

# Crossover: Rokea in Mage



Hello Mage fans & welcome to *Mage: The Podcast*. The podcast that works hard towards Ascension, so you don't have to. I'm your host Adam. Have you ever been afraid to take a swim at the beach. Did you look at the water & say "Yeah, I don't know what's in there." You're smart. Give yourself an honorary phd right now. Those guys at Harvard have nothing on you.

Today's episode is all about the Rokea. What are they? Any description I could give falls short of the truth. The best I can do is play this clip. Before I do, content warning. If any of my listeners are prone to panic attacks, stop the episode right here.

If you just spilled your drink, my apologies. I don't have to tell you that what I just played is the theme for the movie *Jaws* from 1975 by John Williams. That sound clip isn't iconic, it's primal. I've never seen the movie or read the novel but I know that tune. Years ago I heard it at an outdoor mall. Without thinking I put my arm around my young son & looked all around. The nearest body of water was a thermos someone packed under a stroller. That's what that music does to people.

Shark week has been such a hit for the Discovery Channel that we're bringing it to *Mage: The Podcast*. And what better way to do that than discuss the Rokea? This is the 2nd in my series on were-creatures. I never took a particular interest in sharks but the rokea have always appealed to me. I had only read their description in the first Werewolf players guide from 1993 & that was so long ago I'd forgotten it. I didn't know what to expect but I've always loved the sea. Islands, beaches, boats - all of that has tremendous appeal for me so I was ready to read about the shapeshifting sharks of the World of Darkness. So what are the rokea all about? They eat people. Not because they hate people. It's not even because they're hungry. It's just what rokea do. Birds fly, people complain about taxes. Rokea eat people. This isn't complicated. The books hasten to inform us sharks are not inherently aggressive. They don't target humans & there are very few shark attacks each year. But... rokea do eat people. It's nothing personal. They also eat werewolves, sea monsters, old tires, parts of ships - you get the idea.

I'm going to discuss rokea biology & society. We'll take a look at their Gifts, their supernatural powers. Then we'll talk about how mages & rokea can interact. Well, I actually covered that. Believe it or not, there are ways they can interact that don't involve a hasty dinner. For this episode I not only read the Rokea book from 2001 but relevant sections from 6 other Werewolf books & a World of Darkness book. I watched 4 documentaries on aquatic life but the real education on the rokea comes from the memes.

On our Discord server for *Mage: The Podcast*, Mage fans shared the rokea memes & now I am ready to introduce the scariest shapeshifter of all to my listeners.

The rokea started in the first Werewolf players guide from 1993. The description there was vague & felt unfinished. Much of the material is stated as rumors repeated by other shapeshifters. They have no vulnerability to silver. It is said they can't enter the Umbra. They're upset about marine pollution. Hold on. Shapeshifters who don't like pollution? That's new. They are all warriors so there are no auspices. Their totem is the Kraken, a giant sea monster rumored to resemble a squid. They take part in a contest called the Gorge. Whoever can eat the most when food is plentiful, wins. The winner is respected. Sad to say, but the Gorge is not mentioned again in any rokea material. The rokea next appeared in the 1998 Werewolf players guide. This is where they took on their final form.

So let's look at that. Rokea are vulnerable to silver, just like werewolves. They can live for thousands of years if they don't die of violence. They may be immortal. Rokea aren't 100% sure because most die before getting old. The leading cause of death is conflicts with other rokea. They have 5 forms although most rokea only know 4 of those. Squamus is shark form. Chasmus is a larger version of their shark form. Rokea consider chasmus to be their battle form. It is the best form for fighting in water. It causes Delirium. Delirium is a game term from *Werewolf the Apocalypse*. It is a terror regular people experience when they see a werewolf in its most frightening form. It leads to amnesia later, allowing werewolves to avoid discovery. Gladius is the half-shark, half-human form that most Werewolf fans know as crinos. It is the best form for fighting on land. Rokea who spend their lives in the sea have a tail in gladius form. Rokea who spend a lot of time on land do not have a tail in that form. Rokea have no voice in gladius. Glabrus is a large, muscular human form. No body hair, a hump on the back & frightening teeth. Only rokea who have spent a lot of time on land are able

to assume this form. Many were-creatures mistake the glabrus form for a human warped by harmful Wyrms influences like a fomori. A rokea on land might shift to this form to defend himself, get attacked by a werewolf making a mistake, & get the impression that werewolves hate rokea. Actually, werewolves do hate rokea but more on that later. Finally, we have homid, the human form. The majority of rokea are born of shark parents & in homid form they are ugly & fierce looking. Character creation rules do not allow an Appearance attribute higher than 2.

Werewolves form packs. Rokea have slews. A slew has 3 to 10 members. Later books say 3 to 7 members. Early books say slews usually have regular sharks as members. Later books give the impression a slew only has rokea in it. Some rokea live solitary lives.

Rokea have a Gnosis stat, just like werewolves. They spend Gnosis to fuel their supernatural powers. Rokea can only regain Gnosis in seawater. Rokea cannot spend Gnosis & Rage points in the same turn. Rokea need 2 successes on a Rage roll to enter frenzy. That's half of what werewolves need. 4 or more successes is an extreme frenzy called Kunmind. In Kunmind, rokea will attack all who are near them including allies.

