a -(Essence) penalty to someone's action if you can explain how a feeling of camaraderie between Creation and the Wyld would interfere.

He got himself a Ring Grace that looks like a fancy pair of artifact tiger claws. Details on sword and ring shaping can be found [here](#).

Ming, Brug, and Lily:

The oath is still going strong at rating 5 (5-die Oathsworn pool, perfect detection to 50 yards, and a difficulty 5 Conviction test to break it temporarily).

Brug:

Brug modified a recipe for Demon-Trapping Powder, reversing its effects to instead prevent the dematerialization of an already materialized spirit. This Thaumaturgical ritual is part of the Art of Alchemy and has the following stats:

Demon-Trapping Powder (3, Intelligence, 4, 10 hours) – The alchemist brews enough demon-trapping powder for a single use.

Ectoplasmic Net (3, Intelligence, 4, 10 hours) – The alchemist brews enough ectoplasmic netting for a single use.

Tse:

The ectoplasmic nets Tse carries have the following stats:

Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range	Minimums	Cost	Tags
6	+0	Special	3	10	Str ••	Special	-

An Ectoplasmic Net does no damage. Instead, each success above the target's DV prevents the target from dematerializing for 1 action. The net may be dodged as normal, but if successfully parried, whatever weapon was used to block the projectile suffers the effects for 3 actions. If parried with a natural weapon, this prevents the target from dematerializing for 3 actions. If parried with a weapon, only the weapon itself is blocked, the target may dematerialize as normal (provided he is willing to leave his weapon behind).

An alternate form of this alchemical item is called Demo-Trapping Powder. It functions exactly the same except that it must be spread in the air around a dematerialized spirit (usually requiring some form of spirit sight) and it prevents that spirit from materializing for 1 action per threshold success on the attack roll.

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.