

## To the Garden of Monsters

### Announcement

*The Emperor Brightshadow of the Realm of the Copper Lands ordained that his palace gardens must be the finest in all the known spheres, and so it was made. But on the day of the Festival of Inauguration of the gardens, the rustle of applause turned to screams of terror, as monsters emerged from the shady grottoes and horrors stalked the pleasant lawns.*

*The greatest warriors of the Realm have failed to lift the siege of the Imperial Palace. You, though, are not of the Realm. You are **Spherewalkers** – great heroes and wizards. If anyone can dispel this curse, by sword or spell, it is surely you!*

*(Approx. 4 hours. No previous system knowledge required.)*

### Background

**The Copper Lands** are a realm of subtle politics and formal hierarchies, where the **Empire** is forever seeking to extend its influence and consolidate its power, and to resolve the contradictions between those two goals. (Of course, a lot of less-than-admirable people are happy just to exploit that power for their own ends.) Copper is, as the realm's name suggests, widely available, and sources of tin are adequate; iron is scarce. Hence, local craftspeople are much more competent with copper and bronze – but they are *very* competent, working in traditions that go back centuries, and the people of the realm even make small airships that fly thanks to alchemically-created gases and are propelled by small, muscular oxen-like creatures which power treadmills which drive propellers. People know of other spheres and of Spherewalkers, and trade is regularly conducted through a couple of well-established gates that lie in wilderness regions in outlying provinces of the Empire.

The local religion mostly talks about “Heaven” as a rather abstract power; the gods are acknowledged and sometimes worshipped, usually in the form of the Chinese pantheon, but most worship is perhaps more for the sake of form than out of deep belief – the authority of Heaven propagates through mortal authority, and propriety suffices to please Heaven. The realm's virtue is *The King*, representing Authority – the Authority of a well-ordered Empire. Its flaw is *The Cockatrice*, representing Corruption; the Empire doesn't acknowledge how much its power is abused. Its fate is *Law*, representing Order vs. Treachery – the Empire may be led wisely and endure for an age of stability and plenty, or decay into a stew of backstabbing and unjust legalism. The Usurper is *The Court*, representing a complex organised hierarchy; inverted, it represents flashy appearances and pointless rules.

### Emperor Brightshadow's Commands

The current Emperor, **Brightshadow**, is more concerned with appearances than economic or military power. He points out when challenged by bold courtiers that the strength of the Empire lies as much in its perceived glory and perfection as in anything else, though it's noticeable that the measures he takes to reinforce that perception often focus on himself.

His latest big idea was to improve and expand the gardens of his palace, so that anyone who so much as approaches the place will be impressed by the glory of the Empire, and so that its fame will spread even across the spheres. However, his demands grew ever more pressing and vainglorious as the work continued, requiring that the Clerk of Formal Rituals, **Spoken Knife** (actually a specialist spirit-mage – his place in the formal hierarchy permits him command of certain low-level spirits for government purposes) patch ever more problems by calling on spirits to move earth, pump water,

and encourage the growth of the finest plants in the thinnest soils. This worked well enough until it didn't; unfortunately, Spoken Knife didn't notice the problem in time.

### The Disaster

Because the Copper Lands are a realm of hierarchies, there is a hierarchy of spirit-worlds associated with it – or perhaps there are linked spheres inhabited by spirits. That's for the philosophers to debate. The important thing is that Spoken Knife was summoning low-ranking nature spirits and forcing their service, and they became resentful. So they were petitioning higher-ranking spirits in the "hells" – which are mostly organised spirit courts, albeit full of beings which appear rather demonic to human perceptions, and which don't always have much regard for humans. The petition worked its way up the hierarchy, eventually reaching an official, **The Chief Clerk of Complaints**, with the authority to pass judgement.

The Chief Clerk ruled that, as the humans had constructed their garden and enabled it to operate by handing its working over to citizens of the hells, the garden was now the domain of those citizens. This ruling entirely satisfied the complainants; even if some of them were still bound to its operation, their friends and relations could now come and visit them. Others simply decided to invite their neighbours and cousins to come through and amuse themselves in this mortal realm.

Being a creature of formal righteousness, the Chief Clerk declared that his ruling would come into force when work on the humans' garden was formally declared complete – which of course was at the climax of the Festival of Inauguration. As the last seal was placed on the commemorative charter, the doors to the "hells" opened, and the horde of demonic spirits started to wander through. The Festival went rather downhill at that point.

