

## Kinfolk and Caerns: bringing the unheard song into the symphony

'We need someone who can hide us - anyone know some Kinfolk we can trust?' or

'There is grave news, one of our Kinfolk families has been kidnapped by Black Spiral Dancers'

~overheard at almost any *Werewolf: the Apocalypse* game

In most *Werewolf: the Apocalypse* chronicles, Kinfolk most often fulfil the role of helpless plot hook, love interest, strategic asset (such as the *Background: Contacts*) or (pardon the pun) general dogsbody. Kinfolk are generally second class citizens, and it appears to be a rare Storyteller who pushes their involvement to the fore. Bringing life to Kinfolk (outside of these more functional roles) is worth an investment of time, but can be tricky. They are usually NPCs, although some troupes may experiment with whole Kinfolk chronicles or even intersperse full-blood Garou with Kinfolk for a very different type of chronicle. It can however, be a hard sell for the Storyteller. After all, Werewolves have access to the Spirit World, fetishes, are full members of their society and have a powerful war-form - all of which makes playing a Kinfolk appear (superficially) less appealing.

Additionally, the treatment that some tribes are rumoured to mete out to their Kinfolk (the Get of Fenris spring to mind) can also make playing a Kinfolk a less attractive option. *Kinfolk: Unsung Heroes* covers these points in far more detail, and is a valuable resource for Storytellers wanting to more deeply involve the role of Kinfolk in their games. Storytellers may also like to consult *Guardians of the Caerns* for more information on Caern structure and responsibility.

Throughout this article, a smaller scale Caern which needs the assistance of these *Unsung Heroes* simply to function will be explored. The Sept of the Five Seasons features in my home chronicle, and will be further revealed in future blog posts. As the *Apocalypse* draws near, there are many tenets of the

Litany which can be disputed. Sanctity of a Caern however is not one of them. Even among the other Changing Breeds, the integrity of a Caern is inviolate, and no Garou or Bete would dare suggest that abandoning a Caern is acceptable. The challenge for the Garou as a dying breed is to provide more than simple defence for these sites. As wells of spiritual energy and direct connections to the Umbra, these places are sacred and need active nurturing. It is never enough to simply maintain a Caern - they require active care.

But this care takes time, and requires dedicated local Garou to devote time to their Caern duties. Whilst such duties are worthy of Renown, so are other actions such as combating the Wurm and completing Spirit Quests.

At the Sept of the Five Seasons (see next page) the pressure to protect and nurture the Caern has been catalysed by tragedy. Tucked away eight miles from the town of Cedar Rapids in the Hanging Bog State is a relatively low-level Caern. Tended by three



packs and a small group of single Garou, the site seemed well-positioned to eventually grow in stature, a plan which Molly (the Fianna Sept Leader) has encouraged.

Recent events derailed the plans of the Sept when a co-ordinated strike killed one entire pack and decimated another. In one night seven Garou were slaughtered, and the only witness has no recollection of any event prior to a week before the assault. The attack has severely undermined any plans for the area, and with increased rumours of Wyrms-ridden business using the current City Council Business Incentive Funding to become established, the remaining Garou have been hard-pressed to find an advantage.

Six months after the attacks, the Garou are none the wiser as to the identity of the murderers. Over time, it has become known (though not as widespread knowledge) that all of the Garou of the Sept of the Five Seasons have a week of missing memory, culminating in the night of the attack. The fear that this internal weakness could be discovered has led to their near-isolationist policy and rejection of help from other cities. Additionally, the local Fetches have been silent for the last year and no new cubs have been found anywhere near the Sept.

During this time, the few Kinfolk in the area have been instrumental in shoring up the defences and providing much-needed support as the Sept seeks to protect what is still theirs, but also avenge the fallen. Now decimated, the Sept realises that Kinfolk and Garou numbers are more than evenly matched, and the Garou simply lack the personnel to undertake all of the Caern activities. The harsh reality is that some positions within the Sept cannot be undertaken by Kinfolk (such as Master of the Rite or Master of the Challenge), but there are a range of duties which can be shouldered (like the Keepers of the Bawn).

Presented here are two sample NPCs who have stepped into the breach of the war against the Wyrms - and may survive yet to have their tales sung beyond their own Sept.

## Sept of the Five Seasons

Level: 2

Gauntlet: 5

Type: Love (Guardians of the Caerns, p. 12-13).

Tribal Structure: Open, with Silent Striders, Glass Walkers, Fianna, Bone Gnawers, Stargazers, Silver Fangs and Uktena represented. Given the low numbers, there are not many of any Tribe in residence for a clear majority to arise.

Sept Leader: Molly (Rank 3 Homid Fianna Cheurge). Molly knows that her current position is extremely vulnerable, especially given the recent attacks and lack of new cubs. She is torn between a complete isolationist policy to allow for this *internal affair* to be dealt with, but is slowly being swayed by Auntie Gallileo's arguments to the contrary. The arrival of Wyrms-tainted business and growing hostilities with the local Fae are seeing this situation quickly reach a crisis point.

