

Undersea

The world of Undersea is an endless sea, without border or boundary. Although there is a surface, there are no islands, boats, or anything of note on the surface. The choppy sea reflects very little and does not lend itself well to any sort of surface travel. The air is clear, but it is stale and chokes the lungs. Day is lit from above by a blue sun that heats the water, but provides very little in the way of light. When the sun disappears beneath the far off waves (the sun must travel infinite distance to sink below the surface, as the sea is truly infinite in scope) the stars shine down, each one as bright as a moon. Thus, Undersea is perpetually lit by twilight. Nothing lives in the air and nothing disturbs the endless waves on the surface of the sea. The world is contained beneath the waves, both flowing through the endless currents and lying on the infinite coastal shelf at the bottom of the greatest sea. The sea itself is a sacred thing known as Ap (pronounced: Ah (as in "say ah") p (as in pencil)). Ap is like seawater in most respects but is a much grander thing. It sustains animal and humanoid life in the same manner as air ordinarily would and it nourishes spirits who dwell within it. It is at once a divine substance and the most common element upon the face of the world.

Beneath the surface, life flourishes throughout this great, primal ocean. Fish, mollusks, cetaceans, and crustaceans can be found nearly everywhere. Plants, similar to those found in other worlds but altered for sea life, flourish thickly on the stony bottom of the sea. Forests of blue hued coral trees and frost colored anemone bushes live on endless rolling reef-hills. At the center of the Ahp lies a whirlpool, endlessly draining a body of water that cannot be drained. The flow of all things centers on the whirlpool, known by the inhabitants as Vathriagni (pronounced: Vath (rhymes with bath) Rye (like the grain) Ag (as in aggravation) Ni (as in knee)), which draws in everything. The greatest amounts of sea life congregate around the whirlpool, living off of the material and things pulled into the mouth of Vathriagni. Because such abundance flows into the whirlpool, animals living at its edge take on monstrous proportions. At the mouth, coral grows hundreds of feet tall and sea turtles the size of metropolises wait for blue whales to snack upon. The never-ending Ap creates endless abundance, all moving towards this fissure. Vathriagni's western side is the most fertile, pocked with hills and valleys that slow the violent currents more common on the eastern side of the whirlpool. Consequently, the fast flowing waters of the east scour the rock and prevent the lush sea forests seen in the west.

It is here, just inside Vathriagni itself that a great civilization flourishes. This is the realm of the Apsara, wise beings who rule the ocean. Living lives of leisure and study below the waters, the Apsara inhabit floating cities. These cities move about the primal whirlpool in a near-endless cycle of currents and eddies, known as Nara (or orbit, in the common parlance). It is this constant cycle that the Apsara emulate in all things. The lives of the Apsara are governed by the flow of these currents, and thus their way of life is dominated by it. As their great floating cities pass from one side of the whirlpool to the other, their bellies become fuller or emptier due to the disproportionate amount of fertility on each of the banks. This is very much like the seasons experienced by other worlds, except that as a city passes closer to the center of the whirlpool, the seasons change faster. Quickly passing seasons are feared, for they presage the destruction of that city in the infinite

pressures of Vathriagni's focus.

The Apsara (pronounced: Ahp-Sahr-Ah) are not the only intelligent beings who inhabit Undersea. The whirlpool's center, which is said to annihilate everything physical that enters its influence, spawns beings of pure spirit. These spirit beings are physical objects that have been transformed (or liberated) into self-aware beings. Although such spirits lack a physical presence and cannot touch or manipulate things in the world directly, they have power over the things they descend from and can control things within their sphere of influence. The Apsara seek out these newly born spirits when they come from the whirlpool, for such beings are both powerful and capricious. The wisest of the Apsara are called to convince the spirit to help uphold the natural order and to assist the Apsara in their survival. Usually the result is an easy alliance; however, some spirits are angered by their transition from the physical world and become destructive. These spirits must be destroyed by the Apsara.

Spirits of water and current are the most common spirits to come from the Vathriagni's center, although the spirits of sea life and objects lost to the currents are quite common as well. Apsara have come to rely on the spirits of currents to keep their cities' (usually built on top of a great seashell or giant-sized aquatic animal) orbits from decaying. This orbit is referred to as Nara, a complex term which at once means "great currents," "proximity to Vathriagni," and "path of rotation". If a city is without spirit protectors, a city's Nara decays towards the heart of the whirlpool, eventually being crushed by the pressure well before it actually reaches the center. Usually, the Apsara in that city abandon it well before this becomes a danger. The destruction of a city is not cause for mourning though, since it always gives birth to new spirits that help the remaining citizens and refugees in other cities. When a city is destroyed, life becomes much easier for the Apsara, allowing new cities to be created. A majority of Apsara live lives of leisure, pleasure seeking, and philosophical questing, as spirits perform their labor for them. Spirits not only keep the Apsara afloat against the substantial currents, they also serve as workers, confidantes, lovers, and friends. It is because of the spirits that the Apsara live their lives as cycles of creation, sensation, destruction, and quest.

This is life in Undersea. It is a series of cycles created by an endless tension between creation and destruction. The Apsara ride this wave of change gracefully, instinctively understanding the fine line they walk between endings and beginnings. They understand that their place is perched upon a hungry void, enjoying their fragile existences. They believed this perfected cycle would last eternally. They were wrong, for entrances to a new world appeared in their own and disrupted these cycles. Now, the cycles might be forever altered. Some feel that this new element throws their whole way of thinking into question. Others however feel that this is the culmination of yet another cycle of being, into which the Apsara have become a major player.

The History of Undersea

Time as Interpreted by the Apsara

Life in Undersea is measured in cycles, from the grand and all-encompassing Cycles of Being (the largest increment of time) to the relatively small Cycle of Breath (encompassing the time it takes to draw and exhale a single breath). A Breath is roughly two seconds, but since each Apsara has a differing measure of a single breath, there is no clear measure of passage of time. The next largest unit of time is the Cycle of Day. A day is roughly the same as in other worlds, as there is a sun that clearly rises and sets at a regular time. Further complicating matters of time is that what most people measure as “a year” in time is instead calculated on the time it takes for one’s city to pass around Vathriagni once (based on its Nara). This is called a Cycle of Vathriagni. Obviously, there are numerous factors that control how long it takes a city to pass around the whirlpool. Thus, each city holds its own record of time with its own units of time, perpetually changing. After passing through many orbits of a city's Nara, the Apsara there might note the passing of a Cycle of Generation, marking the time it takes for an Apsara youth to be born and to mature into adulthood. Generations are similarly left to individual and local interpretation. Timekeeping is obviously a task left to the most meticulous of savants. Because Apsara live existences without complications that require the measuring of time (this is left to spirits), they need no specific means of calculating time.

This makes history, as such, difficult to record as an objective account. Undersea remembers its past entirely as legend. It is a narrative, not a record, and completely ignores notions such as specific times and dates. It does not matter to the average Apsara when exactly something happened, so much as that it happened. The events that occurred contemporaneously are noted for their value in foretelling what is to come. Undersea possesses a complexity that is nearly maddening, but the truly wise can discern through what has come before what will come again. Memory is therefore prized, as a person with a great memory will clearly be wise in future decisions. Meditation upon past and future Cycles is a common activity in Undersea and Apsara who devote themselves wholly to it are altered by the experience. Knowledge of the Cycles, for whatever reason, makes Apsara strain towards the immaterial existence of spirits and take on some of their nature. It is said that ancient Apsara yogi are able to study subjects without research materials or, even curiously, spontaneously reincarnate into a new adult life without the intervening birth and childhood.

Previous Cycles of Being

Very little is known about previous cycles of being, as they have passed into obscurity. The Apsara consider history in a fashion that compares historical events to bubbles floating towards the surface of the Ap. Such things can be seen with clarity at first, but they are quickly harder to observe the further away they get. Eventually, they pass from sight altogether and cannot be accurately described in any fashion. For this reason, most Apsara do not dwell on the distant past overmuch. The past is fundamentally unknowable, and thus not much time is spent on attempting to know it. However, because Apsara can be quite obsessive about their passions, an Apsara who considers

themselves a student of history might very well devote themselves the minutia and strict timelines. This would be, above all else, performed as a labor of love and not as a rigorous academic exercise. There would be, obviously, no memorization of dates, no lists of ancestors, no legal records, and no archeological digs. History exists, then, as a tale of how things have come to be as they are now without dwelling on the minutia. Storytellers, therefore, are the carriers of Undersea's past. So much of Undersea has passed into nothingness and been reborn as something new that the landscape a scant few generations ago would be entirely unrecognizable to the modern age. None of the current cities in Undersea are older than three generations, making any first hand exploration of ancient sites impossible.

Some events are so epic in scope, however, that their effects can be perceived for a very long time. To use the former metaphor of history as bubbles rising to the surface, great events in history would be like a very, very large bubble. Such a bubble could be seen for a much longer time than a smaller one. The creation of the Apsara is an event of this magnitude. The world had been, at one time, an endless and placid body of fresh water. Nothing disturbed its surface, and when the stars shone at night, they were mirrored with perfect reflection, giving the ocean its own set of stars. This made the stars themselves jealous, and after a time, they grew so angry that they contrived a way to disturb the reflection of the ocean. To do this, one star fell onto the surface of the ocean, plowing through its rocky bottom. This created the endless whirlpool that signifies the center of everything in Undersea. Something of the nature of the star turned the silent fresh waters into the briny sacred Ap that is known in modern times. It also caused a great churning and the foam that was created by this celestial impact solidified into beings that were self-aware. These were the first Apsara, who named the whirlpool from which they descended Vathriagni. Nothing is known of what happened to the star that crashed into the ocean, but it had succeeded in forever marring the placid ocean. The reflection of the stars in Undersea is now forever warped by great waves seeking the center of the whirlpool.