All rokea have natural scales on their skin that are so sharp they cause damage to anyone striking them. Rokea regenerate damage quickly like werewolves but only when in saltwater & only in their breed form.

Rokea sight & smell operate a little differently when in the water. The Rokea book gives these details but I doubt they will come up much in games. Rokea can use electrical signals to communicate. It is called sending & has a range of a mile or more in seawater. The gladius half-shark form can only communicate by sending. The 2 human forms can receive sendings but not send them. Range on land is 50 feet.

Where do baby rokea come from? All or almost all rokea come from rokea mating with regular sharks. The books encourage Storytellers to decide if there are no or very

few rokea born from human parents. There are no shark kin of rokea. When a rokea mates with a shark, a rokea is born. Rokea do not have any notion of shark populations that are kinfolk. When rokea mate with humans, human kinfolk result. When a rokea mates with human kinfolk, a homid-breed-rokea results. Homid breed rokea do not have the fierce ugliness of most rokea & are not restricted from selecting any skills at character creation. Homid rokea share the ethnicity of their human parent. Most rokea are born from sharks & thus do not have human ethnicities. The first time they see humans, their homid form will lock into that ethnicity. Rokea do not have any romance in their lives. They do not have any inclination towards romantic love. They do not understand having a continued relationship with a shark or person with whom they have mated. They also do not understand parenthood. Raising children is a foreign concept. Female rokea who try to produce homid rokea may have a hard time understanding the need to care for their babies. Whether or not instinct kicks in while in homid form is for Storytellers to decide. There are no Metis rokea. Metis is a term from Werewolf the Apocalypse. When 2 shapeshifters have a child together, there are deformities & societal stigma. Rokea feel the urge to mate but not romance. Rokea never desire mating with other rokea. Rokea elders state a Metis would be killed at birth but it happens so seldom it isn't an issue. While on the topic of mating, starting in 1999, rokea on land feel a strong & continual urge to mate with humans. 1999 was when the World of Darkness metaplot began for Time of Judgement. The Avatar Storm, the new red star in the sky, etc.

Rokea do not need a Gift or skill roll to communicate with aquatic creatures or spirits. Even spirits on the other side of the Gauntlet are easy to talk to if they are aquatic spirits. Talking to non-aquatic spirits requires a Gift such as Spirit Speech.

That should cover rokea biology. The ananasi are the most unique of the shapeshifters but the rokea are probably the 2nd most unique.

# SOCIETY

Let's look now at rokea society. Rokea do not have tribes. Each rokea has a shark species. Species has no significance in rokea society. There are over 500 species of sharks in the world but rokea only come from the larger, predatory sharks. The Rokea book lists 6 but encourages you to add more. Great whites are called Karkha, hammerheads are called Spynha, bull sharks are Lexcha, tiger sharks are Galchurva, mako are called Ixya. The final species is only in East Asia. I'll cover that later. Each species has a small bonus. For example, great whites have more Rage & stronger sense of smell, makos are faster & jump higher. Hammerheads have better vision.

Rokea have 3 auspices: brightwater, dimwater, darkwater. Auspice is an important part of shapeshifter society. When a shapeshifter is born determines their role in society. The 3 auspices of the rokea symbolize distance from the sea's surface. Brightwaters are born on a sunny day or when the full moon shows. They are warriors & usually have fierce & curious dispositions. Dimwaters are the most numerous auspice. Born when the day is cloudy or the phase of the moon is between full moon & no moon. Dimwaters are lawmakers & explorers although every rokea is considered a warrior. They tend to be wanderers & messengers. Dimwaters are the most conservative auspice. The last auspice is darkwaters. They are the least numerous & are born when there is no moon or the day is unusually dim. They are the mystics & seers of rokea society. They tend to be loners & innovators. They risk trips to the cold depths to learn secrets.

Rokea do not acknowledge Gaia or the Triat like land-dwelling shapeshifters do. They believe it all began with the great spirit they call the Sea. The Sea created 3 daughters. Kun, the mother of fishes & of the rokea. Kun corresponds to the Wyld. Qyrl, mother of mollusks & deceit corresponds to the Wyrms. C'et, mother of crus-

taceans corresponds to the Weaver. The fights of the 3 daughters as they argued churned up the sea floor & created Unsea, that is, land. Qyrl is thought to resemble a giant octopus. She was curious about the sky so she climbed up & latched on to try & remain there. She damaged the sky & fell, causing the sun. Rokea call the sun the great wound. They believe the moon is a balm applied to the wound each evening. The morning sun is the balm falling away after wearing out. Qyrl wants to close the great wound which would cause Armageddon. How does healing damage in the sky cause the end of the world? That's a question you shouldn't ask the rokea. When they don't have a good answer to a question, they get grumpy. Although it's easy to think the rokea renamed Gaia & the members of the Triat, the book suggests the Sea & her 3 daughters may be Celestines that serve Gaia & the Triat instead. Like the ananasi, the rokea do not give any thought to Luna & Helios, the moon & sun Celestines. Those Celestines are very important to most shapeshifters.