### The Situation

The great garden is now riddled with spirits of varying levels of intelligence, malice, and power. The Chief Clerk's ruling is quite clear that only the *gardens* are freely accessible to the spirits, so they are substantially weakened if they either wander beyond the borders of the gardens or try to enter the palace buildings. This hasn't stopped some of them trying to assail the palace, but the defences hastily erected by the guards and courtiers have been adequate to keep them out so far.

This leaves a lot of courtiers and guests trapped in the palace. Getting in or out through the gardens requires hours of fighting through demons and monsters of unpredictable abilities and considerable power, a lot of these people aren't warriors, and palace guards and the armies of the Empire aren't up to the job of breaking the siege or providing adequate escorts. (The armies defend the borders; there aren't many troops in the heart of the Empire, and bringing forces back would weaken the borders dangerously. Anyway, these are generally just competent mortal soldiers, not necessarily up to the task of fighting demons.) Fortunately, the Empire has been able to use airships to transport supplies and a few people in and out, but the airships can't carry much, and it would be *ritually incorrect* for the Emperor or too many of his palace officials to flee the palace. So word has been sent out; any heroes who can solve this problem will receive due rewards and the favour of the Emperor himself.

### Setup

Explain a bit about the background of the game, the general setting, the nature of spherewalkers, and the basics of the mechanics, then offer the players their choice of pregen characters and use the character sheets to explain a bit more about the rules. Let the players see a couple of Fortune Deck cards. Explain that spherewalkers have a variety of motivations for their wandering, as summarised by their *Motives*, but they're all the sort of people who'll charge into dangerous situations – because

they're very capable, and (broadly speaking) heroes. This particular group have come together by chance, but heroic spherewalkers of this type all tend to head in the same direction most of the time.

### Introducing the Spherewalkers

The PCs have just come together in the course of resolving some minor problem in the realm of **Nature's Touch**, a land of centaurs, satyrs, mermaids, and sphinxes, and are relaxing in the town square of the town they've just saved when a passing traveller – presumably a spherewalker, given that she's entirely human – hails them and offers to buy them a drink of the fine local sapphire wine. She introduces herself as **Silver Wheel**; it turns out that she is a merchant – not something terribly unusual, someone with a knack for spherewalking but no pretensions to heroism who has turned this gift to profitable use – who has just completed a profitable trade journey, and who is therefore feeling generous. Anyone with Water 4+ can tell that her affability seems entirely genuine; Water 5+ determines that she isn't lying or being misleading at any point.

In fact, she has just returned from the Copper Lands (which the heroes either haven't heard of or have only heard vague rumours about), as there is a gate a day's travel south of this town. She'll ask if they're heard about what's happening there; they haven't.

*"Oh well, it's a new thing, I suppose. The Copper Lands are an empire – all very law-abiding – but the imperial palace there is suddenly under siege by demons. Quite the business."*

The heroes will find this quite a dramatic piece of news; there are various entities among the spheres which are called "demons", but mostly they show up singly, summoned by malevolent magicians for specific purposes, or are the enemies of the gods, preoccupied with that eternal war. A whole army of them, laying siege to a mortal palace, is a strange and probably worrying event. They'll presumably ask Silver Wheel for more information, but she shrugs apologetically.

*"It is a new thing, and I only heard about it just before I was heading back here. The two gates there are both on the borderlands of the Empire, you know. One of the local airships sailed up with the news. They're looking for a way to save the palace and get rid of the demons, of course."*

Note that most spheres have two gates, leading to two different other spheres, though this isn't a rigid rule; it now seems that Nature's Touch must have at least three. If asked about the "airship", Silver Wheel smiles. *"Oh yes, they're something you see there. Some kind of alchemical trick – a fish-shaped bag full of vapours that sails through the sky. They charge quite a bit for passage, and can't carry many goods."* The heroes have heard many tales of flying vehicles, usually magical, and most of them have probably ridden on such things once or twice; anyone with Air 6+ will guess that the alchemists you find in some realms might be able to rig up some kind of way to fly, and may be curious about how exactly it's done.

If the heroes ask more about the Copper Lands, Silver Wheel is happy to chat, but has a strictly pragmatic understanding of the realm.