The Apsara claim descent from the union of the stars and the ocean. They share a common ancestry with Vathriagni and the spirits that are refined at its center. They breath in and are permeated by the Ap. The Apsara see themselves as protectors of this order, pointing to their common creation as evidence that they are the caretakers of the world. Apsara universally take this very seriously, for disruption in the perfected cycles could throw the world out of balance and potentially allow Vathriagni to devour the whole world. What would happen if such a thing occurred is unknown, but the Apsara clearly see that history tends to repeat itself. Of course, if Vathriagni ceased to exist, the world might revert to its original placidity and kill all life within. The world would revert to its original state, free of Apsara or spirits. While Apsara fear such a doomsday occurrence, it is hard for them to deny that such a thing is a possibility. Clearly, the world had once been in such a state and could return to it again. To the Apsara, nothing occurs once and nothing is truly eternal.

The Current Cycle of Being

The Beginning of the Cycle

The beginning of the current Cycle of Being is marked by the destruction of a great Apsara city. This single city had housed all of the Apsara, and its size was such that it took the effort of unthinkable legions of spirits to keep it from falling to pieces. None can explain why such a civilization had been destroyed, but it is this event that signaled the entry into a new cycle of being. After the fall of this city, the Apsara were without a home, floating through the currents without direction or safety. Many Apsara perished during this time. It is considered a time of darkness, but also of great potential. Great leaders made their name during this time and lives of adventure were the standard. The Apsara were in a crucible where the destruction they suffered tempered them into a potent force. It is this time that the Apsara developed the Urvashim style of combat and pioneered the Currents of Deepspirit. Great alliances were formed with the powerful spirits of the ocean, cementing the Apsara's survival for generations in advance. Countless new spirits were born from the ruins of the old city, and new cities were created by these reborn spirits for their Apsara allies. The modern philosophical schools known in Undersea in modern times were also forged in this time, as modern controversies rose to prominence.

The spirits pulled great seashells lodged in the corals from the currents and set them adrift on the endless pull. On the backs of these great shells, coral bricks were used to fashion dwellings and places of repast. Spirits were coaxed into creating goods for the surviving Apsara. Civilization had returned to Undersea, even if it was not the single great city of the previous cycle. The spirits of the old city helped to build new ones. The spirits of tools and weapons gave the Apsara access to new infrastructure. In time, the floating cities became autonomous. Although their numbers fluctuated with the loss and creation of cities, the Apsara had mastered the cycles of destruction by meeting it with an equal degree of creation. Within a generation, the Apsara were once again safe and returned to the world with greater insight than previously. Less than forty generations have passed since this time, and memory of the exodus, like a very large bubble traveling to the surface, can still be seen.

The World Now

As it stands, the current political unit is the city. Each city is responsible for its own governance, although there are close ties between cities because they feel a strong tendency to work towards a common good. This unity is not perfect however, as cities can be out of communication range for many, many cycles around the whirlpool. The distances between cities is incredibly vast, and even though cities use a cadre of spirits and trained dolphins to ferry messages between each other, some cities will always be out of communication range at a given time. Although Nara are relatively stable, they vary wildly in relation to one another; for instance, one Nara might be completely circular while another might be elliptical. Travel between cities can only occur in a clockwise motion, as currents against the flow of Vathriagni are too strong to be battled. This means

that trade between cities is one way, allowing for a complex system of credit and exchange. Rarely, two cities will dock with one another until the weight begins to decay their Nara and they dislodge to seek out separate destinies.

Until recently, Undersea was suffering vast scarcities. It had been quite some time since a city had passed into oblivion and gifted the survivors with a host of new, helpful spirits. Tension was growing between those on the inside of Vathriagni (who were considerably poorer) and those on the outside. Small scale skirmishes broke out periodically to count coup and establish rights to local resources. However, these conflicts have largely fallen away as the city of Shellback was pulled into Vathriagni by cadres of angry spirits. Although this provided all of the cities of Undersea with fresh spirit labor, Shellback had always had lackluster relations with spirits and its passing has released thousands of disgruntled spirits all of whom wish revenge against the Apsara. To make matters worse, alien spirits from beyond Undersea have somehow trickled into the Nara of Vathriagni and seek to subvert the Cycles completely. These spirits, known collectively as the Host of Nightmare, are far more dangerous than the ones Apsara have been accustomed to dealing with previously.

Apsara do acknowledge that the world is a chaotic and often imperfect place. While cycles do tend to follow in all things, the perfected order of Undersea is occasionally thrown out of balance. What follows is referred to as "cycle break", a state of affairs which frightens most Apsara. Cycle break happens when Apsara are careless in their stewardship of Undersea, often when a spirit is born angry and is not dispatched or calmed down. In almost all cases, the spirit in question is angry because of something an Apsara did to it in a previous incarnation. Therefore, Apsara often seek to propitiate the spirits of inanimate things in the hopes that if the item finds its way into Vathriagni (and all things do eventually pass into its annihilating gaze) it will be reborn as a helpful, rather than harmful, spirit. The most violent and dramatic example of cycle break was the destruction of the city of Shell-Back, dragged out of its Nara by the Host of Nightmare. To most Apsara, the Host is the literal embodiment of the concept of cycle break. Unless stopped, they have the potential to cause unspeakable harm to the metaphysical ecology of the Apsara's endless paradise.

If that were not enough to frighten the average Apsara out of their wits, it has recently come to light that Undersea is inextricably connected to an alien world which, if rumors are believed, spawn the Host (as well as other spirits, it is assumed). According to common belief, many of the spirits that destroyed Shell-Back were not native to Undersea and indeed entered the world through these gateways. The world beyond is said to be a forest, but oddly growing in the open air on dry land. This place is given many names: "The Land of Golden Sun," "The Great Dry Firmament", "The Forest of Doors", and "The Undiscovered World". A cultural movement has swept Undersea recently as fear about this Forest of Doors has reached a fevered pitch. Local heroes, calling themselves "Airwalkers" have sought out these doors to go beyond them to destroy whatever wicked spirits lie beyond. Thus far, none have returned. Still, one can earn high accolades by declaring themselves part of this heroic effort. Whatever lies

beyond the doors, be it spirit or flesh, has reason to fear the Airwalkers: they are, as a rule, the most militant of all Apsara, sent on a crusade to preserve their prosperous utopia beneath the waves.

The Gates

The first gates began appearing in the city of Shell Back and was interpreted as a potential source of cycle break. People noticed great air pockets in doorways, under bridges, and in certain furniture. These air pockets defied the laws of Undersea's physics and appeared to lead to another place entirely. The people of Shell Back assumed it was the work of a dangerous and tricky spirit, and avoided such things. However, young Apsara began experimenting with travel into these pockets of air. To their surprise, they found the air to be sweet and refreshing, unlike the stale air of Undersea. The first explorers were utterly lost in this new world, frightened by its inhabitants and obviously hostile spirits of an alien terrain. Some found other gates within the Forest of Doors and entered them assuming that any place would be better than where they were. They were lost completely in terrible landscapes, never heard from again. Others found their way to gates that were forming in other cities back in Undersea, proving that the new world could be a source of faster travel than fighting upstream currents. To date, no organized effort has succeeded in finding a reliable means of transport through the gates.

Some of the population was terrified by the implications of these gates. After all, this was a colossal disruption in the cycle of ages that threatened to throw off the perfect order of the cosmos. The Apsara always relied on the turning of time in order to make predictions in the future. Access to another, unfamiliar world throws in another set of calculations that could not be accounted for. The Ghandarva of every region held lengthy debates on the nature of this Unknown World and its inhabitants, with some condemning the place and others singing its praises for the potential it represented. Refugees saw a place they could potentially migrate to without having to fight established Apsara for acceptance. They could start new lives under the strange alien yellow sun. Well-to-do Apsara saw a means of trade between cities that allowed faster travel and access to even cities still upstream. Many cities prepared to call in debts from downstream cities, thus eliminating the terrible scarcities they had suffered for a generation, using the gates as a means of transport between cities. The Apsara, always pragmatic in their approach to survival, eventually allowed free travel between the gates. Explorers and adventurers have trickled into the gates in small numbers; a handful have even returned.

There is a significant faction that will never enter the Forest of Doors, even if it means the end of their lives. The gates do not permit spirits to pass through (indeed, they cannot even see them). The spirits of Undersea require the Apsara to sustain their existence. Without it, they are but fading wisps decaying without the life-giving waters of Vathriagni. This means that Apsara cannot rely on their spirits to aid them in the new world. Some Apsara are so comfortable with their lifestyle in Undersea that they will never leave it. They reason that it is unnecessary to find new places to live if those places do not offer the comfort and safety they are accustomed to. Unfortunately for this type,

the doors sometimes open in one's path of travel without warning.

The Society of Undersea

Apsara are a perpetual frontier culture. They lack the ability to settle for generations, and must constantly move. Thus, their culture is incredibly pragmatic and often generous. Few Apsara are set in their ways and the belief that all are created equal is taken for granted. The common good is the ultimate goal of Apsara law (what passes for law, at least), and a majority of Apsara believe this is the way things should be. This does not mean that this tendency is universal, however. The Apsara generosity may be great, but it is not infinite like the ocean they inhabit. During times of greater scarcity, the well-off are often loath to provide charity to refugees from cities that are losing their Nara. When poorer cities are suffering extreme deprivation of resources, raiding a richer neighbor is not unheard of.

