



Call of the Wild

An 8 Page World
by Brent Wolke

“Gather around and I’ll tell you a tale of how the Shadow has come to pass...

In ages long ago, men lived in cities of stone and metal, the ruins of which are scattered about the land. They raced about in metal wyrms and beetles. Oh yes, by all accounts they were the masters of the world, but a great unnamed calamity befell them and they fled the cities for the wilds to escape. The calamity followed and struck them down where they hid. The only ones to survive were those who embraced the Call of the Wild, and became part beast as well as man. Thus were the great tribes born; Bear, Crow, Deer, Horse, Owl, Rat, Snake, Whale, and Wolf. A great many lesser tribes also came to be. With the Call, the Calamity was stayed.

The tribes thus took up what has become their ancestral lands, and though we build villages, the working of stone and metal is forbade lest the calamity come again. Battles are fought among tribes over resources, and raids occur in lean years, and tribes manipulate others for their own benefit, but all in all, things were considerably safe and peaceful.

In time, the Rats moved back into the cities where they took up metal and stone again, against the laws of nature. The Snakes and Owls sought a greater understanding of the world beyond the Call, and severed their ties to the Forces of Nature. In their ignorance they unleashed the Shadow. Though the Snakes repented for their crimes and now seek to undo the damage they have caused as a Banisher of the Shadow, the Owls insist they can use this power for good, and still Forsake the Call of the Wild. Be weary of the Rats and Snakes, but never trust an Owl.

The Shadow, as you know, is an evil spirit from another world, who enters this world through the birth of living things. It hides in the flesh until such time as it is ready to strike, then erupts as a malignant monster, hideous to behold. We are protected to some degree by our ritual, the Call of the Wild, which reveals the Shadow at birth, but among the lesser creatures, base animals, the Shadow gains strength, and so the forests and plains and mountains and swamps and seas become more and more dangerous year after year. As Resources dwindle, the tribe’s raid more often, the conflicts grow, and soon, it may very well end that we must forsake the wild, returning to the civilization of stone and metal to gain power enough to defeat the shadow.”

Call of the Wild is a role-playing setting for use with **S. John Ross’** *Risus: The Anything RPG*. Fear not, for it is free, and readily available at <http://www222.pair.com/sjohn/risus.htm>, along with the *Risus Companion*, which is not free, but you’ll want it anyway ‘cause it is loaded with goodies. So go spend some money at his website and tell him hello from me. Thanks!

THE GREAT TRIBES

BEAR TRIBE

Appearance: The Bears are a large people averaging well over 6 feet in height. They are marked by shaggy heads of hair and men have huge beards. They have sharp teeth and their fingers are more like claws.

Culture: They are quick to anger and slow to be placated. They seldom build villages, as they prefer small family groups or solitary existence and usually make their homes in cave complexes. While not adverse to society, they will often avoid travelers passing through their land unless a threat is seen, in which case, the strangers will be with overwhelming (and if necessary, violent) force.

Homeland: Their traditional lands are in the Western Mountains, but can be found in any mountainous region.

Allies: Ram and Wolverine Tribes

Cliché Modifier: Huge, strong, and muscular; Able to withstand a great deal of punishment; Keen sense of smell; Able to deal damage with tooth and claw; Temperamental



CROW TRIBE

Appearance: The people of the Crow tend to be small and slight of build, with black hair, pointed noses and round yellow eyes.

Culture: The Crows value intelligence, cunning, tricks, and planning, disliking rash or spontaneous actions. Crow families build permanent homes, but as a society they build no villages of any kind. They have frequent gatherings, celebrations, and community discussions, but as soon as it is over, they move on, leaving no trace that anything took place on the spot.

Homeland: Their ancestral homelands exist within the Southern Forests, but being drawn by the wind, a certain segment of the Crows give up their ordered life, and tend towards a nomadic way of being, wandering where the wind takes them. As a result, they can be found nearly everywhere.