The rokea believe they were created so that Kun would have children who survive Armageddon & establish the new natural order that comes after. Their duty to survive is as a race, not as individuals. Sacrificing one's self to defeat a threat is still heroic.

Rokea are either entirely or mostly born from sharks. Whether there are no or very few human-born rokea is called out as a plot point that Storytellers decide for their own games. Werewolf 20, the 4th edition of Werewolf, states this has not changed. There are rumors that land-dwelling rokea are working on starting a human-born population. Rumors circulate that a group of human rokea kinfolk are kept hidden on the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

Because they are shark-born, rokea society is quite different from werewolf society. Besides the auspices, there were no factions for most of their history. The only faction currently is the Betweeners but I'll get to them in a minute. Rokea swim through the seas on their own initiative & carry out their mission of defending nature. They

fight with the monsters of Qyrl or stop harmful human activity when they see it but complacency is the rule with rokea. They believe Qyrl is mostly busy on land. The sense of urgency the werewolves feel to fight the Wyrms just isn't there. The rokea know of the 2 Changeling kiths that live in the sea, the mer folk & the Me-roo-cha. Rokea have little interest in the mer folk & avoid their undersea cities. Rokea hate the Me-roo-cha but the 2 groups mostly leave each other alone. If you'd like to know more about the aquatic Changelings, listen to our episode on Blood-Dimmed Tides.

Rokea have underwater Grottos to match the caerns of werewolves. They are less common, though. As a result, rokea also receive Gnosis from rorquals. Rorquals were described in our episode on Blood-Dimmed Tides but for those who missed that, a rorqual is a kami spirit in the sea who serves Gaia. They usually take the form of whales or dolphins & carry Gnosis from deep sea trenches to supernatural denizens of the sea. They are peaceful & sometimes carry messages from the great spirits. The Rokea book gives information on 7 specific forms rorquals take, 5 whales, killer whales & dolphins. This is a welcome addition to the rorqual information we get in Blood-Dimmed Tides.

I mentioned rorquals carry Gnosis from deep sea trenches. There is a supernatural order to the oceans but we get very little information on it. Grottos provide Gnosis but the deep sea trenches are especially rich sources of Gnosis. By the way, that means mages can get quintessence there. The trenches are cold, remote & the pressure is difficult for rokea. Dimwater rokea have Gifts that allow them to visit the trenches but they don't stay long. Rokea revere the trenches like early human cultures revered the mountains. They are dangerous but wondrous places.

Rokea use Fetishes, that is, weapons & other hand-held objects that have powers because they have a spirit bound to them. One book says only land-dwelling rokea

use Fetishes. Later books say all Rokea use Fetishes but not all that often. Rokea Fetishes never have silver in them.

The main totem spirit of rokea is Kun, the mother of fishes. Kraken became a totem associated with Qyrl that is only followed by rokea who are tempted away from normal rokea society.

When young rokea discover their true nature they take what is called the Long Swim. They travel the waters until they discover another rokea, a rorqual or another spirit that serves Kun or the great Sea spirit. After this meeting, they are guided to a Grotto where they can commune with the Sea or Kun. They are granted their first Gifts & told of their duties to the rokea. The Long Swim is an important introduction & who conducts it makes a big difference. If a peaceful rokea or rorqual does the honors, the rokea will probably take little interest in the Betweenner Conflict. If a conservative dimwater conducts the Long Swim, the young rokea will be directed to have a rite of passage that involves trying to kill renegade rokea on land.

That leads us to the Betweenner Conflict. The only point of contention in rokea society is the Betweenner Conflict. A May 1955 nuclear test at sea was conducted pretty close to San Diego. That happened when the rokea were having a rare gathering at one of their Grottos. This gathering hosted most of the rokea where they discussed what to do about human pollution of the sea. The nuclear blast killed a large percentage of the world's rokea & was named the Turna'a Massacre. The surviving elders forbid rokea from visiting land. Many brightwaters, the warrior auspice, rebelled. For years, the rebels were forced to return to the sea but snuck back on land as soon as no one was looking. By the beginning of the 1980s rokea decided the only way to solve the problem was to kill those who left the sea. Traditional-minded rokea hunt the rebels but also push new rokea to undergo a rite of passage that involves visiting land to kill rebels. Rokea can only regain Gnosis in salt water & if they stay away from the

sea too long they are locked in human form permanently. When rokea visit the land, it is unheard of for them to travel more than a few miles from shore. That makes rokea on land easier to track down. Betweeners are rokea who spend time on land. Betweeners are either rebellious, curious or dedicated individuals. The dedicated ones are trying to learn more about humans so they can prevent pollution at sea but they are also trying to create more human-born rokea. They think this will bring balance & wisdom to rokea society. The conservative dimwaters believe this will taint rokea society. They not only try to kill Betweeners but also human-born rokea & some even want to kill the human kinfolk of rokea. This looks a lot like notions of genetic purity. My listeners will no doubt agree with me that genetic purity is never desirable. I think the Betweenener Conflict is not as simple as good guys vs. bad guys. Change is hard. Human-born rokea would bring change to a society that has been the same for centuries. I think it would help the rokea but it's frightening for many of them to contemplate turning everything they know on its head after so long. Also, sharks are good at killing. Stick with what you know, you know? Another thing, humans are known as land-dwelling polluters. Land dwellers don't belong in the sea. Who wants to bring polluters into rokea society? Betweeners argue rokea are half human. Denying that half brings blindness & reduces their resources. The sea dwellers argue rokea take on human form only to oppose humans, not to become them.