Few Apsara are workers. Crafting simple things, building, gathering food and other types of menial labor is below the average Apsara who are expected to utilize spirit workers to make sure such tasks are completed. Apsara generally spend their times in leisure as a result. However, scarcity does crop up in specific types of spirit labor periodically. There are times when spirits of the hearth might be hard to come by and an Apsara would be forced to blend their own spices. If compassionate spirits are in short demand, it might be difficult to find a spirit to care for a new Apsara child. Working for a living is a shameful thing, usually reserved as punishment for heinous crimes. For many Cycles of Vathriagni, spirit labor was at an all time low and quality of life suffered terribly. However, with the destruction of Shellback, fresh spirits are again returning to Undersea. This economic "boom" however proves to be short lived, however; Shellback had notoriously poor relations with its spirits and surroundings, and thus, many of the spirits that might be claimed entirely reject Apsara and seek their undoing.

Apsara society is essentially without classes or caste, although Apsara do specialize in specific areas. Rule is mostly performed by consensus and the majority. Each city has its own means of making law and enforcing those laws, but the process is usually democratic or else the product of a large council of elected philosophers. Some cities lack any sort of formal leadership and simply ignore organization until it they are faced with some crisis, forcing them to come to a consensus as a people. Undersea culture prides itself on tolerance of minority opinions although many unpopular points of view fail to have any effect on public policy.

Social Organizations

Although Apsara society is quite informal and lacks any sort of rigidity, there are a few organizations that span the whole of Undersea. The largest is an informal network of occultists, known as the Ghandarva. The Ghandarva practice a form of magic known as the Currents of Deepspirit. There is no formal process of joining the Ghandarva, nor are

there any specific practices that differ radically from the mainstream of Apsara society. The Ghandarva do however have a much stronger scholarly bent to their lives than their compatriots. They also have much greater responsibilities, for it is they who largely regulate and care for local spirits.

Philosophy and the Currents of Deepspirit are the primary concern of the Ghandarva, who spend their time pondering the meaning of things while spirits dote on their whims. It is the belief of the Ghandarva that Vathriagni, as the center of the known world, holds the secret of life itself. The current theory is that Vathriagni houses the remnants of a powerful spirit, known in legend as a star that fell into the ocean. Ghandarva meet endlessly in salons to discuss and argue various points pertaining to this fact, but most agree on a specific set of points. The easiest point to reconcile amongst each other is that whatever is in the center of Vathriagni creates spirits and discharges energies in the form of currents. This is precisely the element that the Ghandarva manipulate in their sorceries. It is known that the Currents of Deepspirit penetrate even to the Land of the Golden Sun, proving Vathriagni's universal potency.

Although life in Undersea is relatively peaceful (excepting the destruction of whole cities periodically), conflict does occur and is expected to be dealt with swiftly. The Urvashim School of the Thousand Perfected Combat Actions trains Apsara in the ways of warfare. It is the single martial society of Undersea, focusing on use of the Blythe Lancer style of combat. Despite this focus, the Urvashim welcome practitioners of every combat style. The only requirement of membership is a professed desire to perfect oneself through martial focus. The "school" itself has no formal meeting place. Indeed, it exists in every city. It is a social organization for Apsara to meet with one another and test their martial skill. It stresses health of the individual and personal conviction, making it something that every Apsara could theoretically join. While it is open to all, the Urvashim School is often called on to deal with problems with violence when spirits fail. Giant predators, angry spirits, or popular uprisings usually find the Urvashim students gathering to deal with whatever the problem is. This is not because they in any way are required to do so. They are not hired to take action or ordered by any authority. Nor do they take these actions because of any sense of duty or obligation. They are motivated by the desire to perfect oneself in the heat of battle. It is the desire to test oneself. The school teaches the belief in ones own personal might, and service to the community in combat is the form this commonly takes.

Students of the Urvashim School (there is no such thing as a graduate) teach other students. This is the nature of the school. It is without hierarchy or discipline. Students are expected to experiment with their teachers to find out which techniques are best for the student. There is no textbook, no formal memorization, or any sort of structure. Urvashim are as likely to train through dance or meditation as they are rote drills. While this might perhaps work a little slower than would otherwise be the case, it clearly works for the Apsara who have respect for members of the Urvashim School. In times when Apsara cities go to war, it is often the students of the School who are called to fight. This prevents battles from becoming too bloody, as it would be foolish for the school to murder its own members. This does not mean that death does not occur, for war is a

terrible thing. It just means that death is kept to a minimum.

The remaining majority of Apsara society lives quite homogeneously. Apsara spend their time as they please, studying, creating art, resting, pursuing lovers, or seeking out new things to please them. The Apsara have few cares. They are doted on by spirits who they coax into service, and so they have no need to labor to stay alive. Their meals are made for them. Their homes are kept tidy. They do not have to search out materials necessary for artistic pursuits. They can live as they desire on their own terms. This level of freedom is a double edged sword however. Although their lives are spent seeking pleasure, when life demands otherwise the Apsara ignore this demand and suffer as a result. For instance, many Apsara cities are suffering shortages in specific goods, such as spices, tools, building materials, and metals. Instead of actually seeking out these materials themselves, they expect spirits to find such things for them. When no spirits capable of obtaining these materials can be found, they simply live without. In this way, Apsara suffer needlessly. Being forced to labor is a high form of punishment amongst Apsara. Therefore, personally charismatic individuals who can pull a large number of spirits into their service are well equipped for life in Undersea.

Although Apsara is roughly egalitarian, the Apsara have a rich and complicated economy. The common currency accepted by all cities is the cowrie. A cowrie is a small vermilion or scarlet shell that are harvested from the forests across Vathriagni's ocean floor. Cities will fund expeditions to harvest cowries which are then carved with images glorifying that city. Cowries rarely leave circulation, and thus, there are a number of cowries minted by cities that passed into the eye of Vathriagni. Apsara are, according to their natures, quite shrewd at the art of negotiation. The concept of debt, obligation, responsibility, and other "harsh" aspects of commercial life are well known to the Apsara and well respected. Apsara society shuns those who shirk their debts to others (and, in some cities, it is illegal in fact). This allows for a relatively cutthroat game of fortunes. Although Apsara do not have concepts such as corporations, they often make investments in various ventures such as intercity caravans, temple complexes (to attract spirits), restaurants, pleasure palaces, theaters, salons, and such. Obviously, not all Apsara participate in the economy as investors. However, Apsara who do not have cowries in pocket are objects of pity and, often, derision. Few Apsara have access to every kind of spirit labor they might conceivably need, and thus, there is brisk trade in renting or borrowing the spirits of others. Ordinarily, a day of spirit labor is worth a single cowrie unless that brand of labor is in high demand.

In the very recent past, richer cities were set at odds with their poorer neighbors whose Nara were closer to the center of Vathriagni. Many of the "Outsiders" (those who had a higher Nara) refused entrance to refugees from Shell Back and other "Insider" cities. Consequently, Insider cities raided the Outsiders for a number of commodities. This conflict was anticipated to take an entire Cycle of Generation to sort itself out and Ghandarva incorrectly predicted that spirit labor was going to continue decrease. However, with the unexpected fall of Shellback, labor has again returned in suitable quantities. Sadly, few cities have welcomed Shell Back's refugees with open arms.

Many of them have resigned themselves to life as nomads, wandering the open currents with schools of dolphins. Others sought out the fabled Forest of Doors, but there is no easily accessible means to find its all too uncommon gates. This fact is all but unknown to most of the people of Undersea, and many cities reject refugees from dwelling in their hometown on the grounds that refugees could simply resettle in the Unknown World. This position is based largely on rumor and hearsay, as travel to the world beyond is as rare as singing sharks.

Philosophical Orientations

Although the Ghandarva and Urvashim School have particular outlooks on the nature of existence and Undersea, their ranks have members whose beliefs span the entire spectrum of philosophical thought. Because the people of Undersea have very few concerns, matters of abstract philosophy take on tremendous importance in the eyes of the Apsara. It might seem somewhat impractical, but in many ways Apsara consider philosophical belief to be the core of a person's being. In many ways, philosophies are somewhat like personal religions as known by other cultures. Matters of perceived difference are written large in the many nightly debates in Undersea's uncountable salons. Obviously, all Apsara are different and their beliefs are their own. Some do not subscribe to any established mode of thought, and in fact, are critical of the dominant ideologies of Undersea. Such individuals, however, pay the price of constantly and unceasingly defending their point of view.

Vathriagnishesham (Seeing-with-Two-Eyes-Closed Philosophy)

Apsara are often obsessed with the cycles that govern their lives, and none moreso than the Vathriagnishesham. Those who subscribe to the Seeing-with-Two-Eyes-Closed view of the world see Undersea as a complex tapestry of cause and effect that can only be seen through quiet meditative practice. In many ways, this is the closest the Apsara come to a truly ascetic lifestyle, as the Vathriagnishesham largely withdraw from the world in order that they see it more clearly. Devotees of this belief system have all the trappings of ordinary Apsara; they possess spirit retinues, they live in opalescent palaces, and they never sully themselves with a humble day's work. However, they also largely withdraw from civic life. They usually abstain from public gatherings, such as in matters of legal arbitration, public debates, or any sort of celebration. This proclivity sets the Seeing-with-Two-Eyes-Closed school of thought into conflict with the Ashwar-Nara school of thought, who preach that Apsara are justified primarily through participation in public matters. They frequently dress in austere blue robes, denoting their sobriety. Many Vathriagnishesham are members of the Ghandarva, but the designation of both is largely up to the claims of the individual. Vathriagnishesham who have devoted themselves to their meditations for long periods of time begin to resemble spirits as their soul strains towards the currents emanating from Vathriagni. It is said that with sufficient unity with the great whirlpool allows one to become immaterial in the manner of spirits or to reincarnate and retain one's memory. ((Members of this philosophical school of thought

almost universally possess Scholarship 2 with a specialty in Meditation.))