*"As I said, it's an empire. Not a bad place if you don't mind dealing with half-a-dozen clerks and bureaucrats every time you want to arrange an honest deal, I suppose. A seer I once talked to said that the Usurper card there was something like The Court. They don't have much iron – you can get a decent price for that – but they are very good at working copper and brass and bronze."*

All of which should be enough to get the PCs interested in heading for this gate; this is a sphere they haven't visited before, the siege of the palace is a challenge, a puzzle, and an arcane mystery, and people need their help. So they can get some directions from Silver Wheel and set out.

## The Journey

A day's travel carries them to the gate, which is evidently well enough known to locals; a trading post community has sprung up around it, and a small contingent of centaur soldiers is guarding it. They have no objection to spherewalkers going through, so long as there are no apparent signs of criminal or untoward behaviour. The gate itself is marked by a pair of great ancient oak trees which have grown up and leant towards each other so their branches are tangled and knotted with ivy and vines. The space through which travellers must walk is marked by a faint amber shimmer in the air.

Stepping through a gate always produces feelings that differ from individual to individual, but which are sometimes described as being like falling through the air on a dark and starless night. However, on this occasion, anyone with effective Water 4+ with regard to magical forces picks up a slight but definite sense of *chaos and disruption* on the arrival side. The spherewalkers are moving between locations where the cosmic energies are different, and on this occasion, it seems that there's something amiss about those energies in the Copper Lands. Anyone with Water 6 will get a more specific visual impression – as if a chaotic, many-coloured fountain of energy is erupting somewhere in the distance; someone with effective Water 7 when it comes to magical phenomena (i.e. Opal, if she's present) will get a specific vision – of strange creatures ascending and descending a ladder from underground to a place where they've set up an encampment.

Anyway, on the arrival side, the gate has a very different appearance; a pair of brass columns, about 12' high and the same distance apart, with a brass lintel with a worn inscription in some ancient script. (It's an archaic version of the local script; the inscription says "Beware the Land of Unruled Beasts" in the Tongue.) Looking round, it's clear that the locals have once again established a trading post, albeit a tidier and larger one – this is a small village within a stockade. The heroes are promptly approached by a fussy, middle-aged man in what might be formal clothes or an ornate military uniform – a tunic, trousers, jacket, and skullcap – and politely greeted and asked their business. This is **Three Slow Cats**, an official of the Empire who regards this posting as an inconvenience but who is nonetheless determined to perform his duties correctly.

Anyone looking round the trading post will mostly be in danger of being sold intricate bronze curios; the locals know enough about spherewalkers not to pick fights with them. The stockade is there to discourage bandits and wild animals from being a nuisance to the community; the lands outside are somewhat unregulated, being very much the borderlands of the Empire. But anyway, once the heroes convey that they have heard of the troubles in this realm, and that they are interested in investigating and/or helping, the locals will be actively enthused, saying that yes, such help would be appreciated; word is that the forces of the Empire have so far been unable to repel the demons, and no wizards or scholars have yet come up with any sort of solution. Most of the locals only know what they've heard at second or third hand about this problem, but they'll be quick to introduce the spherewalkers to someone who can be more help to them.

This is **Purple-Tooth**, the captain of a small airship currently docked here. Being taken to speak to him will give the heroes their first sight of an airship; describe it as a blimp-like craft with a cabin suspended underneath and a big propeller and rudder arrangement at the back of the cabin, all rather ornate and very slightly rickety in fantasy-illustration style. An open walkway runs around the outside of the cabin. Purple-Tooth is a weather-beaten middle-aged man who is sitting smoking a pipe when the heroes arrive; he'll be interested to meet the heroes, and very willing to transport them to the palace.

*"I've been in and out twice since the trouble started. Luckily, it seems that the demons can't fly. Then they asked me to come here and give anyone from beyond the world who wanted to fix the*

*problem a ride over. Get aboard soon as you like; you're flying at the Emperor's expense, and I don't know how long the place can hold out."*

The airship turns out to have a crew of four besides its captain, and to be powered by a pair of small, muscular oxen-like creatures on a treadmill. (*"Specially bred for the task."*) It travels remarkably quickly, but it's six days to the palace from the gate. This is basically down time, but it gives the spherewalkers an excuse to discuss plans, ask questions, and come up with bright ideas.