Allies: Raven and Beaver Tribes

Cliché Modifier: Small and agile; Highly intelligent and cunning; Tricky; Cautious

Character Creation

Humanity gave up the ways of civilization and embraced an animalistic, primitive way of life known as the Call of the Wild. The Call is a force of nature working through the greater spirits of animals. As humanity embraced the call, they physically changed to a greater resemblance of an animal, and through these changes, they became the tribes.

The tribes act as separate races, and though one can produce children between tribes, the child is not guaranteed to follow either parent. A child is always handed over, at the earliest convenience, to the care of the tribe to whom the child was embraced.

Characters are built using 10 dice, with Hooks and Tales encouraged. If the Risus Companion is being used, Lucky Shots, Questing Dice, and Sidekicks and Shield Mates (usually animals) are also allowed. Double-pump clichés are allowed under certain circumstances, explained elsewhere. All characters must be from a Tribe, the major ones being described here. If a player wishes to portray another lesser Tribe, the GM and player must work together to determine specifics. Being a member of a tribe grants a Cliché modifier that is added to a character's primary Cliché.

Example Clichés

The Clichés offered below are meant to stir the imagination and give a sample of what is possible. It is not an exhaustive list.

Builder: Erecting structures and building shelters made of wood, bone, rocks, and animal parts; Creating ice-hut.

Caretaker: Tending to the care, feeding, and nursing of children, elderly, or even other adults; Creating clothing from cloth and plants.

Carver: Creating practical or decorative items out of wood and bone.

Cooker: Knowing the best way to prepare and serve a multitude of animals and plants for consumption.

Dancer: Performing ritual dances for entertainment, ceremonies, courtship, and animal spirit worship.

Fisherman: Baiting and catching fish of all types. Specialties can be taken in fresh or salt water fishing.

Gatherer: Identifying plants, herbs, fruits, seeds, and nuts and knowing their uses, which are edible, which are poison, and so forth.

Grower: Being able to plant, raise, and harvest plants for consumption.

Healer: Using natural remedies of animal and/or plant base to cure illness; Knowing how to set broken bones and stop bleeding.

Herder: Knowing how manage a herd of animals for human use and keep them in health.

Hunter: Being able to use stealth to sneak up on animals; Tracking animals; Knowing how to fight and kill animals with spears.

Leader: Asserting authority; Having a right to rule; Being recog-

nized as 'the law' within their domain.

Musician: Playing music

Nomad: Knowing how to live on-the-go; Finding food and water on-the-move; Quickly erecting and dismantling camps; Following wild animal herds.

Pathfinder: Surviving in extreme conditions; Trail blazing; Finder of water and food; Identifying dangerous areas or conditions; Navigating by the stars.

River-man: Being able to sail, row, or pole canoes, rafts, and even raft-like barges on rivers and lakes.

Sea-man: Being able to sail or row boats and other vessels out at sea; Navigating by the stars.

Shepherd: Providing counsel and wisdom; Administering religious rites of the animal-spirits such as the taking of mates.

Skinner: Removing and tanning animal skins; Creating clothing from the skins of animals.

Storyteller: Passing down oral traditions; Entertaining others through tales and narratives; Acting.

Thrower: Using an atlatl; Throwing javelins; Throwing rocks; Throwing bolas

Warden: Fighting defensively; Protecting others; Guarding tribal territory.

Warrior: Knowing how to fight with spear, axe, and club against other humans; Avoiding injury.

Forces of Nature

Some people are more attuned to the Call of the Wild and can summon from deep within their animal spirit, abilities beyond anything a human can accomplish, sometimes bordering on the super natural. These people are known as Forces of Nature. They are very specific to each tribe and must be taken as a Double-pump Cliché.

Additionally, when a character Double-pumps, an actual physical transformation occurs that transcends anything remotely human. The bonus dice and the transformation lasts as long as the conflict or scene occurs, and not just a specific round of dice rolling. However, at the end of conflict, the character returns to his or her normal form, and loses the appropriate amount of dice because of the double-pump, and cannot regain those dice for a number of days equal to the dice used because of the taxing nature of the transformation.