Jithramurti (In-Pursuit-of-Excellence Philosophy)

Withdrawn meditation on abstraction is not fit for everyone. The Jithramurti school of thought is the most worldly of philosophies, focusing as it does upon personal excellence and enrichment. It focuses primarily on the physical world and does not concern itself with far-off enlightenments that are imperceptible to their fellow citizens. It is, in many ways, quite selfish in that it rejects the idea of service to the community (Pillars-Made-of-Eddies) and ascetic enlightenment (Seeing-with-Two-Eyes-Closed). However, unlike The-Opalescent-Trident, which focuses only on personal pleasure, the Jithramurti philosophy often requires hardships in order to temper the soul into a vessel of perfection. The goal of this philosophy is to achieve the greatest heights of personal excellence. In doing so, Jithramurti believe they arm themselves with this perfection in all future incarnations. That is to say, that in their next life, they will possess some of their current greatness. This philosophy blends best with the Urvashim School, who consistently test their mettle against others in order to perfect their own skill in battle. However, this philosophy is in no way limited to the art of war; indeed, it most often manifests as aggressive participation in economic affairs. The Jithramurti wish not only to be the best in their chosen field, but to present an image of true Apsara glory. For an Apsara In-Pursuit-of-Excellence to appear slovenly, or worse, be forced to labor, is an unacceptable indignity. ((Members of this philosophical school of thought universally possess Mercantile 2 and never possess Craft or Tinkering))

Ashwar-Nara (Pillars-Made-of-Eddies Philosophy)

Apsara are said to possess, at their core, a compassion for their fellow traveler in the currents of Vathriagni and his endlessly circling Nara. The Ashwar-Nara philosophy is a way of life devoted to civic service and spirit diplomacy. Devotees of this school think of themselves as "Pillars-Made-of-Eddies" because they are the Apsara responsible for negotiating with those spirits of the deep who preserve each city's Nara. Through their action, the spirits are propitiated and civilization is sustained. Ashwar-Nara spend their time engaging in social matters at all times and reject the decadence of The-Opalescent-Trident and the navel-gazing of the Seeing-with-Two-Eyes-Closed philosophy. These are the Apsara who build temples to attract the presence of newly born spirits. When a matter needs the local community to make a decision, it is the Ashwar-Nara who lead the way and organize gatherings for that purpose. They see this as a sacred duty and tradition passed down from the days when all Apsara dwelt in a single glorious city. Oddly, within Ashwar-Nara there is an ideological split: mainstream Pillars-Made-of-Eddies philosophy views Apsara civilization as a single society coming together to support one another. However, there is also a very nationalistic bent to a number of Ashwar-Nara's devotees who believe that their city is supreme above all others. Even those who follow this belief are, at their core, diplomats and thus they would not disparage foreigners in a public manner. ((Ashwar-Nara devotees universally possess Diplomacy 2, and most have some

skill in Performance as well))

Tandagam (The-Opalescent-Trident)

Apsara morality, to be blunt, is very slow to condemn. Moral outrage at another's lifestyle is all but unknown. Thus, Tandagam, The-Opalescent-Trident sensation-seekers, are free to pursue their personal satisfaction without societal constraint. The Trident is a metaphor for the Apsara's three senses: sight, touch/hearing, and smell/taste. These are, to the Tandagam, the most important aspects of life in Undersea. According to Tandagam morality, pleasure is the highest of virtues, worthy of any sacrifice to attain. They regard pain as a hideous vice, morally wrong to experience or cause in others. The-Opalescent-Trident place little value on enlightenment, public service, or personal exaltation. Yet, despite the obvious decadence of this way of living, Apsara do not consider it amoral or wrong (although, perhaps wrong-headed). There is altruistic side to Tandagam, as giving pleasure is also considered a virtuous thing to do. The-Opalescent-Trident is an easy fit for artistic Apsara, who give the gift of inspiration and beauty to those around them. There is some spiritual credence to this philosophy, as spirits seem to love those Apsara who surround themselves with objects of beauty at all times. ((Followers of The-Opalescent-Trident have no skills in common, as their pleasures take them where they will. Tandagam are the most likely Apsara to possess Craft, but almost universally specializing in Artistry or Jewelcraft))

Rajak-Ariman (People-with-Empty-Hearts)

The Rajak-Ariman, like the Seeing-with-Two-Eyes-Closed philosophy, is primarily concerned about cycles of being. However, the Rajak-Ariman have a uniquely morbid fascination with destruction, entropy, and cycle-break. In the eyes of People-with-Empty-Hearts, destruction is at its core a healthy process that leads to new growth and creation. Their mantra, repeated often before throwing objects into the currents of Vathriagni, is "Sacrifice breeds Creation". Other Apsara, of all modes of thought, universally abhor this philosophy, fearing the destruction it craves. Indeed, Apsara devotees of this school of thought actively seek out sources they perceive as cycle breaking. This is because the Rajak-Ariman believe that Undersea is in a debased state and that greater spiritual truths lie beyond the perception of the physical world. Indeed, the Rajak-Ariman believe that in time all of Undersea will be drained of the sacred Ap and that all things will pass beyond the physical world into a greater state of perfection and nirvana (perhaps to be reborn or perhaps in a state of divine nothingness). Many People-with-Empty-Hearts revere the ancient undisturbed waters of Undersea before the Apsara existed and so they are often portrayed as desiring extinction for all Apsara. This is a straw man argument; the Rajak-Ariman wish the Apsara to evolve beyond physical existence entirely. In many ways, People-with-Empty-Hearts aid the efforts of the Ashwar-Nara since they are constantly discarding well-treated objects into the eye of Vathriagni. ((People-with-Empty-Hearts universally have Diplomacy 1, Performance 1, or Currents of Deepspirit to placate the spirit of those things that they destroy))

Airwalkers

Less a philosophy than a political movement, a number of Urvashim, Ghandarva, and refugees have deliberately set their sights upon the Forest of Doors to purge it of evil spirits. It is well known that the destruction of the city of Shell Back was the result of alien spirits from beyond Undersea and the Airwalkers seek to eliminate or neutralize this threat. So great is their devotion, that they publicly declare their willingness to part with their lives to achieve this goal. This movement is, in many ways, more of a crusade than anything and Airwalkers are, at their core, an essentially reactionary movement. They radically reject and fight against anything resembling cycle-break, fearing that damage to Undersea's sacred cycles might spell the doom of the Apsara race. Airwalker's sole desire, obviously, is to enter the Unknown World to combat the dangers there. However, this first step at becoming part of the war effort is by far the hardest. Consequently, Airwalkers are constantly trying tricks rumored to open doors to the world beyond. Many roam the wilderness, hoping to cover as much ground as possible to maximize their chances of finding a gateway. No Airwalker has yet returned to Undersea to tell tales of their triumph or failure, so their success is an entirely unknown quantity. It is unknown if the fight against unclean spirits even has a clear leader in the world beyond or not.

Life and Death in Undersea

Apsara, like most other people, are conceived and born in the same manner. However, there are a few complications that make conception and birth in Undersea different from that of other beings. Apsara are formed only when another Apsara is destroyed, keeping their numbers constant. When Apsara first appeared in the world, there was a set number. That number still exists today, although no more Apsara can exist. Furthermore, Apsara who are of fertile age (similar to that of humans) can choose whether or not their sexual pursuits result in the union of a child. If there is no desire to create children, no children will be created from any union. This results in "baby booms" as the cycles of life and death ebb and flow. In fat times, children are commonly created whereas in times of scarcity, few if any children are created.

Children are usually not raised by their parents, although they guide their progeny's education and discipline. Apsara are usually too concerned with their own pursuits to cease them and take up childrearing, and thus children are given to spirits to rear. This, combined with a lack of formal marriage, makes family loyalty low on an Apsara's list of allegiance. Although families are cordial with one another, familial bond is rarely taken into account.

Education is far from formal for Apsara. They are schooled from the time they can talk until such time as they wish to cease schooling, giving the Apsara a great deal of mastery over her own destiny. Spirits care for and teach child Apsara, commonly making nursemaid and tutor the same position. Powerful spirits with a strong compassionate streak are usually called to perform this function. From the spirit, the Apsara will learn

self discipline, how to deal with spirits, basic survival, and depending on the whim of the student and the capabilities of the teacher, the choice of weapon training, magical training, or advanced skills. Multiple spirits occasionally teach Apsara, giving her a wide variety of skills on which to draw. However, because the student has a measure of control over her schooling (she can theoretically stop at any time if she really wishes to) she can dictate what she wishes to focus on. The teaching methods of spirits vary wildly, but very, very few rely on memorization or texts. Instead, they tend to focus on observation, action, and real world experience. Harder teachers will genuinely put their students in dangerous sink-or-swim positions, such as dealing with a powerful and angry spirit or forcing her to find her way home after being whisked off by a warm current. Should the student fail, the spirit will without fail step in and save her student's life, but will probably allow her to take a few blows or spend a few days without food. After all, such things are meant to teach lessons.