### Approaching on Foot

If any of the heroes express an interest in approaching the gardens on foot, or of being dropped into them to challenge the demons, Purple-Tooth will shrug and say that it's their business, but from what he's heard, the demons are tough enough to give even great warriors a fight, and he doesn't know what the situation will be when they get there; anyway, the Emperor and his officials will want to talk to the newcomers and maybe formulate plans. (*"They do love talking and planning."*) He'll be willing to wait a safe distance; it seems that the demons don't venture beyond the bounds of the gardens.

If the players insist, well, they'll have a huge fight on their hands, though reconnaissance using supernatural stealth *might* work. See the separate notes for demon types and abilities; Give the group **Vine Operators** equal to their own numbers to begin with, then have a mixture of **Vine Operators** and **Spring Managers** drawn by the commotion, then throw in a couple of **Earth Movers** to make the point. Really favourable card draws *and* clever tactics might enable the group to fight through to the palace, but they'll be battered and blooded by the time they get there.

### The First Problem

On the morning of the sixth day of the journey, Purple-Tooth announces that the gardens will be in sight soon, and the palace not long after. Ask the players what the characters are doing at this point, which determines where they are and how much attention they are paying when the airship is attacked by a flock of **Blood Butterflies**. When he sees them coming or his attention drawn to them, Purple-Tooth yells "Heaven defend us! The bastards can fly now!"

Describe the butterflies to the players. There are seven of these demons approaching – so if each PC engages one, there are a couple more

to slaughter crew members or send them plummeting to their doom, or rip holes in the gasbag. If PCs engage them with effective missile fire, they'll fly around the other side of the airship, forcing the missile-using PC to run around the walkway to deal with them. The PCs can doubtless fight them effectively, but the fact that the enemy are flying is obviously a problem. As the players what specific tactics they're each adopting, then play through the fight and see how things pan out. They should ideally be trying to protect the crew and the gasbag, but it will unavoidably take some damage.

### *The Gardens Now*

However the spherewalkers first get proper sight of the gardens, they'll be struck by how *weird* they are. They evidently started out with an intricate formal layout of paths, streams, and well-groomed plantings, but this has been overlaid by lush and wildly fecund growth, with a pervasive smell of rot. Some paths have been roughly and crudely widened by brute force; others have been transformed into tumultuous streams bursting out of the original water features. Flowers are huge and varicoloured; fruit are grossly large and saturated with heady perfumes and intoxicating juices.

Anyone with Water 5 will have the sense of powerful and undisciplined mystic energies running riot here; Water 6+ specifically picks up that these energies are all about *growth* – any corruption here is merely the decay within rich soil.

After which, the airship is once again heading for the palace, if a little less under control than before...

### The Palace

The palace is a big, ornate extravaganza of a place, with one or more courtyards quite large enough to accommodate the airship – which is just as well, because it took damage in the fight with the butterflies and is basically in a shallow crash dive just now. However, as it approaches, the spherewalkers will see that the palace is currently under direct attack; three **Vine Operators** are goading an **Earth Mover** to batter at the walls with stones, hoping to create cracks that they can open up with plant growth.

They aren't actually doing at all well at this, as the PCs may realise if they pay close attention with decent Air scores. The demons' powers and effects basically stop working at the palace walls – but the hurled lumps of rock are doing some damage, and a group of palace guards are trying to drive them off (and taking casualties if and when they cross the perimeter of the palace). This is an opportunity for the PCs to play the heroes and make a good impression, if they wish, but they'll either have to drop a significant distance from the approaching airship, drop a shorter distance onto the palace walls and then climb down, or disembark when the airship lands and then make a dash for the fight. Check elements and make a fortune card draw or two, and then go into the fight.

### Guards and Courtiers

Once they're on the ground and talking to the locals, the spherewalkers will discover that they're dealing with a mixed group of nobles, courtiers, guards, and servants, all of them hungry and scared. They'll rapidly acquire a polite escort of palace guards, mostly to save them from being bothered by panicky courtiers; as the palace guards have been taking the brunt of the fighting, they're glad to have someone around who may be able to solve the problem. They can describe the main different types of demon, and agree that the blood butterflies are a new and worrying arrival – though none of the monsters seem to be able to get into the palace.

The PCs will sooner or later be summoned to speak with **Emperor Brightshadow**. Water 5+ picks up that the Emperor is burying a raging anger beneath a stiff formality; Water 6+ quickly recognises that he's way out of his depth here, and trying to solve the problem by issuing formal commands that it should be solved (without disrupting his courtly routine). All he really knows is that he ordered the construction of a great garden, which had of course to be the finest possible, and then it turned out to be infested with these monsters, and now he wishes to have the problem solved, and will grant due honours to anyone who accomplishes this. He has no idea who or what might be responsible; there are revolutionaries and malcontents within the Empire, but none with the power to do something like this.