Most Betweeners are brightwaters. Because they are persecuted, betweeners get resentful & desperate. Some are tempted to accept Qyrl's offers & turn to the Wyrms. That means serving the Kraken totem. Werewolf 20 revised things a bit. They said the rebels who went on land were trying to take vengeance against humans but needed to figure out which humans to attack. Now, they work against the humans who are polluting the sea while dodging attacks from conservative rokea. Also, many young rokea who hunt betweeners see land for the first time & decide they like it. The hunts against

betweeners makes more betweeners. Also, some betweeners return to the sea with useful intel on Qyrl's minions. This could soon soften the feelings of the conservative dimwaters.

## **AROUND THE WORLD**

Now let's take a look at rokea around the world. Something evil is happening in Antarctica but the rokea don't know what. The Australian coast line has 5 Grottos. The largest is the Long Grotto, humans call it the Great Barrier Reef. The Long Grotto is the most important Grotto in the world. The Mokole, reptile shape shifters, in Australia try to help betweeners when they can. The Bay of Bengal has many rokea. Sea dwelling rokea dominate the Bay of Bengal's surrounding shores. Rokea avoid the Persian Gulf which is polluted & a nest for Qyrl's aquatic minions. United States has the largest betweener population. Europe has the 2nd largest. The Bermuda Triangle is no problem for the rokea. They don't know why humans are afraid of it. The Sargasso Sea is avoided. No enemies there, they just avoid it. It's like a modern shopping mall. Why would you go there? It's a shame the Hammerhead Triangle wasn't mentioned. In the east Pacific near South America, the triangle connecting Cocos Island, Malpelo Island & the Galápagos Islands is a world-renowned gathering place for hammerhead sharks. A big Grotto should be there.

Mariana Trench gets special mention because Project Deepwater is there. The Mariana Trench is in the Pacific Ocean & is famous for being the deepest trench of all. In the early 2000s Mage & Werewolf were both in their Revised editions. Project Deepwater was a cooperative project between the Technocracy & Pentex, the evil, polluting corporation of Werewolf books. An underwater fortress was built at a great depth on the edge of the Mariana Trench. The Technocracy did research, Pentex caused pollu-

tion. What did the Technocracy think of all the pollution? That never came up in the published material although we are told the Technocracy serve the Wyrms so, I guess they like it. Mage Storytellers probably don't accept that at face value. The Rokea book tells us the rokea learned of the fortress after it was completed. They were offended because it disrupted the rorquals visiting to get Gnosis. The rokea attacked as a group & tried hard to destroy the fortress. They sustained heavy losses & failed. Finally, a spirit of the sea told them to retreat. The rokea have decided to avoid it & do not keep tabs on it. Remember the chulorviah? They are a supernatural menace introduced in Blood-Dimmed Tides. That material was reprinted in Infinite Tapestry. They infect humans who slowly turn to evil & mutate into squid-like creatures. The chulorviah are suggested as one of the threats players have to deal with at Project Deepwater. The origin & goals of the chulorviah are mysterious so Storytellers can use them however they like. A large sidebar in the Rokea book gives us the scoop on this menace in Werewolf games. The chulorviah was an evil spirit in the Middle Umbra who chose to enter the world without a definite form. As a disease, it infected squid & octopi for years. Now, it wants to cause trouble for humans on land. It helped Project Deepwater get started so it could infect human scientists who carry the threat back home when their tour at Deepwater finishes.

## **OTHER SHAPESHIFTERS**

Do the rokea get along with other shapeshifters? Looking through the Werewolf books, you see the same thing again & again. When asked about rokea, most were-creatures say "they live far away & I never met one." The rokea will tell you the same thing. They know about the werewolves & the Mokole, the were-reptiles. They know there are others but they don't worry about it. Rokea are attacked on land by were-

wolves but they expect that. There's no hard feelings. Rokea attack shapeshifters other than Mokole when encountered at sea because they don't belong there. Rokea elders believe the other shapeshifters were created by land spirits in a foolish attempt to avoid Armageddon. Rokea & Mokole think well of each other. They occasionally consult each other & have no disagreements.

*Werewolf 20's Book of the Wyrms* introduced a new faction. Balefire sharks. Some survivors of the Turna'a Massacre in 1955 were dying of radiation burns. They accepted the Wyrms' offer & balefire elementals twisted them into mutants. Their stats are the same as rokea. They regain Gnosis only in polluted or radioactive water. They can learn Black Spiral Dancer Gifts. They mostly protect nuclear power plants & factories near saltwater. Because of their need for tainted water, they do not roam the open seas. Some roam near coastlines looking to make pollution sites worse by spreading the pollutants. The more organized minions of the Wyrms don't like the disruptions so they either chase them off or pass information to werewolves. They are known to operate near the U.S.'s Great Lakes, Lake Baikal & the Caspian Sea. I have 2 questions on balefire sharks. Because they operate near populated areas, do werewolves mistake them for regular rokea? Do werewolves think all rokea have gone the way of the Black Spiral Dancers? Also, we hear nothing about what regular rokea think of balefire sharks. Do they want to wipe the mutants out? Are they content to let them hurt humans?