Apsara may declare themselves an adult at any time, but if the community does not believe that the person is mature enough, they will simply not treat them with the respect adult Apsara reserve for one another. Adulthood gives the Apsara an even greater degree of freedom. She is free to pursue lovers, seek out knowledge, perfect her skills, start a household, engage in trade, negotiate with spirits, or travel the currents of Vathriagni. The first thing a new adult generally does is form a retinue of spirits, who will care for her and perform labor in her name. This is a complicated process, taught during the Apsara's spirit education. If she cannot gain sufficient spirit allies, she may have to labor on her own. Such a thing is unthinkable unfortunate, and few Apsara allow themselves to fall into such a pitiful situation. Luckily, Apsara naturally tend towards being highly charismatic and empathic, and thus they can usually deal with spirits without difficulty.

When an Apsara dies, her form melts into sea foam and salt water slowly over the course of a few days. Somewhere in Undersea however, a child has likely been conceived, as long as the Apsara's death is not somehow magically reversed. The newly conceived Apsara is not the same as the one who has just passed from being. They retain qualities of its parents just as other beings do. The Apsara belief in reincarnation is not entirely a matter of faith, as Ghandarva and ascetic Apsara have techniques at their disposal that allow a person to reincarnate instantly and with no intervening childhood. Such individuals spring to life with their collective memories without their lifetime's experience and skills. Apsara universally expect to be reborn after their deaths, and consequently, fear death somewhat less than would ordinarily be expected.

Apsara Physiology

Apsara are, in most ways, functionally similar to humans. They possess all the same organs and structures that mankind possesses. The fundamental differences between Apsara and humanity are very slight, from a physiological perspective. Apsara tend to be more lithe and quick, less likely to be physically powerful or possess a great deal of endurance. In Undersea, disease is unknown to the Apsara, and even in other worlds, their flesh is largely incorruptible.

Apsara also have streaks of blue, silver, navy, and aqua that pigment their skin. This is the only visual cue that seems to set the bodies of the Apsara away from humans. The blue, it is said, originates with Vathriagni and is a sign of their common ancestry. Not all Apsara possess silver streaks at all time, and it is said that an Apsara displaying silver highlights are "one with the stars". The marks of Apsara tend to flow and change during the course of days or even hours, and Apsara sometimes read meaning into these patterns of color. Rarely, Apsara are born with blue or violet colored hair, but this is a recessive trait and not particularly common. Some Apsara, particularly the older ones, possess patches of fish-scale like skin. This is considered the province of age and signals that an Apsara is likely old and wise.

Names

The Apsara have lofty, abstract names. Apsara choose their own name as they can change it on a whim, but they are universally abstract names (that is, not based on anything other than pure sound). Apsara do not name themselves after things, for such is the province of spirits. To name oneself the same thing as an object or place is to declare yourself an object or a location (or a spirit). Naming oneself after things tends to offend spirits. Thus, they string together syllables they find pleasing. Apsara have no family names at all, as they often place a greater significance on their city of origin than their parentage.

Common male names frequently include the 'vati' sound, such as names like Apsarvati, Havati, Gnavati, Artivati, Vathrivati, Uvati, Jhorvati, Sastharvati, Swavati, and Ghormivati. The suffix 'vati' signifies that the person is male or possesses a male persona.

Common female names frequently include the 'vasi' sound, such as names like Oorvasi, Matrvasi, Buvasi, Amparvasi, Lavasi, Jhintorvasi, Kalvasi, Agnivasi, Rhashavasi and Parmavasi. The suffix 'vasi' signifies that the person is female or possesses a female persona.

Apsara sometimes refer to a man as a 'vati' or a woman as a 'vasi'. Interestingly, Apsara folklore often involves generic stock characters named Vati (male) and Vasi (female). These are the morality tales and folk stories told to children to teach them moral lessons.

Although any string of abstract syllables can be taken as a name, the naming conventions above are considered traditional. Names outside of these conventions are considered to be gaudy or a symbol of rebellion against traditional culture. Apsara don't place particularly great import on their own individual names, and thus Apsara occasionally change their name if they attain a position of power or move to a new city. One who changes their name frequently (perhaps more than once in several Cycles of Vathriagni) is likely to be seen as tempestuous, prone to action without thought, or otherwise indecisive.

Apsara Art and Architecture

The Apsara place enormous value on artistic expression: both in artistic design and performing arts. This is largely for pragmatic reasons. The spirits that the Apsara rely on to keep their cities afloat love the arts. They desire great performances in their honor, sculptures to adorn their abodes, and songs performed about their virtues. This is precisely what keeps spirits around performing labors at the behest of the Apsara. Because of this, the Apsara live in a world of great beauty and skill. Their buildings are made of carved coral and jade, in a style appearing as if the structures are grown rather than built. This beauty serves to put spirits at ease and make them more likely to serve the Apsara. Massive minarets mark places where spirits are held in high esteem, and Apsara musicians can always be found in such domed structures. Here, spirits are given assignments or impressed into service. Such structures are always the largest in an Apsara city, and the massive domes dominate the skyline.

Apsara who are not initiated into the Currents of Deepspirit instead attract spirit labor through the arts, personal magnetism, and good old fashioned negotiating. A spirit may offer to clean one's home for a song or a spirit might agree to educate ones children in exchange for a well carved altar. The desires of spirits are often individual in this regard, and a bad performance or product will likely offend a spirit. An Apsara with no talent whatsoever is likely poor indeed, so most Apsara have one or two means of entertaining a spirit. Seduction is also considered an acceptable form of payment for spirits, and there is no stigma associated with such things.

Apsara Food

Apsara food is meant to be a feast for the senses as well as the appetite. Most Apsara are sensualists so meals become a means of experiencing pleasure. Well off Apsara have grand spiced meals, cooked within the gut of volcanic spirits, and served with luxurious sea-fruit juices straight from the fruit. Few Apsara are able to cook for themselves, and in the absence of fire, spirits must be used to actually cook any food. Apsara food is often well spiced, and to call a dish too spicy marks one as plebian or low class. Typical meals involve unleavened bread, a spiced bean or pulse dish, yogurt (made from the milk of whales), and fruit juice. Apsara love milk products, and have their own types of cheese. The creation of cheese is considered an art among Apsara, although those who make cheese rarely know how to serve it themselves. Ground pearls put into one's food is considered a good luck charm, and Ghandarva are among the most common pearl-eaters.

Apsara Clothing and Appearance

Apsara take great pleasure in their appearance. Apsara wish to be well groomed and well dressed at all times. Men usually wear single colored robes, wraps, or similar flowing clothing. Women mostly wear saris, long skirts with flowing veiled shirts, or similar loose clothing. Silk is prized, as it is spun from the dreams of spirits of cloth. Both men and women like jewelry and wear a great deal of it. Piercings are common in both men

and women. Men tend to dress more austere (always cleanly though) than women. The Apsara have access to nearly all shades of dye, but reserve the color blue for formal occasions. Wearing blue is considered severe, as it is generally reserved for funerals, legal proceedings, or similar ceremonies. Devotees of the Vathriagnishesham philosophy wear blue as a sign of their supreme austerity. Many dedicated practitioners of the Currents of Deepspirit wear a third eye on their forehead to signify their status and honor Vathriagni. Members of the Urvashim School of fighting wear a spear symbol on their forehead as a symbol of their martial skill. This spear traditionally faces down, in reverence to the whirlpool Vathriagni. Jade and opal are the most prized materials taken from the earth. Gems, while not unknown in Undersea, are considered prodigies of the earth and aren't considered particularly valuable except as geological wonders and colorful building materials. Pearls are quite common and Apsara gather them when they can.

Apsara Music

Apsara love music of all types. When wooing spirits into service, Apsara will project their songs onto currents where they know spirits dwell. These songs entice the spirits into service or keep them satisfied with their lot. Those who deal often with spirits are expected to have some skill with music, whether it is the lute, the drum, or her voice. Sound carries across the Ap in much the same manner as air, so instruments that would otherwise seem impossible to play underwater are rendered as useful as they would in the open air. The most common instruments played by the Apsara are the drum and flute. They tend to shy away from stringed instruments or anything overly complicated. However, just as Apsara are absorbing the cultures of other worlds, they are likely to attempt to learn new songs, new instruments, and new types of music. The Apsara are far from being humorless and enjoy a ribald tale as much as anyone, especially if it attracts the service of a spirit.

Prejudices and Superstitions

The Apsara are possessed of a few notable superstitions. In their own world, these beliefs are fairly rational. However, in the Forest of Doors, they are not quite as useful. For instance, the Apsara believe that all things possess a spirit and that the spirits should be respected. Apsara often pause first before enacting any sort of destruction, in honor to the spirits she will theoretically offend. This can be sort of silly when kicking in a door and apologizing to the door's spirit. However, in Undersea this is absolutely necessary, as angry spirits can cause very real damage to the lives of Apsara.

Furthermore, the Apsara tend to think on grand celestial scales, and when shown a pattern or a series of events they will always see cyclical patterns even if they do not exist. This is because the concepts of cycles of being are so ingrained in the minds of the Apsara; it is hard for them to think on a linear scale. The assumption is always that if something happens once, it will happen again. There is also the assumption that everything comes to an end, and that things that end are replaced. This is certainly not always the case, at

least, not on a mortal scale. For instance, an Apsara would likely have difficulty empathizing with someone who has lost something of value that cannot be replaced (such as a close friend, a priceless idol, or a tome of forgotten lore). Things are, after all, temporary.

Apsara assume that personal freedom is a given. They are open about matters of sexuality and are rarely embarrassed or shamed by their own desires. This openness is hardly shared by the inhabitants of other worlds who have a much more reserved view of sexual relationships. The basic unit of Apsara relationships is the casual dalliance, and this tends to make others think of Apsara as loose or even perhaps a little crazed.