The PCs may get more useful information from the Emperor's advisers and ministers, who confirm that no known enemy of the Empire is thought to be capable of such evil. There are always said to be evil wizards, of course, but none with such power. If anyone asks whether there's a "court wizard" or similar, the idea is treated as faintly shocking; the Empire runs on formality and correct behaviour, not anarchic magic – though a specialist might be employed when supernatural power is required.

If anyone asks about the construction of the gardens, they'll be told that this was the Emperor's idea; he holds that the Empire should overwhelm hostile forces by dazzling them with its capabilities. (There's a definite hint here that the courtiers recognise that there's a lot of personal vanity involved here, though they can never say so.) Although he laid out the essential basis of the plan, the task of construction was of course handed over to the Clerk of Formal Rituals, who is responsible for such

matters. Direct questions will elicit an acknowledgement that the Clerk may employ specialist supernatural powers as part of his job, and learn his name; **Spoken Knife**, a quiet, grey-robed character who has been lurking at the back of the crowd of courtiers, not speaking to the spherewalkers yet.

If anyone speaks to him, Spoken Knife agrees that the garden was his task; if anyone asks if he used magic for this, he points out rather uncomfortably that he is the *Clerk of Formal Rituals*, and of course certain formal rituals are part of his work...

The fact that Spoken Knife is scared and worried is hardly something that anyone will be surprised by, under the general circumstances, but anyone with Water 5 gets the feeling that he's hiding something, and Water 6+ gets a distinct sense of guilt here, with the implication that the problem is somehow his fault – though getting him to admit this would be hard work, or require direct threats or force that might lead to problems later. If anyone gets him talking about the actual garden design, or gets sight of the planning drawings, Air 4 recognises that this was a huge project requiring considerable technical skill and ingenuity, Air 5 perceives that the task required more than mundane effects and methods, and Air 6+ instantly notes that the task given to Spoken Knife was essentially impossible in mundane terms – magic must perforce have been involved. Confronted with such insights and not in the presence of the Emperor or his ministers, Spoken Knife eventually breaks down and admits that he had to work increasingly complex rituals to meet the Emperor's demands, which may somehow have led to this demon incursion. If pushed, he'll then admit that the rituals called on spiritual powers – but he doesn't call on evil powers to create a garden! That would be foolish!

However, flattery or threats will get him talking about the details of the design, and he'll point to the great fountain in the centre of the main garden as his greatest achievement – and his greatest problem. He has to admit that was where he had to perform the most complex rituals – but the Emperor demanded the greatest possible fountain...

### Dealing With Demons

It's possible to talk to the demons, though not easy; they regard humans as irritating pests who are too much trouble to bother with; they should be ignored where possible, driven off or even exterminated if necessary, and doing so in physically pleasing ways is obviously best. Spirit control magic lacks permanent effect in the gardens, but can work outside them or within the palace; physically restraining one would allow it to be interrogated. Extended non-violent interaction with a demon also enables anyone with Water 4 to sense that this isn't a creature that reeks of evil, while Water 5 gets the feeling that it's more of a functional spirit than a demon as most people understand the term, and Water 6 recognises that it's mostly *annoyed* at humanity for pestering it with magic.

Hence, careful players may be able to draw out responses from the demon, and eventually get a clear statement:

*The Chief Clerk of Complaints has ruled that, as you humans constructed your garden and enabled it to operate by handing its working over to citizens of the hells, while making unreasonable demands of our service and binding us to this place, the garden is now our domain. Some must still work here, but it is their own land to work; others simply invited their neighbours and cousins to come through and amuse themselves in this place of amusement.*

If anyone wants to dispute this ruling, they need to go talk to the Chief Clerk of Complaints. He's in the Hells, which are, if anyone asks, through the portal in that big fountain...

## The Fountain

The portal is indeed in that great fountain which the Emperor commanded should form the centrepiece of the gardens; getting to it will mean getting past a few demons, but Air 5+ can plot a route on the plans of the gardens, or the PCs can just bull through; high Earth as well as decent Fire will make this feasible. Alternatively, the players may work out a way to present themselves as emissaries from the Emperor to the demon realm; a document under the Emperor's seal and some adequate eloquence could actually impress the demons, who are at least as hierarchical as the local humans. Maybe draw a fortune card to see how well any plan goes...