Feral Rager (Bear): Transforming into a monstrous 9ft tall half-human, half-bear; Withstanding an enormous amount of harm; Dealing a massive amount of damage via ravenous fangs and claws;

Forest Mystic (Deer): Transforming into a man-sized half-man, half-deer; Becoming incredibly beautiful; Traveling through woods without leaving tracks; Being unseen by others in forests; Communication with animals; Summoning animals to aid and assist; Leaping great distances

DEER TRIBE

Appearance: Deer are of average height and build but are quick and elegant, a beautiful people with soft, brown eyes, and hair, with large pointed ears. Men have small horns, no more than an inch long.

Culture: The people of the Deer live in many, small, elegant villages, often secluded among dells and along river banks. They are a peaceful people and rarely take up arms, but can be surprisingly fierce when forced. It is quite an honor among other tribes to be able to take a Deer mate and many pursue it. Since many can trace family to the Deer Tribe, it is typically seen as poor taste to show aggression against the quiet people.

Homeland: The Deer tribe lives among the Western Forests, and though extremely social and hospitable to visitors, they rarely venture out of their homelands.

Allies: Eagle and Badger Tribes, though they generally have good relations with everyone.

Cliché Modifier: Beautiful; Graceful; Quick; Beguiling.



HORSE TRIBE

Appearance: Second only in height to the Bears and Whales, the Horse Tribe are a tall muscular people with long faces, long hair, and a certain nobility of spirit in their stature.

Culture: The Horse Tribe is entirely nomadic, building no permanent settlements of any kind. They follow the food and make temporary encampments with tents, though dotted across the land are certain points where resources are plentiful, and where the Horse Tribe visits often. They are far from pacifists, but do try to settle most conflicts amiably before resorting to violence, and are often called upon to be arbiters or judges in conflicts between other tribes.

Homeland: The great Central Plains is the home to the Horse Tribe, though they claim that any place flat, where the horizon beckons, is their home too.

Allies: The Buffalo Tribe

Cliché Modifier: Great endurance; Fast of foot; Strong; Regal Bearing

OWL TRIBE

Appearance: The Owl Tribe is marked by their short, stocky frames, large, fierce eyes, and sharp nailed fingers.

Culture: The sagacious Owls were once the most respected of people, but their continued involvement in Forsaking the Call of the Wild, even after unleashing the Shadow, has marked them for shame and they are unwelcome everywhere. This generally suits the Owls just fine as they prefer their own company. Yet, their many villages are not unhappy places, and if not for the stigma attached to them, they would not have cause for conflict among the other tribes.

Homeland: The Owls call the Eastern Forests their home, and if they are to be found anywhere else, it is in hiding.

Allies: None

Cliché Modifier: Keen eye sight; Wise; Enigmatic; Unwelcomed



RAT TRIBE

Appearance: The Rat people are short, with ragged hair. They have beady eyes and long noses and large front teeth.

Culture: The Rats are an unsavory people being scavengers who will make off with anything not tied down but are never-the-less a clever group and useful even outside their tribe. Their villages, built within the ruins of the old stone and metal cities are a maze of tunnels and warrens, and it would be best not to visit unless one has a guide. Their celebrations are legendary for the wild antics and sometimes pyrotechnics. The Rats have been able to learn from ancient human ways of stone and metal working, and have built primitive fire arms and steam powered vehicles. For this reason also, they are distrusted by the other tribes.

Homeland: It is unknown where the traditional Rat homelands were located, for they have long lived among the ruins of the ancient cities as far back as anyone can remember.

Allies: The Rats have no allies.

Cliché Modifier: Sneaky; Stealthy; Clever.

Leviathan (Whale): Transforming into a monstrous 10ft long half-human, half-whale; Breathing underwater; Fast Swimmer; Withstanding an enormous amount of harm; Dealing massive damage via an enormous toothed maw; Dealing damage through a massive tail slam.