Totem: Dawn (*Axis Mundi*, p. 89-90)

Physical Location: Hanging Bog, Iowa (north of Cedar Rapids)



## Helen, Watchful Healer

*Background:* Helen became aware of her heritage from a young age. Her mother, a full-blood Garou, was killed when she was still very young, leaving Helen to be raised by her father and brother. When her brother, Michael, underwent his first change, he savagely attacked their father who is now wheelchair bound. Michael's guilt drove him first into Harano and then into a near-suicidal vigour to combat the Wyrms. Helen was the lynchpin holding the family together, and her entry into medical school was precipitated by her belief that these skills would benefit her family. When Michael eventually slid further into despair, he was removed from active duty and sent to the Valkenburg Foundation for extended treatment. By that stage, Helen's study was complete, although she was tethered by duty and family to Cedar Rapids. Even as Kin, she understands that her skills are incredibly useful to the Sept, and working the late shift means that wounded Garou and Kin can be safely and discretely treated.

Recently, Helen has secured a contract for their clinic to work with the local nursing home owned by the Autumn Health corporation. However, recent meetings with the Director Mr Thaddeus have left her with a distinct feeling that something is wrong with the business. Having spent most of her life with watchwords like *duty* and *obligation*, Helen has decided that it is time to prove her worth. Perhaps motivated by a feeling of shame over the actions of her brother, she firmly believes now that the family name needs to be redeemed. Guided by these beliefs, Helen has met with a small number of other Kinfolk and has begun an off the books investigation into Autumn Health and their practices. The alliance firmly believes they are capable of good, especially given the recent tragic decline in Garou numbers in the Sept. The only question, however, is how foolhardy this need for recognition makes the Kinfolk and whether they are able to get information back to the Sept before something goes horribly wrong.

Autumn Health has already secured public goodwill by funding open Family Days, and spearheading local charity activities so convincing the public of any wrongdoing will be a risky venture. Helen, however, is keeping her eyes on the end goal of arriving at the Sept with intelligence that Kin, not Garou, have uncovered and the possible Glory of their activities.

*Description:* Helen is surrounded by a fierce energy and seems to be in near-constant motion; whether pacing the floor or drumming the table with her fingers. She is a genuinely warm, and both her home and work life have given her great patience welling from an honest desire to help people. Her reddish-brown hair is usually tied back in a functional ponytail and most of the Sept would be familiar with her only in her hospital garb.



## Heidi, Vicarious Nomad

*Background:* Only recently identified as Silent Strider Kinfolk, Heidi was blessed to spend time on the road with a few of the Tribe. A combination of 'fortunate meetings' has proven her knack for being in the right place at the right time. The past year has been one of 'finding herself' after finishing high school and deciding whether college, a job or something else was the right path. She didn't expect that 'finding herself' meant the realisation that werewolves existed and darker forces were at play. However, her near-perfect memory has taken it all in, as she does the stories of fellow travellers. Her ability to not only tell a good tale, but tell the right tale, has already earned her the respect of the few low-Ranking Galliards and those Garou in particular are watching intently her for signs of the Change.

Arriving in Cedar Rapids only recently, Heidi has made the acquaintance of Aunty Galileo, the owner/operator of the local Bed & Breakfast. The matronly woman, a Stargazer Garou, is the local Den Mother (or would be if any Cubs were to be discovered). Instead, Aunty Galileo offers a safe haven for the nomadic packs which pass through and Heidi is already making herself known to these packs as a source of information. Able to see patterns in disparate stories, and aided by her memory, the Strider Kin has become somewhat of a human network for local news. Stories from other packs (and even mundane travellers) are eagerly stored in her head, and in the quiet nights at the Bed & Breakfast the facts are sifted through her mind. Helen has only recently become aware of the new Kinfolk in town, and is debating whether to bring her into the Autumn Health operation. Heidi is still very wide-eyed about Garou, and Helen worries that secrecy may be an issue.

*Description:* Heidi is very much an experimenter when approaching what she calls 'her look', and it can be influenced by present company and her mood alike. Currently, she is fond of a pair of second-hand leather boots left unclaimed at the Bed & Breakfast and a long coat which has been her constant travelling companion. Beyond that, she is just at home in jeans and t-shirts as clothes most at home at a Ren Faire. She is a very good listener, and most folk find her to have a youthful, positiveness which older, more cynical Garou speculate will not

last long. Given the dire circumstances of the Caern, and the encroaching Wyrms threat, they may be right.



## Story Hooks

Below are a couple of ideas to work both of these characters into a chronicle:

Helen decides finally to recruit Heidi and the younger woman wastes no time trying to uncover useful information. At the Bed and Breakfast Heidi makes the acquaintance of a Black Fury Ronin (Diona, outcast Cheurge from the Sept of the Western Eye in San Francisco) who is simply 'passing through'. The Ronin, seeing a chance for easy Glory, swiftly joins the investigation. When Heidi expresses doubts, Diona simply states that Helen does not need to know about her involvement, and that Heidi can take the credit. When rumours begin to circulate about break-ins at Autumn Health, and the Sept begins their own investigation, will Diona simply abandon the Kinfolk?

News arrives that Michael (Helen's brother) is being transferred from Valkenburg to the local Autumn Health facility, to ensure he is closer to family. Helen tries in vain to overturn the decision, but the Sept is pre-occupied with other matters. Michael seems to have some difficulty in settling into the new facility, and his outbursts are met with a regime of sedation. When a horrified Helen visits him during one of his more lucid moments, Michael gives vague reference to the 'other wolves' being held at Autumn Health. Who are the others and what is the agenda? If Autumn Health was tied to DNA (see *Book of the Wyrms*) what types of clandestine operations is the Director authorising? What if Mr Thaddeus is a Fomor tasked with building a Valkenburg for Black Spiral Dancers?



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