Once they reach the fountain, a character with Water 6+ can sense the portal – a sort of variant gate – here and take the entire party through safely. If no one has that level of sensitivity, somebody with Water 5 can get themselves and one other person through safely, and someone with Water 4 can get through okay but with a fortune card draw to check for bad consequences; if anyone with Water 3 or less plunges in unaided, they'll get through but a bad effect is very likely – ask the fortune deck how bad. Bad consequences here mostly involve lungs full of water.

Then, after a moment of what feels a lot like falling through a rainstorm in pitch darkness amidst inhuman screams, the party arrives in... hell?

## Into the Demon Realm

Actually, the demon realm seems a lot like a human city, albeit that the buildings are double size and built with lots of weird angles, the air is full of the smell of sulphur and burning dung, and the local citizens... Are a little unnerving to look at. They'll also look askance at the PCs, and may soon start to look threatening, but the trick here is to act confident and talk well. (A high Air score will help a lot.) Demanding to speak to the Chief Clerk of Complaints will actually make things a lot easier; passing a problem upwards is always a good way to get rid of it.

If the PCs start violence or completely fluff negotiations, things may become sticky; they'll probably get a fight with an equal number of vine operators, with more demons coming into sight as they fight. However, just as things look bad, what seems to be a human skeleton made of jade, holding a scroll and a pen, pushes through to the front of the watching crowd of demons and demands that these impolite intruders give an account of themselves to the Chief Clerk of Complaints.

## The Chief Clerk of Complaints

Meeting the Chief Clerk means entering a vast pagoda seemingly made of jet, wherein the Chief Clerk has absolute authority. The officers of the court appear to be human skeletons made of jade, all holding scrolls and pens with which they make notes of *everything*; the Chief Clerk himself seems to be a 9' tall humanoid, but all that can be seen of his face is a silver mask under a black silk hat, and his body is swathed in multiple layers of black silk. He speaks in a low, level, sibilant voice.

If anyone attacks the officers, they fall back and let the Chief Clerk deal with the problem. The chief clerk itself has total command over space and distance within the court, so anyone trying to attack him or his officers will find themselves running impossible distances and yet never reaching their foe, while missiles and magic simply fall short.

Sorting out this problem will require some thought and roleplaying; the demons consider themselves the injured parties in all this, and want compensation. However, the Chief Clerk will be irritated to learn that the demons in the garden have been attacking humans without warning and trying to break into the human palace; the former was just rude, and the latter was exceeding the scope of the initial award to them. If the humans would care to suggest a revised settlement, the Chief Clerk

will be prepared to consider it. If anyone asks what the demons would consider valid compensation, the Chief Clerk consults with his officers and other demons for a moment, and then says that ten cartloads of manure every day for a year would be acceptable. (It can simply be poured into the fountain.) If this is primarily human-produced dung, that would be considered a goodwill gesture. (Demons are *weird*...) A signed agreement between the Chief Clerk and the human Emperor may be necessary; the PCs will have to negotiate that.

Incidentally, if it emerges that the PCs have slain a few demons in the garden, that won't count against them too badly; demons are primal creatures which are well accustomed to violence, a few casualties are nothing new for them, they may well reincarnate eventually, and the Chief Clerk will readily accept pleas of self-defence. Violence inflicted *in Hell*, on the other hand, is more of a problem; the PCs were visitors and intruders here. Let the PCs come up with some kind of profound apology or offer of compensation. If they come away owing a sworn favour to a demon, that's for them to worry about later.

### Wrapping Up

The PCs will (hopefully) eventually return to the human world, and will have to sell whatever agreement they reached there. The Emperor won't be best pleased to have cartloads of night soil trailing through his garden every day for the next year, so the PCs had best wax eloquent about that. Whether they sell out Spoken Knife, or leave him owing them a huge favour, is up to them; giving him the job of supervising the dung shipments might be poetic justice.

The PCs should also feel that they are due some rewards; maybe let the players suggest what they will ask for, but point out that they are wanderers by nature, so land and titles aren't terribly appropriate, and wealth is of limited interest. However, the palace has an enormous library of ancient wisdom, warriors can be offered fine weapons and armour, and their feats can be recorded on gold-dusted scrolls which will be preserved for generations to come.