Long Strider (Horse): Transforming into a 7ft tall half-human, half-horse; Running for days on end without need for rest or food; Being immensely strong; Danger sense.

Spirit Hunter (Wolf): Transforming into a man-sized, half-human, half-wolf; Biting with sharp fangs; Raking with sharp claws; Tracking by scent for days on end; Fast runner; Causing fear

Tree Topper (Crow): Transforming into a man-sized, half-human, half-crow; Flying by way of wings; Sharp talons on feet capable of inflicting nasty injuries; Incredible eye-sight.

Forsaking the Call

When the tribes of Snake and Owl began to pursue a power other than nature as a means to better understand the Call, they didn't quite succeed. What they did do was open this world to the Shadow. In that instant, the Snakes and the Owls ties to the Forces of Nature were severed. So while these tribes are still embraced by the Call of the Wild, they can never again call to the greater animal spirits.

Yet, they gained something else, a vast and deep understanding of the elemental forces at work in the world, beyond beast and man: The land they walk on, the air they breath, the fire that falls from the sky and the water which gives life. The Snakes repented for unleashing the Shadow and use their knowledge to combat it instead.

The following two Clichés are available for Snake and Owl tribes only, and must be taken as a Double-Pump Cliché. Like Forces of Nature though, the lost dice due to a Double-Pump are regained after a number of days equal to the dice used because of the strain it places on the Banisher and Forsaker.

Banisher (Snake): Cause harm to the Shadow afflicted by touch; Drive the shadow from a body by touch; Sense the Shadow's presence; Rebuke the Shadow

Forsaker (Owl): Sculpt stone by hand; Cause burns by touch; Electrify by touch; Vaporize water by touch; Create water from hands; Create flames from hands; Heal wounds by touch; Withstand cold and fire without harm; Break objects by touch; Fuse objects (including living things!) by touch; Turn skin to rock to withstand injury.

The Working of Stone and Steel

The people of the Rat, like those of Owl and Snake, have lost their connection to the Forces of Nature, and did so because they gave up the wilds in favor of working stone and steel in the ruins of ancient man.

The great artisans of the Rats have been able to crudely reconstruct the metal wyrms and beetles that run on steam, or else produce primitive fire arms. The more eccentric inventors have been able to produce bizarre, wondrous and sometimes dangerous contraptions, such as flame throwers, flying machines, and telescopes.

The following Cliché is limited to the Rat Tribe only, and is taken as a normal Cliché. However, any character with this Cliché may then gain Bonus Gear Dice on a 1 to 3 ratio. That is, for every die sacrificed, the character gains 3 dice in Bonus Gear for this Cliché only, and must represent the various inventions of the character.

Artisan (Rat): Building and repairing steampunk powered technology; Building and repairing primitive fire arms; Building and repairing primitive flying machines; Building and repairing other primitive devices; Stone Masonry

The Call of the World

The following sheds some light on the larger culture of the Tribes, Geography, and the world in general.

Encampments

At the edge of territories between tribes, when the stars reach certain points in the sky, the tribes form encampments where the tribes mix in great celebrations. News, rumors, craft goods, and foods are traded, while many others look to renew or forge alliances and still others look for mates within and without their own tribe. The exceptions are the Owls and Rats. The Owls still come to the traditional meeting points every year, but it is a lonely, quiet festival, for no other tribe pays a visit to these encampments. As for the Rats, they hold no encampments of their own, but small clans or families show up to everyone's encampments on a regular basis.

In lean years or when recent raids have been particularly brutal, the encampments are also a place to seek help or air grievances. If a season has been particularly hard, sometimes the encampment will be called off completely.

Once a year, each tribe hosts a Grand Encampment in which all tribes send delegations to represent interests. Even the Rats and Owls send delegations though they host no Grand Encampment of their own.

Naming

Each person is given a personal name by their parents, and these names tend to be traditional names from ages ago (see sidebar) followed by the Family name which is usually descriptive of where the family lives, followed by the Clan name which is usually descriptive of the region the clan resides in, followed by the Tribe name.

