
The Town, the Elders and Their Duty

The town on Gorkhon River is a small, insular community with its own beliefs, notably unlike those of the neighboring Buryats, Kazakhs and Mongolians. The town is regarded with suspicion by steppe nomads and ridiculed by city folks, but a few desperate outsiders have been known to travel there to seek treatment for incurable ailments.

The town's administrative and spiritual leader is called an elder. The elder is responsible for guiding the town, healing the sick, and nominally, performing the sacrifices necessary to maintain the health of the town. No human sacrifices have been recorded for three decades, but the town has been prospering until now.

An elder must be descended from one of the town's few spiritually powerful families, the most prominent of which are the innovative but controversial Kains, the powerful but near extinct Startsevs and the wealthy but fractured Sidorovs. Elders are not allowed to marry, but they must have a spiritually sensitive heir to pass on their responsibilities to. The town's current elder is rather unusual for having two children.

Because of the ridicule the townsfolk face from the rest of the world, they tend to be hostile towards outsiders. They do not look kindly upon outsiders disrespecting their customs or breaking their long-held taboos. Such taboos include:

- Drawing blood
- Burning bodies
- Desecrating dead bodies
- Consumption of alcohol

Because of the recent plague, the elder has declared it acceptable to burn bodies, perform autopsies and draw blood as long it is done with his permission.

Shabnak-Adyr, or the Spirit of the Earth

The earth spirit, sometimes called a shabnak-adyr, is a prominent figure in local lore. Outsiders would call it a devil, but to the locals, it is a thousand year old protector. Born from the earth's core, a shabnak-adyr prefers to sleep in the soil where it was born. Life always circles around its home. Its hair grows as harvest, and its breath turns a newborn's lips pink and their blood warm.

Because all blood is warmed by a shabnak-adyr's breath, all blood is required to go back to the earth. Burning bodies is considered sacrilegious, as is the perservation and use of blood in anything except sacrificial rituals. Only an elder has the right to draw blood. In rare, often life-threatening circumstances, an elder may grant another the right to draw blood. However, due to the recent plague, these taboos are now commonly broken.

On occasion, a particularly mischevious shabnak-adyr will inhabit a clay body and explore the world. The clay body has no blood and disintegrates immediately upon receiving a fatal injury. Reports of bloodless, crumbling bodies like that are almost unheard of and doubted even by elders. However, elders do not doubt the existence of shabnak-adyr; they are reportedly able to see and talk to it even when it's not bound to an earthly form.

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The Kain Family

You are a member of the Kain family, a distant cadet branch of the Startsev family. The Kain family is famous among the other spiritually powerful families due to their magical prodigy and innovativeness. However, their unorthodox research often garners suspicion, and few members of the Kain family have been elders. Rival families such as the Sidorovs have attempted to steal and replicate the Kains' magical research more than once. You are unsure what happened to the Sidorovs during the plague. They could be dead, or they could be alive and too proud to seek shelter at their enemy's home. Or they could have sent spies.

Grigoriy Kain jealously guards his research into binding earth spirits. No one outside the family knows the true source of his powers, for the enslavement of an earth spirit would be considered dangerous and cruel by other families.

Victoria Kain has also made forays into unorthodox magical research: she studies blood magic, and her research lead to the creation of a blood-generating device called the Crucible. The use of blood independent of the earth is normally considered taboo, so she has kept her research heavily guarded as well. Unfortunately, both the Crucible and Victoria's notes on blood magic haven't been seen since the shelter was established. Blood magic is highly dangerous and poisonous to the reputation of anyone who dabbles in it, so it is imperative that the notes do not leave the shelter in the hands of anyone except a loyal Kain.

Alexander Kain has not conducted successful magical research as far as everyone is aware.

If you are loyal to your family, you will protect its interests and pursue these goals in addition to your own.

Goals

- Find and retrieve the stolen notes on blood magic
- Find the Crucible
- Protect your family secrets
- Root out spies, enemies and traitors to your family

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