We turn now to East Asia where the Same-bito are a part of the Beast Courts. The shapeshifters of East Asia have a different culture described in Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East. Rokea there long ago joined the Beast Courts when Sensei Mizuchi proposed the idea. The local Mokole encouraged it. Same-bito means shark people in Japanese. Hengeyokai used a lot of Japanese terms because Chinese is harder for westerners to write & pronounce. Korean was not as accessible as it is now.

The Same-bito are mostly shark-born but 25% are human-born members. They are treated as equals. Same-bito spend more time on land & know more about the doings of their fellow shapeshifters in the region. They revere Tiandi, Lord of Thunder but secretly follow Teanoi, the great shark spirit. They have less Rage than regular rokea. The goblin shark is a species that produces shapeshifters only in East Asia. They are smaller than other Same-bito but have much influence in Same-bito society. They can enter the Umbra & take other Same-bito with them. They are called Kagesame in the book which is Japanese for shadow shark. Kagezame would be a better pronunciation. Shadow shark is not a common name for sharks in Japan. It's an invented term. The Japanese call goblin sharks mitsukurizame which, on paper, looks like basket or bamboo mesh shark.

Sensei Mizuchi, not seen since World War I, is still around. The elder Same-bito regrets getting his people so involved with the Beast Courts. He is looking for a way to get the Same-bito to withdraw & reconnect with sea-dwelling rokea. One book says the rokea aren't really aware of the Same-bito so they don't think of them much. Another book says the rokea resent the Same-bito as traitors. There is no known communication between the 2 groups.

## **GIFTS**

Whether allies or opponents, supernatural Gifts make rokea more interesting. Rokea have a wide range of Gifts that allow them to do things like bite hard, bite fast, bite holes in ships, pull people towards them for a quick bite, make people jump in the water so they can bite them. Eating people is a recurring theme. All joking aside, there are a number of Gifts to make rokea capable & interesting to play in a game. Being simple creatures, rokea remove toxic waste by eating it. A Gift allows them to do so

safely. Don't try this at home, kids. There are too many Gifts so I'll hit some highlights. When mixing shapeshifters with other supernatural types I am always conscious of which Gifts need to be toned down or removed. No Walls allows rokea to smash through anything that confines them. As written up it is just too powerful. I would either remove it or make it add 2 Strength dice to rolls for 2 or 3 turns. Scuttle allows the sinking of any ship. Too powerful. Has to go. Spit Teeth may be a neat idea but it allows aggravated damage from 25 feet away. This is too much. It gets upgraded to even more damage in Werewolf20. I would downgrade it to lethal damage or just remove it as ranged attacks are not something sharks would think of. Unseen Attack is a kind of sneak attack that is fine until Werewolf20 when it causes too much damage. Use the one in the Rokea book. Guide to the Changing Breeds added Gift of the Ray. It's a sting that can slow opponents down. Nice idea. I'd add that to the list in the Rokea book. The books never address rokea breathing freshwater. I would make a level 2 Gift for all rokea that allows them to breathe freshwater. When they enter brackish water, give them penalties on all rolls & make them dizzy if they don't have that Gift. Darkwater rokea are the smallest auspice. Sea's Breath allows them to swim in the air. This is creative but I think it's pushing things too far. Too powerful & it strays too far from rokea themes. Darkwaters can learn a Gift to enter the Umbra. I would allow this Gift to work only in the sea. Goblin sharks from the Same-bito can also enter the Umbra. There is a Merit that allows any rokea to do it but this is supposed to be rare. I said before the darkwaters are the mystics of the rokea. Their Gifts allow them to travel to deeper, darker parts of the ocean where pressures are intense. They learn much there. Because of these & other darkwater Gifts, darkwaters are the rokea mages will want to talk to. They will know more ocean geography, more about the spirits & are the most open-minded. They would be the most willing to let Sphere Rotes be cast on them although they wouldn't understand why they can't learn any new tricks from mages.

Rokea totems are covered. A slew can adopt a spirit as a totem & gain bonuses from it. Rokea are already so dangerous in the water I can't justify giving them further bonuses. The most common totem is Shark which gives a bonus to Stealth, bonus to Strength & 2 more dice to bite damage. This is pushing things too far. I would either remove all bonuses from totems for game balance or just remove all bonuses to stats & combat.

The Rokea book has 5 fetishes that are useful without upsetting game balance. There's a belt with bone pieces that increase swimming speed & jump distance. A net that causes anyone caught to have trouble breathing. Fetishes are rare among sea-dwelling rokea. It's hard for them to make things & the idea of holding things in their hands is weird. Adapting to Fetish use is an advantage that has allowed betweeners to hold their own against those who hunt them.