Families, Gender Roles, and Marriage

There is no such thing as an Apsara family, per se, although Apsara do certainly convene in groups similar to families. There is no clear name for such a unit, although the idea of 'familial love' is certainly not alien to them. Marriage does not really occur between Apsara, but they certainly do feel love. Although Apsara do sometimes form into monogamous relationships, there is no formal declaration of such. Apsara assume that everyone is an eligible bachelor or bachelorette. Furthermore, there is very little discrimination between genders. Apsara are unlikely to think of someone by their gender first. Generally, they consider their city affiliation to be the most important aspect of their identities.

Apsara are possessed of all the emotions that human beings possess and fall in love with the same degree of frequency as their terrestrial counterparts. They also fall in love with the same degree of ferocity. Their relationships tend not to last forever however, as Apsara hate to be tied down in any fashion.

Societal Divisions, Crime, and Law

Although the Apsara are a largely egalitarian society, there are numerous stilted and complex divisions within Apsara society. Cities with a higher Nara claim social supremacy over those with lower Nara because culture universally spreads downward in Undersea. Cities with higher Nara can also expect a higher degree of prosperity on average, owing to their proximity to the coral reefs at the edge of the whirlpool and their ability to attract spirits with their own prosperity. Because of this economic inequality, Apsara born in low-Nara cities have much less wealth on average. When traveling to another city further up the whirlpool, they are able to afford less and likely will seem shabby.

Even more unfortunate than the plight of those in low-Nara cities is the plight of the refugee. Because cities are periodically sucked into the crushing depths, the citizens of that city must settle in other cities. While refugees are always given sanctuary by other cities, they are rarely treated as equals. Their flight rarely affords them the luxury of

taking any goods or possessions with them to their new home, and thus refugees must begin life anew. Refugees are also commonly resented by the local population, who see the newcomers as unwelcome mouths to feed. Refugees are often subject to harsher penalties if brought before the community for punishment.

Crime in Undersea is fairly rare, as communities tend to put the rights of the individual over that of society. However, as times become scarce, criminal proceedings increase proportionately. The community is the declared keepers of the law and they perform the role of judge, jury, prosecutor, defense, and executioner. Since being brought before the community is uncommon, it is usually punished quite harshly. Death is almost never declared against an individual, but exile is quite common. Crimes include theft, slander, gross negligence, gross misrepresentation of the facts, and of course, murder. If a death sentence is declared, Ghandarva are called to poison the convicted, as it is thought of as being humane.

Sadly, refugees often do not receive fair trials as often because they lack roots in the community. This is not usually because of any sort of malice, but rather that the local population does not value them as highly. Because of this, they tend to have harsher sentences with a more frequent rate of prosecution. No one really sees anything wrong with this level of mob rule. As usual in Undersea, the charismatic are at an extreme advantage.

Communication and Travel

Communication between cities is difficult, but far from impossible. Communication downstream is fairly easy. A messenger can travel downstream efficiently, and a mail service spirals down the currents, keeping a constant stream of communication heading downstream. Communication upstream is significantly harder. Trained dolphins are often used to ferry messages or small amounts of goods to another spot. However, this is extremely time consuming and predators often pick off the slower dolphins. A certain number simply leave the service of their trainers and are never seen again. Spirits sent on missions often become resentful for the absence of their master or are waylaid by angry spirits looking to increase the size of their mob. Communication is easiest when two cities are close by, but obviously this is dependant on a number of factors, such as the cities' Nara, whether their orbit is decaying, and where she is located across the spiral.

Travel is quite dangerous, especially upstream. Although civilization in Undersea is relatively safe, the majority of it is untamed wilderness. Near the rim of the whirlpool, massive megafauna, including crabs, octopi, squid, and eels lurk about, searching for their next meal. Squads of combative Apsara are dispatched to deal with these beasts when they get close to a city, but out in the wilderness a lone messenger could easily be ambushed by a hidden stone-fish of gigantic size. Towards the center of the whirlpool, rogue currents can shunt a careless Apsara into inescapable undertows that drag her to the bottom. Pressure is what ends up killing such unlucky creatures. The least lucky are snatched up by unruly spirits and kept as a sort of pet. Some spirits have such perverse

appetites that they will keep such a victim alive for a generation before tossing her into the crushing currents.

Sometimes, an entire city will have to travel through the open sea. This is always a deadly proposition, and when it happens Apsara measure its success not in whether or not there were deaths, but rather how few died in the travel. Usually, the Apsara travel between cities in caravans consisting of a large mollusk shell harnessed to a whale or other large sea creature. As the caravan approaches the rim, predators are attracted by the movement and smell of prey. The Urvashim School do all they can to prevent such attacks, but a dozen giant squid is enough to overwhelm any cadre of Urvashim masters (to say nothing of dreaded Leviathans).

Conflict

War between cities is not unheard of, but it is a fairly rare occurrence. Only the most prosperous cities can afford to go to war, as it requires a great deal of infrastructure and security to start a war somewhere else. There have been times, not terrifically dissimilar to the recent predicaments, when multiple cities were on the verge of collapse and spiritual resources were stretched incredibly thin. War was declared on one city or another who had plentiful spirit allies but refused to share. This is generally for something specific, like sprits of rice, jade, or shell. A truly poor city with no access to any resources is unlikely to mount any war, since its resources are already allocated to simply staying within orbit. In general, Apsara don't want to start a war if it means they will have to start making their own beds.

War between Apsara nations is just as brutal as war elsewhere. Sea foam whips around, saturating the waters around battles. Instead of blood, bubbles obscure the vision of those participating. Thankfully, the Apsara have almost no means of ranged combat. Some Apsara use bows, but they are thought of as a means of hunting more than as a means of killing another Apsara. Rather, a majority of Apsara use spears and perhaps a buckler for defense. Students of the Urvashim School are usually the only participants in a given battle. For purely logistical reasons, no civilization-wide war has ever broken out among the Apsara. The Airwalker movement seeks to bring war to the Forest of Doors against the Host of Nightmares that resides there. This war, however, is presumed to take place far from the paradise that is Undersea.

Other Inhabitants of Undersea

Apsara are just one inhabitant of Undersea. Undersea is home to a vast multitude of spirits, each unique and unpredictable, as well as an infinite array of sea life. The Ap is truly infinite in scope, and thus, there is a (theoretically) infinite variety of flora and fauna.

Spirits of Undersea

Undersea is populated with more spirits than Apsara and not all of them are benevolent. When an object is annihilated by the center of the whirlpool Vathriagni, a spirit is created. Although no one can accurately say why such a thing occurs (no one can get close enough to study the phenomenon), it is widely believed that the physical object is transformed into a spirit substance and given thoughts of its own. Another school of thought, mostly espoused by the Ghandarva, is that every object contains a spirit and that contact with Vathriagni merely frees such a spirit. People who hold to this model have great reverence for objects, and frequently apologize to them when they accidentally damage something. Most healthy spirits are naturally immaterial, but despite their state, are naturally visible to all. Weak spirits often do not manifest physically at all, but exist as gauze over the water. Only Apsara (and other beings) able to observe spiritual disturbances can usually see such spirits.

The most common kind of spirit in Undersea is the spirit of water itself. This is because the most common thing found within Vathriagni is water. Thankfully, the amount of water it takes to create a spirit of water is immense, so the world is not overrun with water spirits. Spirits of the water that are newly created kindly seek out Apsara cities and offer to push them away from the void in exchange for the attention of an Apsara. Wicked spirits of water seek to drag off the Apsara and crush them in their loving embrace. Their malignancy is hidden beneath a veneer of compassion. The second most common kind is the spirit of sea life pulled into the mouth of the whirlpool. These spirits are the most likely to be angry, and nearly all of them cause problems of one sort or another. They can bring clouds of angry squid or create an infestation of barnacles. The third kind of spirit likely to be found is the tool spirits. These are the spirits of objects that have fallen from an Apsara city, into the whirlpool. These are the most commonly helpful as they like to help Apsara keep their cities in order. When angered though, these cause tremendous damage as they undo the work they once did in their physical existence.

Rebellious Spirits

Many spirits hate the whirlpool, remembering their own destruction in its immeasurable pressures. They wish to break its cycles and cause it to swallow itself, creating an eternity of silence. Such spirits spend their existence committing acts of spite, futilely attempting to disrupt something that cannot be disrupted. Eventually, these spirits turn against the Apsara, who they see as maintaining the hated spiral currents. Angry spirits are not terrifically common, but common enough to cause a great deal of trouble for the Apsara. They appear as any type of spirit, although their lack of self control and obvious anger frequently betray their nature. Warriors and magicians are usually the Apsara who have the most contact with such spirits, and frequently such contact is an exchange of violence.

Such spirits cannot find their way to the Forest of Doors because, like all of Underseas immaterial denizens, they are sustained by its life-giving Ap. However, the Forest has its

own spirits as well and not all of them are friendly. In fact, Undersea is most familiar with the Host of Nightmares, a class of black-clad spirit who represent, as far as any can tell, the essences of all terrible things. Many spread disease, something unknown in Undersea until their arrival. Most of them reside in the city of Three Curses, a haven for all wicked spirits. Some whisper that there might be a powerful member of the Host in charge of that unspeakable place, but no one has escaped its grasp to tell of it.