SNAKE TRIBE

Appearance: The Snakes are easily identifiable by their long bodies and limbs, absence of all hair (even among the women), expressionless eyes, forked tongue, and long fangs

Culture: They are a generally mirthless people and most others feel uncomfortable around them. They, along with the Owls are responsible for the Shadow, but their attempts to repair the situation have earned them a modicum of tolerance, and while others treat the Snakes with some distrust, they Snakes for their part fully accept this attitude as their shame to bear. The Snakes make their villages on raised platforms and huts above the water, on top of low hills, or else in low, strong branches of trees.

Homeland: The Snakes call the great southern swamps their homeland.

Allies: Salamander and Egret tribes

Cliché Modifier: Lithe; Extremely flexible; Deep puncture bite attack; Protected Eyes.



WHALE TRIBE

Appearance: The people of the Whale are equally huge and strong as the Bear tribe, but are smooth skinned with little hair. They have large mouths and wide blocky teeth.

Culture: They are a ponderous people, typically slow to take umbrage, but once motivated they are like an unstoppable tidal wave. They build quaint little coastal villages, but having little land of their own they have no hesitations about raiding coastal communities of other tribes when their own resources dwindle. A wanderlust strikes the Whale people perhaps stronger than any other tribe except the horses, and so it's not uncommon to find a Whale exploring some far off place.

Homeland: Their homeland is all the sea, but especially the Northwestern Islands.

Allies: Dolphin and Seal Tribes

Cliché Modifier: Huge and strong; Relentless; Ponderous; Able to withstand a great deal of punishment; Great swimmers; Wanderlust.

WOLF TRIBE

Appearance: The Wolves are of average height and build, but are marked by long canine teeth, thick heads of hair, and pointed ears.

Culture: Few people are any fiercer or of greater warrior spirit than the Wolves. This tribe is among the most feared, for they rarely ally, and are highly territorial. Their raids are frightening quick and overwhelming, ferocious and without mercy. Yet, Wolves are immensely loyal, and a Wolf friend is a life time friend. Their villages are functional, but very warm and loving among families, a stark contrast with how they treat outsiders.

Homeland: Their ancestral home land is the Northern Forests.

Allies: The Wolves actively resist making alliances with anyone, but have on occasion worked together with the Coyote Tribe.

Cliché Modifier: Great sense of smell; Inherent ability to track by scent; Dealing damage with a bite; Mistrustful of others; Fighting spirit; Loyal.



Example Names

MALE

Adrik
Borya
Cheslav
Dima
Edik
Fedor
Gavrel
Hedeon
Iov
Jurg
Konstantine
Luka
Maxim
Nicolai
Oleg
Pavlya
Rurik
Sergei
Tosya
Uriah
Vanya
Yura
Zhenya

FEMALE

Alasa
Biana
Caterina
Daria
Elacha
Feia
Galya
Helena
Iaroia
Jelena
Karinna
Liska
Mara
Natasia
Okulina
Pasha
Raina
Sabina
Tatjana
Varya
Wissa
Yulia
Zhona

Example: Alek Brookside of the Green Glen Deer. Alek (personal name) Brookside (Family name) of the Green Glens (Clan name) Deer (Tribe Name).

Example: Vera Frostwood of the Tundra Wolves . Vera (personal name) Frostwood (Family name) of the Tundra (Clan name) Wolves (Tribe Name).

Rumors & Legends

Bat Tribe

In the beginning, it is said, a tribe of men embraced by the Bat existed in the Eastern Mountains, but they were a terrible people, cursed by a lust for the blood of the other tribes. Stories say the other tribes banded together and drove the Bats to extinction. No proof has ever been found to say the Bats ever existed as a tribe, but they make for good camp fire stories and to keep misbehaving children under control.