That covers what the rokea are & how they operate. I hope that wasn't too much detail. It's hard to navigate the line dividing helpful details & too much information. I mentioned the World of Darkness book Blood-Dimmed Tides. The Rokea book & that book repeatedly refer to each other. If you're going to use the rokea in your games I recommend getting Blood-Dimmed Tides. It gives you ideas for stories on the sea but what it really delivers is rules for swimming, exhaustion, drowning, etc. It also gives you opponents from the sea & rules for creating your own. The Storyteller chapter in the Rokea book has 10 pages before the sample story. Pretty thin & very little on ocean life or enemies the rokea fight. We get a clam spirit called Pearl Keeper. Rokea can convince this spirit to give away its pearl which grants knowledge of Science, Crafts or Linguistics. Using it can create a dependence on it plus a desire to serve C'et, the mother of crustaceans. This can add an interesting element to your stories. The Kluru are jellyfish related to pollution. Progenitors are creatures that serve Qyrl & have an unfortunate name. No relation to Technocrats. I would rename them to brood-

mothers. They are masses of tentacles with a central beak. Think of a massive octopus that flattens out to a field of tentacles. They can grow very large. Each one produces a specific kind of creature that causes problems in the ocean. Mind worms are aquatic worms that infect people, animals & spirits to make them desire something harmful or stop thinking about a certain threat. Rokea are very bad at noticing them. This is a place where mages can help. Kraken is a large spirit that coordinates efforts against rokea. It doesn't enter stories directly but it passes information about the rokea to their enemies including mages & sorcerers. This causes people to take to the seas with knowledge of rokea locations & weaknesses. One thing to note in passing, the books recommend opening talks between rokea & the Same-bito of East Asia as a suggested story. Neither side is pushing to make that happen but both would find advantages after it started.

The Rokea book needed more opponents, more information on life & factions at sea & more information on the how the Umbra is different at sea. The rokea know of 2 changeling kiths that live under the waves but don't interact with them much at all. The only real politics you can rely on at sea are the 2 sides of the Betweeners Conflict but most betweeners are living on land, so, you don't have much to work with. If you want factions, Blood-Dimmed Tides reminds us a number of Nephandi use magic to live in cold, dark places in the sea. They might work against Technocracy underwater Constructs. The chulorviah infecting scientists or people living on the coast is another. I would use the rules in Blood-Dimmed Tides to create 1 or 2 groups of creatures that serve Qyrl & attack rokea Grottos. That would explain why rokea on land haven't been hunted out of existence.

Umbra at sea. The Gauntlet rating is lower further from shore. In greater depths it is not only lower but published material hints a person can pass quickly into the Deep Umbra. The sea's Umbra has a Penumbra. Everyone there must have a means of

breathing seawater or take an air supply. I would rule the Middle Umbra is easier to enter at sea. The High Umbra would be harder. Once in the Penumbra, mages trying to access the High Umbra should pass another Gauntlet with a high rating. That's my house rules, not official material. What are the Penumbra & Middle Umbra like at sea? The books give us very little. The spirits resemble aquatic animals but appear strange. Greater depths have less pressure pressing on you but more frightening spirits are there. Mages will be surprised to learn the rokea know very little about the Umbra at sea. I would rule rokea society has a ban on passing into the Umbra at greater depths. The Deep Umbra is no place for rokea & the spirits there are dangerous. Darkwater auspice rokea on spirit quests will go into the trenches but stay out of the Umbra there. They still have much to explore & can talk to spirits through the Gauntlet.

## **ROKEA & MAGES**

What do rokea think of mages? We know werewolves & mages seldom work together because werewolves don't like or trust mages. Even if a werewolf decides to trust mages, other werewolves will try to prevent the relationship. Rokea are different. Their society is much simpler & pretty isolated. Rokea don't really have a conception of magic. They think smarter creatures naturally learn Gifts from spirits. To rokea, mages are clever humans. They must be learning human-style Gifts from land bound spirits. Rokea do not see mages as different from regular humans. The only mage group known to rokea is the Kahu, that's the new name for the Kopa Loei Craft from the Pacific islands. Rokea like the Kahu. There is no mention of alliances or regular communication between them but rokea will not knowingly attack them. There's a rumor the Kahu are hiding human kinfolk of rokea on Oahu Island but most rokea haven't heard that rumor. The mage books don't really tell us what the Kahu think of rokea. They proba-

bly keep a respectful distance for safety. The Kahu no doubt pass Rotes to initiates to deal with rokea. Shapeshifters are generally weak to Mind magic. Life magic can be used to mask a scent or confuse the senses of sea creatures. Matter magic can be used to create material that confuses scent & sensing electric signals in seawater. I doubt the Kahu fear rokea. It's fun to speculate on Kahu policy regarding supernaturals of the ocean. They probably don't often come in contact with changeling merfolk or Meroocha. I wouldn't be surprised if the Kahu are aware of the Betweenner Conflict & siding with the betweenners to guide the rokea towards being more peaceful & cooperative with non-rokea. The Kahu probably think the rokea are too passive about fighting the monsters of the sea.

## **ROKEA AS LOOMING THREAT**

Some people have criticized the original Jaws movie for giving an inaccurate portrayal of sharks. The critics failed to understand the movie wasn't about sharks. It was about people's fear of sharks. That fear of unknown threats lurking beneath the water's surface is perfect for World of Darkness games. We're focusing on mage today & mages are a savvy bunch. Low level Sphere magic allows mages to learn much more than Sleepers. Rokea can still be used as a mysterious threat. The sea is an unfamiliar setting & rokea have a variety of Gifts to make them more capable than ordinary sharks. Looming threat does not have to result in a showdown. Your players probably aren't trying to pollute or kill off sea life so a misunderstanding can resolve into cooperation after some tense scenes.

