
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. They 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

An elder may give permission to break some of these taboos in desperate situations. However, an elder's reputation will drop drastically if they are seen engaging in taboo activities themselves.

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.

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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