Megafauna and Leviathans

An infinite bounty of plankton and krill ever wafts towards the open mouth of Vathriagni. In the east, its currents are quickest, scouring the reefs of all but the hardiest of barnacles. However, Vathriagni's western side contains an unthinkable bounty of all manner of sea life. So vast is this biomass that schools of whales, numbering in the thousands, gather at the surface like schools of fish seen elsewhere. Blue and humpback whales are as salmon to predatory megafauna, giant versions of sea animals seen elsewhere. There is at least three species of giant sea turtle that are commonly seen, each one capable of housing an Apsara city on its back. There are sea snails who are equally large, scraping across the sea floor, devouring a path thirty miles wide and thousand miles long in a single day. Squid the size of a cathedral hunt shrimp the size of elephants. Dolphins, rather than lampreys, scour the gills of a giant shark for morsels of giant flying fish it captured earlier. Apsara try their best to avoid megafauna for the most part. They have no means of communication with them outside of a select few animal spirits and although megafauna seem to understand that Apsara are not tasty (they are sea foam, after all) that doesn't stop them from annihilating a city with a single thrust of their tail. The bones, shells, scales, and sometimes flesh of megafauna make excellent building materials, however, and most cities use some element of them as their base.

The most dangerous creature native to undersea are not the megafauna. Leviathans, immense sea dwelling monsters, roam all parts of Vathriagni in search of prey. Unlike megafauna, which instinctively ignore Apsara for the most part, Leviathans seem to revel in carnage. Indeed, the Urvashim school of combat states as one of its greatest missions the destruction of all Leviathan. Devotees of the Blythe Lancer style are told that they must tangle with tentacled Leviathans before being initiated into the style, as Leviathan suckers routinely disarm warriors. Not being disarmed by such attacks is the most basic technique of the Blythe Lancer style. Leviathans and their accompanying beasts come in an bewildering array of forms some of which recapitulate the forms of well known animals, such as serpents and octopi, with others seemingly born without any antecedent form. Leviathan themselves are quite massive and usually swarm with a host of young larvae or predatory parasites that are themselves the size of an Apsara. Many Leviathan spawn tentacles from themselves to hunt, returning to the body to disgorge any meal they might find in the watery wastes. Others simply roam the waste with giant maws, swallowing anything unlucky enough to be caught in the creature's advance. Many Leviathan possess incredible regeneration properties, often spawning new Leviathan through the loss of a limb or head. One particularly tricky type of Leviathan even creates

larvae that superficially resemble Apsara who can even mimic speech for the purpose of luring in prey.

Flora of the Sea Shelf

The sea shelf of Vathriagni blossoms with a vast array of plants and plant-like forms that are quite similar to the forests, marshes, jungles, and plains of other worlds. Huge trees of kelp take the place of the vast evergreens seen in other worlds. Large anemone take the place of bushes, palmettos, and low scrub. Massive sponges dot the landscape, like baobab upon a vast savanna made of seaweed. Mollusks, such as clams and muscles, adhere to tree-like structures in much the same way as fruit forms in other worlds, allowing pearl-harvesters to pluck fresh pearls from huge groves of kelp. The sea floor has an unimaginable array of corals, which like herbs and weeds, make up a majority of the biomass found there. Corals are used in much the same way as herbs in other worlds are used, with many of them having useful medicinal and alchemical properties. Aquatic strains of many of the crops known in other worlds can be found growing naturally on the sea floor, with Undersea cognates of wheat, rice, and barley being the most common. The Apsara likewise grow within their own cities cultivated orchards of apples, peaches, almonds, saffron, fenugreek, cumin, and many other agricultural commodities.

Cities and Locations of Undersea

Shell Back

The city of Shell-Back, once the most populous of the low-Nara "Insider" cities, no longer exists. It met its doom well before its apportioned time and is now a tale of caution against those who would have relations with the alien spirits beyond the world. Built on the shell of a megafauna sea turtle, the city was dragged into the eye of Vathriagni by an encounter with the terrible demon city of Three Curses (see below). Adding to the tragedy, spirits have been leaving and besmirching the name of Shell Back for generations because of a number of diplomatic missteps made by the city's inhabitants. Ordinarily, the destruction of a city is a time for rejoicing and reflection, as new spirits are born into the world to aid the Apsara. However, because of Shell Back's terrible relations with the spirits, a disproportionately large number of the spirits created through its demise are disgruntled or so furious that they are a detriment to Apsara society. Shell Back had once been home to large numbers of Urvashim warriors (many of whom are to blame for the bad relations with their immaterial brethen), but its population has been dispersed throughout the world in the past few Cycles of Vathriagni.

Snail's Rest

The city of Snail's Rest is the gem of Undersea. Located on top of and inside a giant snail shell, it boasts the greatest population of Apsara in any world. It is home to the greatest number of Jithramurti salons, and the population considers their city in much the same way as Those-in-Pursuit-of-Excellence consider themselves: inhabitants seek to make the city the greatest upon the face of Vathriagni. Their Nara is quite high upon the whirlpool, their temples are the largest, their salons outlandish in apportion, and their public performances the most ostentatious. Snail's Rest is quite nationalistic and seeks to be a beacon of Apsara values to the those cities whose Nara are further down (travel, and thus culture, travels most easily downward through Vathriagni). In Snail's Rest, the richest Apsara live upon the surface of the shell, but those who cannot afford the pleasure palaces in the sun instead take refuge in a number of less grand lodges in the shell itself. The truly destitute (by Apsara standards) inhabit the innermost part of the shell and rarely see the blue sun.

Pearl Spire

The city of Pearl Spire is a medium sized city with a relatively high Nara and one of the oldest by far. Pearl Spire doesn't seem to be losing its Nara in any appreciable fashion, due in part to its bivalve-shell construction and alliance with spirits of the currents. Pearl Spire is however extremely elitist and even the poorest citizens seem to look down on the plight of those whose Nara is close to the eye of Vathriagni. Despite this, they are welcoming skilled refugees whose services could aid the city, especially practitioners of the Currents. Pearl-Spire shores up trade shortages by dealing in pearls to the richest members of other nations, often paying for transport both ways. Pearl Spire is often a site for scholarly travelers, as its libraries and salons possess the closest thing to a record of Apsara history. The city is also home to a great university carved from a single pearl, taken from the animal whose shell forms the city's base. Here, spirits teach the most scholarly among the Apsara, who make pilgrimages from quite far away to learn with the noble Tablet Spirits of Pearl-Spire. Pearl Spire embodies the philosophy of Ashwar-Nara most, constantly seeking the aid of spirits and their fellow Apsara.

Azure Wall

The city of Azure Wall watches in horror as its seasons pass with greater frequency. Everyone knows Azure Wall is going to be lost soon. There is a great uncertainty though, as the city has always had the worst relations with spirits. In fact, their actions have long angered other cities as they consider their insulting behavior to be a liability. When Azure Wall passes from the physical world, resentful spirits will be birthed into the world to wreak havoc on other cities. For this reason, other cities are not inclined to accept refugees from Azure Wall with wide arms. No city has granted blanket refugee status to Azure Wall citizens and most have outright refused entry to anyone hailing from it. No profession is considered dominant in Azure Wall, but everyone is seen as incompetent by

those whose Nara is higher. They are pointed to as an example not to be followed and as their doom nears, their options are beginning to dwindle. The Apsara in Azure Wall have good reason to flee Undersea, as their reputation makes it unlikely they will receive amnesty from other cities. Although their lot is not worse than that of Shell Back, public opinion is so arrayed against them that they have fewer options. Consequently, the Rajak-Ariman school of philosophy is most dominant and apocalyptic and millenarian points of view are expressed openly.

The Shard

One curious city, known collectively as the shard, is actually made of marble as opposed to the shell and shale of other cities. It is believed that the city is a remnant of the old city which once housed all Apsara, thrown back into the flow of Vathriagni by the actions of the spirits. The city itself is quieter than other Apsara cities. There are no grand ballrooms, no houses of of fleshly pleasures, and no places of scholarly debate. Marble columns, in the style of the old city, hold aloft the roofs of an uncountable number of temples and sanctuaries where devotees of the Currents and followers of the Vathriagnishesha school of thought meditate on the nature of time, events, and the great soul which resides in the center of all things. The Shard sits upon a precariously low Nara as the city is itself quite old, but its orbit is completely stable and shows no sign of decay. Few travelers pass through the Shard and even fewer ever leave its decaying splendor.

Dhakka, Glory of the Depths

The city of Dhakka, known popularly as the the Glory of the Depths, sits in an inauspiciously low Nara. However, unlike other cities who face a similar state, Dhakka is flush with an unthinkable quantity of wealth. Early in the city's existence, it was a simple affair set upon a (relatively) small shell from a megafauna crab. However, in the days of its high Nara, other smaller cities attached themselves to the nascent Dhakka. In time, the Glory of the Depths became a vast metropolis flowing through the waves of Vathriagni. Dhakka became supreme among cities who field caravans, and the people of Dhakka became the most skilled merchants in a world where mercantile matters flows through their veins. Dhakka actively sought out skilled refugees from fallen cities to further their own collection of skilled individuals. However, this age is largely gone; Dhakka's Nara has decayed greatly since those times and the city itself continues to live in unimaginable splendor on the profits of their earlier gains. Because of its vast riches and pervading sense of impending doom, the city is dominated by the Tandagam school of thought. It seems as if every aspect of city life is in some way bent towards the gratification of some pleasure or desire.