To maintain the mystery for a while, remember 2 things. Rokea are fast in the water & detecting things at a distance is more difficult. Regardless what skill or Sphere is being used, remember mages aren't familiar with sensing things surrounded by water.

Also, the players will often be on a boat or shore trying to detect things at a distance. Require more successes for a clear impression. Don't be timid about raising the difficulties. Rokea may be moving so fast they are mistaken for a man-made device. Rokea can shift to chasmus, that's big shark, so their size may make players assume it isn't a shark. They may strike the side of the boat or damage things with their jaws that real sharks couldn't. Behavior that isn't typical of sharks can make them harder to identify plus most mages have never heard of rokea.

Let's take a brief spin through Gifts to see which would help. Shagreen Shield makes a rokea's skin armored. When things bounce off, players will think it's metal, not an animal. Fathom Sight lets rokea track & follow vessels at distances impossible for real sharks. Patient Hunter lets a rokea sink into a solid object & pop out unexpectedly. Scuttle can cause battering damage to a ship's hull that normal sharks can't cause. Living sea causes the water to hold or move a ship. It also allows the rokea to swim unusually fast. Qyrl's Blood makes the water opaque. Piercing Shriek is a paralyzing sound. It can also make sonar stop working. No Blood is a mystic stealth that makes the rokea very hard to locate.

If there are NPCs with the players, having them fall to rokea attacks raises drama. Drown is a Gift that causes people to suddenly need to breathe water. They instinctively leap into the water. If the players hired a ship & its crew, the crew will perform tasks & react without consulting the players. The rokea might pick them off. Perhaps the players boarded an enemy vessel. NPCs dying off will frighten the players but, after the mystery is cleared up, help the players.

Mage fans in our Discord server asked me not to jump the shark but I can't help bringing in some pop culture references. The Austin Powers movies taught us no James Bond villain is worth his salt if his lair doesn't have a pool full of sharks with lasers strapped to their backs. Laser beams diffuse terribly underwater so how do the

sharks use them? So many people miss the subtle schemes of James Bond villains. There's supposed to be a rope bridge over the shark tank the hero has to cross. When he's in the middle of the bridge, the sharks surface & use the lasers to cut the ropes. They eat the hero when he falls in the water. The Progenitors & Iteration X engineers figured that out. Project Laser Dunk was in production for years. Progenitors genetically engineered sharks with higher intelligence who loved having things strapped to their backs. Iteration X made the best waterproof laser you ever saw. The project was a failure. The sharks kept trying to use the lasers on each other so they could hog all the food. Firing underwater drained the laser batteries so fast it wasn't funny. The project was such an embarrassment, James Bond movies were forbidden at Technocracy Constructs for a few years.

The movie Sharknado from 2013 had 3 sequels. For years Mage fans have checked How Do You Do That, the repository of Rotes for Mage 20, looking for the Rote Sharknado. It isn't in there. Onyx Path, how could you let us down? Reports that the Hollow One F.U. Lately unleashed the Rote on pursuing Men in Black in Chicago's Shedd Aquarium were an exaggeration. He broke the glass on the shark tank using a pistol then Forces 2 to maintain the shark's momentum, Life 3 to stoke their killer instincts & Mind 2 to suggest panic to the crowd. That was a shark-tastrophe at best, not a Sharknado. Forces 3 to propel the sharks, Prime 2 to fuel the pattern of motion, Matter 2 or 3 maintains control of all the water needed. That might make a Sharknado but that's not what we want to hear about. We want the real Sharknado Rote. The one that will flatten a Construct guarded by squads of HIT Marks. The one that will generate enough Paradox to make a whole cabal of mages talk like Max Headroom for a month. That requires Forces 4, Prime 2, Life 3, Entropy 3 & a slew of rokea who have the Gifts Killing Bite & Undertow which pulls bystanders into the area of effect for bonus points. Rumor has it Doissetep converted an entire wine cellar to store the finest rums for a

planned attempt to bribe the Kahu to teach the Rote. Doissetep's fall ruined that plan. Brings tears to my eyes.

## **ROKEA AS OPPONENTS**

Rokea as NPC opponents is next. Even without the mechanical benefits of Totems, rokea are so dangerous they have water superiority. Players will quickly understand any fight against rokea in the water is not in their favor. We don't want to railroad our players but there are times when limiting options can add the drama you're looking for. If your players are in a ship, submarine or underwater Construct, knowing they can't swim away or use an inflatable raft blocks the escape hatch. Now they have to focus on the dilemma you've put before them. Clever use of Sphere magic can always give the upper hand but it's nice to push players into the position of needing to be clever with their Spheres. A Mage20 book told us were-creatures are weak against Mind magic. The mindworm in the sample story in the Rokea book backs that up. Rokea are less capable than regular people at resisting Mind magic. Forces, Life & Matter magic can be used to confuse rokea senses if players are creative. A confused rokea may freeze until they know what's going on. Using Forces to hack the sendings that rokea use to talk to each other will allow players to negotiate or trick the rokea. If the players offer lessons about human technology, promise to help sink the ship or chase off other humans, it could work. Mages imitating the voice of a sea spirit has a better chance of working than you'd expect. Let the players notice the remora spirits attached to a rokea's side. Use them to pass messages. Even a maddened rokea will listen to a remora.