## Demon Types

All of these are technically spirits, but if the players use spirit-control magic on them, there's a problem; they're acting at the command and by the authority of the Chief Clerk of Complaints, a demigod-level being within the ambit of his authority. Hence, spirit control magic has only temporary, brief effects on them within or over the gardens, or in the Demon Realm. However, it has full effects if they are somehow dragged within the palace or outside the gardens.

### Blood Butterflies

These have the appearance of human-sized butterflies with intricate, dazzling patterns on their wings, glowing red eyes on stalks, and legs ending in bony spikes. Their normal assigned function is moving life energy around from places where it is in excess to those where it is needed, but they are permitted to take a small amount of the energy as payment for their work, and they *enjoy* that; their direct control of such energy makes them quick and precise. Mentally, however, they are little more than animals.

**Fire: 5, Earth: 2, Water: 1, Air: 2.**

**Sense Life Energies:** This is their function; treat them as effectively **Water 5** for this specific purpose.

**Flight:** Blood butterflies are swift and agile flyers, though their large, fragile wings give them problems in confined spaces.

**Order Energies:** When they encounter a problem or engage an opponent, the butterflies spread their wings and the patterns thereon key into local life energies. Fire 5+ overloads this effect after a split-second pause, causing the butterfly to reel back (higher stats have faster and more potent effects); Earth 6+ simply resists it; Water 5+ gets an idea what's happening, and Water 7+ identifies the effect exactly, allowing the character to come up with ideas how to counter it; Air 6+ comprehends the complexities of the pattern, and may enable the character to come up with a mental countermeasure. In all cases, turn a fortune card and see what it suggests about the ensuing fight.

**Claws:** The butterflies' bone-needle claws are the equivalent of weapons; being hit by them gives one the feeling of one's life blood being drawn out. But anyway, treat this as a straight fight with a Fire 5 opponent.

**Death Burst:** When a butterfly is slain, all the energies it was transporting are released in one go. This can be messy, or beneficial, or both; turn a fortune card...

### Earth Movers

These are creatures whose assigned purpose is managing landscapes. They look like an unholy blend of bull, gorilla, and horned lizard, with deep-set amber eyes. They tend to do as they're told, primarily by other demons, but mind magic can control them rather easily; however, they also enjoy their work in a simple-minded way.

**Fire: 3, Earth: 6, Water: 2, Air: 1.**

**Move Earth:** When it is doing its job, an earth mover just stares at the ground in front of it and the earth moves at its will. Stone moves slower and in smaller quantities. Although these creatures are only Fire 3, when they're using their power to move earth at an opponent and have a little bit of a run-up, treat them as Fire 5 for purposes of resolving the fight – and they can engage two or three opponents at a time, if those opponents are obliging enough to bunch up.

## Spring Managers

Spirits charged with the management of flows of water, these creatures are whimsical by nature, but buckle down to their work with only a small sigh when required. Left to their own devices, they create intricate, transient artworks out of moving water – and are not above including living creatures in such creations. To them, living things are just complicated tainted water...

**Fire: 5, Earth: 4, Water: 5, Air: 3.**

**Moving Water:** If engaging in combat, spring managers use powerful short-range jets of water as attacks. If forced into close combat, they move the water in a foe's body around – an exquisitely uncomfortable experience for the victim. It's all just personal combat (with Fire 5), though.

## Vine Operators

These creatures have the job of supervising plants, which therefore grow and tangle at their command. They seem humanoid at first glance, albeit that their figures are formed of a tangle of leaves, vines, and twigs, but they appear distinctly weird in motion, as they don't have joints, but bend and flex as they need to. They regard all animal life as inferior, and like tearing down buildings; the ones in the garden are deeply aggrieved by the very existence of the palace and are leading the attempts to attack it.

**Fire: 4, Earth: 5, Water: 4, Air: 3.**

**Plant Control:** Vine operators can make plants grow and tangle at will, and can create them from bare earth with just a little more mental effort. Fighting them is a continuous battle against being entangled and crushed.

**Move Through Earth:** So long as they are in contact with the earth, a vine operator can “put down roots” and then move through the earth, seemingly collapsing into a small heap of twigs where they were and instantly growing up again from any contiguous earth within a couple of hundred yards.

## Denizens of the Hells

The creatures of the demon realm are too many and varied to describe, though all are disturbingly inhuman; use one or two of the types above if the PCs insist on starting a fight.