Three Curses

Somewhere within the mouth of Vathriagni, there exists a city inhabited by spirits and their unfortunate prisoners. The city, known as Three Curses, is the remnants of a city that was abandoned and left to fall into oblivion. Instead, thousands of angry spirits raised the city and inhabited it as their own. They seek out and recruit spirits as aggressively as the Apsara, and although no Apsara knows its location, it can increase its Nara or even hover in place if the leadership desires it to. Three Curses (referring to it as anything else isn't scornful enough) is seared into the consciousness of every Apsara, who view it as a hell for the unwary. It is the worst possible place an Apsara can speak of, for it is everything they despise. Worse, it breaks all the rules about how cycles of creation and destruction are intended to work. Its existence is an indictment of their entire philosophy. Besides, it is a genuine danger. The demise of Shell Back was caused by the appearance of Three Curses. As it approached the city from below, angry spirits attached anchors to the sea turtle and dragged it into the depths. The city's Nara was all but destroyed and few refugees made it out alive. Some unlucky few were captured and are presumed to still be in Three Curses. Such a fate is by all accounts unthinkable awful. Undersea culture has been shocked by this happening to its core and survivor's accounts place the blame on strange, nightmarish spirits imported from the Forest of Doors. Witnesses claim that the Nightmare Host organized the native spirits and granted them terrible powers, including the ability to inflict disease. Apsara had never before seen corruptions of the flesh and such things are not only horrifying but also alien in the extreme.

Common Aphorisms and Colloquialisms

“You can never know what you have not seen with your eyes.” (Only a person present for an event will actually know what occurred at that event. This saying also has connotations that one should generally believe what they see.)

“Break a shell, break a friend.” (Harming an object will one day cause equal harm to an Apsara. Among children, this saying has the connotation that the shell is the friend, and that the object contains a spirit that will one day aid the Apsara.)

“The citizen upstream should not laugh at the citizen downstream, for there could be someone further upstream laughing harder.” (Do not look down on others, for those above you might perhaps look down on you. There is a tacit assumption that there is always someone upstream from you.)

“Every warm current can drag you off.” (Nothing is perfect. This is particularly morbid, for warm currents are considered wonderful things and being dragged off is often a prelude to death at the center of the whirlpool.)

“The charitable soul pleases the world.” (Altruism is rewarded with good luck. Cynical Apsara reverse the value of this with the phrase thusly: “the charitable soul pleases the world... with his suffering.”)

“Jade makes a person safe, pearls make a person lucky, and opals make a person lovely.” (A mantra repeated by young Apsara to themselves as they get dressed. Although there is no significance to this ritual other than sheer habit, its practice spans the whole of Undersea.)

“When a spirit smiles without a note played, you will be eaten.” (Although this is an extreme exaggeration, it is a warning to the inexperienced that dealing with spirits is tricky and can result in death if not done with respect and skill.)

“First, think of others.” (This is another common saying exhorting the need for charity and compassion. This is frequently used against people perceived as hard hearted. It is not something Apsara like to hear said to them, and elicits feelings of shame.)

“She (or he) thinks she (or he) is not from the sea.” (He or she thinks she is above others. This also has the connotation that the subject does not believe that he or she has any faults of their own.)

“You’ll remember this day in another cycle.” (This is both a stern admonishing and a high compliment. The general idea is that the person will remember the day through previous incarnations. Some commoner Apsara claim that they recall things from previous incarnations. All such so-called memories are universally positive, as no one seems to remember any terrifically bad days from previous lives.)

The Currents of Deepspirit

Sorcery is very much a part of life in Undersea, and those who practice the Currents of Deepspirit find their lives much more comfortable than those who don’t. The Ghandarva are a powerful influence on society and command a significant degree of respect. Ghandarva usually have the largest retinues of spirits because they have numerous powers that attract spirits and keep them happy. Ghandarva can magically conjure an aura of attractiveness around themselves through the spell Knowing the Spirit Ways. This allows them to make instant friends with happy spirits and negotiate with the more aggressive ones. Once they have a spirit’s attention, they can conjure Joss, a spirit material that is sought after by all spirits. Spirits internalize (or ingest as some have suggested) this material and use it either to grow in power or to cause a sort of narcotic sensation in the spirit. Ghandarva can even turn themselves into spirit matter and interact with spirits in their own native environment.

The Currents of Deepspirit provide numerous worldly benefits as well. Ghandarva can draw out poison in those who have fallen victim to giant blowfish or anemones. Ghandarva can throw destructive energy from their hands to send dangerous spirits into oblivion. They can throw poisonous energy to infect the blood of those who would do them harm. Often, Ghandarva who know this spell use it in service to the community in the form of executioner’s hand. The magically conjured coral serpent’s venom is said to cause a euphoric effect just before death, and thus it is considered a humane means of

execution if such is called for. Ghandarva are also quickly called upon if no healers are present, for their magic can instantly close a bleeding wound.

A Day in Undersea

On an average day for an average Apsara, she wakes in the early afternoon to her personal house spirit who brings her possible outfits for her to wear during the day. While being washed by two current spirits, she chooses the outfit she feels will make her the center of attention when she goes out. She puts on the clothes, singing a song to her spirits as she does. Once she has her jewelry on, she leaves her home and seeks out her friends. They meet in the public square, each followed by their spirit servants. They proceed to gossip and make jokes about local happenings. The meeting becomes an impromptu picnic when spirits bring a hot meal for the gathering. The assembled Apsara take turns telling stories about wonderful things they have done. Recommendations go out for certain songs that the crowd wishes to hear, and the average Apsara performs for her peers. As night falls, the crowd disperses back to their homes where they will spend time alone seeking out whatever things they wish to spend their time on. Some will write poetry. Others will placate their spirits. Others will clash in duels to hone their martial skill. Others will study the orbit of the city and calculate when next the city will move within communication distance with their closest neighbor. The average Apsara spends her time performing rituals to create Joss for her servants. When the ritual is complete, she goes to sleep, repeating the cycle of day once more when she wakes.

Five Things Every Apsara Knows

Apsara are very much individualists, freed from scarcity to pursue their own goals and passions. However, every Apsara knows...

...That Cycles Rule Everything

Creation incites destruction. Destruction breeds creation. Few things occur only once, and things that have happened once before will likely occur again. Likewise, things that are happening now could very well happen once again. Nothing lasts forever. Even the lives of Apsara are not eternal, yet the death of an Apsara allows another to be brought into the world.

...That Spirits Should be Negotiated with to Obtain their Favor

Spirits have incredibly valuable skills and powers at their disposal, and to obtain these services one must bargain for service. For simple spirits, a piece of art or a performance can usually secure a favor. For more powerful spirits, a period of service, a shrine, or a feat of magic would be required. Ghandarva are armed with numerous magics to secure the services of spirits.

...Their Greatest Passions and Sensations

Apsara are a leisure culture with vast amounts of time to do with as they desire. Apsara thus seek out their greatest passion. Since Apsara forge their own destinies from their desires, they have great freedom to choose what they devote their lives to. This could be something as simple as the feeling of a warm bed to something as complex as finding a means of immortality. Every Apsara has a great and overarching passion or sensation that colors their existence and gives it meaning.

...That the Unknown World is Alien

The new world's sky burns with yellow fire and is covered in a blanket of air instead of Ap. The world is solid and it stands still. Although many plants and foods are similar to that of Undersea, the world is full of new sensations and subjects to study. It is a world of endless potential with little known about it. Spirits from Undersea cannot travel through the Gates, but there are new local spirits to be found in the Forest of Doors.

...Their Philosophical Orientation

What might be considered idle speculation in other worlds is deadly serious business in Undersea. Because the daily concerns of Apsara are so limited, they are freed to explore endless abstractions and theories of moral existence. Whether the Apsara is a feared follower of the Rajak-Ariman philosophy, devotee of the ascetic Vathriagnishesham, or focused Jithramurti follower, every Apsara can explain their belief system and defend its virtues.

Inspirational Material

The Brothers Grimm Version of the Little Mermaid (Literature)

This is the story of the life (and yes, death... this is after all the Brothers Grimm) of a mermaid. The metaphysics of life and death were a particular inspiration.

The Rig Veda (Literature)

The name of the Apsara is taken from this ancient and really entertaining epic. In it, the Apsara are heavenly maidens who come to earth to bathe. In the stories, they turn into geese. Occasionally, Shiva sends them to tempt wise men who gather too much karma... even Shiva doesn't want to be outdone, and the Apsara are his tools to hold supremacy amongst the yogi.

Gulliver's Travels (Literature)

The section on Laputa is particularly appropriate although it's all great (and very grown up!). Laputa is inhabited by self-obsessed scholars who float above the world contributing nothing, the least of which is any sort of actual knowledge. While these guys are irredeemable dweebs, the feeling of genius unencumbered by usefulness is definitely something the Apsara share.

The Legend of Atlantis (Various Literature Sources)

Although the Apsara no longer have a single great city, they still retain the sense of utopia. Like the Atlantis of legend, they eek an existence out of the sea and place great value on personal wisdom and charisma.

The music of Lata Mangeshkar (Music)

Lata Mangeshkar is perhaps the greatest chanteuse of Indian music. This is the sort of music I imagine the Apsara singing, although certainly I don't expect this level of talent. From any person. Ever.

The music of R. D. Burman (Music)

R.D. Burman is perhaps the greatest composer and songwriter of Indian pop and cinema music. Although his music is a little more pop and a little less traditional, it is none the less something I had greatly in mind for Apsara culture and music.

Finding Nemo (Movie)

This movie portrays life underwater. Imagine Nara-riding to be similar to the current-surfing portrayed in the movie. The aquarium has numerous characters that would make perfect Apsara.

Fantasia (Movie)

The underwater scenes here are perfect inspiration for Undersea and the Apsara in general. Hell, this entire movie has something that can be used for inspiration in Forest of Doors.

Spirited Away (Movie)

The spirits of this movie are very much like the spirits of Undersea: eager to please for the right price. They are idiosyncratic, place great value on station, and are quite

terrestrial.

Howl's Moving Castle (Movie)

Another movie by Hayao Miyazaki, this one again reiterates the theme of spirits who serve. There are also numerous angry and sarcastic spirits with no desire to see anyone happy.