In the setting of Mage, when might rokea oppose mages? Technocrats doing things near their underwater Constructs might upset rokea. One of the new ideas from

Revised Edition that I really liked was the Technocracy underwater locations. Sons of Ether submarines might run afoul of the protectors of the sea. Blood-Dimmed Tides tells us the Hermetic floating Chantry Verditius roams the seas. Mages trying to contact Kahu mages will find themselves on Pacific islands. Disturbing rokea, native sorcerers & the submerged Labyrinths of Nephandi might happen. Moving against or supporting Technocracy installations by the shore may pit mages against between rokea. I would use rokea to spice up a story about removing something from a shipwreck or unearthing a Wonder that was lost at sea.

## **ROKEA AS ALLIES**

Mages & rokea working together doesn't happen often but I think there are interesting possibilities there. Mages won't encounter them on land but at sea, the potential allies are few. Kahu can be a great help but they aren't everywhere. The spirits mages will likely contact at sea are Middle Umbra spirits & thus less familiar. Rokea are among the few supernaturals mages may meet. The majority of rokea, those who live in the sea, prefer to avoid humans who aren't hurting sea life. Mages who try to get their attention will usually be ignored. If there is a problem & the rokea think mages might help them, there's nothing keeping them from cooperating with clever humans. Mages need to keep in mind rokea are dangerous. They frenzy more easily than other shapeshifters. Kunmind, the severe frenzy, is a dangerous situation that mages need to know about. Storytellers should allow players some way of learning about this before they swim with the sharks. Remora are fish that attach to & follow sharks to eat leftovers. Remora spirits are peaceful spirits that encourage communication & cooperation. Rokea frequently spend time with them. Storytellers are encouraged to use remora spirits as friendly spirits willing to pass information on rokea to mages who seem

non-threatening. Remora might try to teach a Gift to mages who prove friendly. This Gift would make mages invisible & impossible to smell for rokea in severe frenzy. Mages can't learn spirit Gifts but mages with Spirit 1 or Mind 2 should be able to translate the Gift to a Rote with a skill roll. Maybe Awareness, Intuition or Enigmas roll. What Spheres would be needed for that Rote is a Storyteller call. I could give you my suggestion of Mind 2 with Life 2 or 3 but each Storyteller should make their own call. If your players can't perform the Rote, let the remora create a minor Fetish out of coral or stone. Remember, coral formations have predators that eat them, leaving a coral skeleton behind. Breaking off a piece of that isn't killing anything or disturbing a reef.

If players learn of the rokea & want to establish friendly relations, the Kahu would be a great start. Offering the rokea something they want is a great ice-breaker. Mages who know the Mind Sphere can protect rokea or point out harmful effects acting on them. Telling the rokea about a Technocracy Device broadcasting a Mind effect to repel unwanted guests would be a good introduction. Void Engineers or Progenitors might be doing research in the Great Barrier Reef. Kahu, Verbena & Dreamspeakers would be most likely to find ways to work with rokea. The Mind Sphere can be a good way of noticing nearby rokea. Rokea are unusually intelligent sea creatures. Passive detection with the Mind Sphere is not impossible. Using Prime to detect Gnosis rokea are carrying is reasonable. On land, near a shore, rokea in human form will be tense & panicky. Mages may notice that. Betweeners have a hard life & will appreciate allies. After detecting them, mages may track them for a while & then start conversation. Offering knowledge of human society or supernatural threats on land will be eagerly accepted.

Rokea as custos serving mages or Chantries is unlikely. Rokea do not travel far from the sea. Devoting themselves long term to something that doesn't help the sea is not likely. I can imagine a Horizon Realm that has a saltwater sea or lake. A rokea might

like to live there & protect the Chantry but not many games would feature that. What is more plausible is a Node or Chantry by the sea. Getting rokea to protect it & help keep it secret in exchange for Gnosis or other aid would not conflict with rokea goals at all.

Finally, mixing rokea player characters with mages. This might be fun & more individualistic rokea could do something like that. The game would need to be focused on life along the shore, at sea or island hopping. Rokea won't go far from shore. A sea-focused Chronicle sounds like a lot of fun to me. I would recommend human-born rokea for that game. Sea dwelling, shark-born rokea are recommended for games that focus on their needs & experiences. Many of them don't know a human language. Their knowledge of everyday life is so limited it might hamper your game. There would be a constant risk of them attracting trouble by reacting oddly to a passing bicyclist, a police officer giving instructions or a misunderstood advertising poster. It's hard to track down enemy mages when your friend is constantly diving head first into street vendors' food carts.

Those are my thoughts on rokea in Mage games. I hope I didn't go overboard today. To sum up, if your game spends a lot of time in or near the sea, rokea can add an interesting element. If you've used the shapeshifting sharks in your games, let us know at [magethepodcast@gmail.com](mailto:magethepodcast@gmail.com).