Stone World

Legend says that the world is round like a river stone and that man was not limited to this one land, but existed on many. They were separated by the vast gulfs of the oceans, and when the Calamity came, men were cut off from each other. Relics of ancient civilization are occasionally found which seem to indicate the truth of this. Yet, if true, are those other lands free of the Shadow's presence or are they plagued as well? What tribes exist? What other animals were embraced? Unfortunately, no sailing vessel is strong enough to survive long ocean voyages to determine the truth of this matter.

Tree Tribe

Rumors have circulated almost from the start that a tribe of men exist which did not embrace animals, but the plants of the earth. Invariably when a gathering of many clans meet, rumors are traded of sightings or encounters with this Tree Tribe, but no proof exists. If there is a Tree Tribe, then they are extremely reclusive and have done well to keep themselves nothing more than rumor for centuries.

Tribes of the Deep

Despite the best efforts of the Whale Tribe (or the Dolphin and Seals), no proof has ever been discovered of the long suspected Tribes of the Deep; those tribes of men who embraced the true water breathers of the seas and settled in the darkness below the waves.

Tribe Hierarchy

Though it may seem as though Tribes exist internally in harmony, such is not the case. A Tribe, at it's base, is comprised of hundreds of Families. Each Family consists anywhere from two to

a dozen or more individuals. Each Family allies itself with a Clan. There are anywhere from a half-dozen to a dozen Clans per Tribe. Families may feud with one another and Clans may feud as well. Regardless of internal strife, a Tribe presents a united front against other Tribes.

All told, each major Tribe has a population between 2,500 and 30,000 members, with the Whales having the lowest numbers, and the Rats having the greatest numbers. The lesser Tribes have about half to one-quarter the population of the major tribes. The total population of all Tribes across the land is around 300,000.

The Shadow

The Shadow is so named because when a living thing is born with it inside, it does manifest itself as a sinister and dark mockery of the true form. The body is elongated and stretched. The afflicted might have more or less eyes, limbs, horns, or tails. Some have been born with two heads. It is always obvious what the original creature was supposed to be, but the twisted form of the Shadow afflicted is a hideous abomination which rages and murders without mercy or need.

Members of the tribes are rarely afflicted by the Shadow, but when a new born tribe member is, it's obvious from birth (and is mercifully killed), whereas with lesser animals, it may take some time before Shadow erupts from the flesh. In this way, the wilds have grown dangerous.



BEHIND THE CALL

Note: This section is for the GM's eyes only.

The great unnamed calamity of Call of the Wild was biological and nano-tech warfare of the greatest order by a technologically advanced society. Tailor made genetic plagues swept the planet killing every one, even those who attempted to leave civilization behind. Soon there were no sides, as humanity as a whole faced extinction.

Humanity was forced to use genetic splicing nano cellular reprogramming to add animal DNA to their own, creating composite creatures immune to the viral plagues. Over time as civilization was forgotten, myths rose to explain the different tribes and Forces of Nature.

The whole of the world was affected, and many more continents exist for adventure and exploration, with different tribes of animals.

Nano-tech allowed the Snakes and Owls to intuitively attempt something they thought was magic, but in actuality, what they did was create a new virus that triggers massive and sudden spontaneous evolution - what the tribes call, The Shadow - and it will eventually take over the world. Salvation lays in understanding the technology hidden in the ancient ruins which could provide immunity or a means to combat it.

Adventuring in Call of the Wild need never touch upon this background, and could focus solely on inter-tribal conflicts and survival while delving fully into and making the animal theme a driving force of adventure. Adventures could also revolve around coming to understand the history of the world and attempting to relearn the ancient secrets of men to stop the Shadow.

One final note: Nothing above has to be true. Nothing will change about the game world if you, as GM, decide to give actual magical and/or spiritual forces at work. Above all, enjoy, and play how you want.

Personal Name
Family Name
Clan Name
Tribe Name

Cliches

Sketch

Lucky Shots **Questing Dice**

Tools of The Trade

Tale

Hook

Personal Name
Family Name
Clan Name
Tribe Name

Cliches

Sketch

Lucky Shots **Questing Dice**

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