

Crossover: Werecat in the Ascension, Part 1



Adam

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, In our series on mixing were-creatures into Mage the Ascension I've covered spiders and sharks. Today it's time to let the cat out of the bag. Yes, I'm covering the Bastet, the were-cats of the *World of Darkness*. While prepping for this episode it was revealed: I'm a dog person, not a cat person. Mage fans questioned if I'm the right person for this topic so I asked Pooka to join me. Pooka, how are you doing?

Pooka G

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I'm doing all right. I do have one announcement today. For fans of Mage: The Podcast, we are slowly putting things in place to bring back Try It Con for a third iteration in late November. You may remember the details from last year, but the idea is this will be an online convention held over the course of a weekend where people run games they've never run before and people play games they've never played before. Terry Robinson started the event during COVID back in 2021. We're aiming to carry it on in his memory. So keep an ear out for further details as they arise. I would say last year was a pretty good turnout. Did you jump in last year? I couldn't remember.

Adam

I was not able to, unfortunately, but I heard it was fun.

Pooka G

Well, maybe be this year. Fun times were had.

Adam

Pooka is a cat person & well acquainted with the Bastet. Just to establish his bonafides, Pooka, if Puss in Boots were around today, what boots would he wear?

Pooka G

Well, my understanding is that in the original folktale, Puss in Boots is a practical sort. Because he's chasing rabbits and tearing through the underbrush and whatnot. In addition to looking his best so he's not going to go for something purely utilitarian with no fashion value like a wellington and he's not going for the decorative thigh high. So something in between like hiking boots or cowboy boots. Might be more a speed. But he's also aiming for comfort because he's a cat and he has toe beams to protect. I think... I'm going to vote for the Doc Martin. as the boot of choice for the sensible modern cat. They've got they've got the comfortable sole for the paw pads but then they're sturdy enough to stomp around when you need to and you can get them in decorative styles.

Adam

Now that sounds like it fits the *World of Darkness*. I just cannot dispute that one.

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Pooka will let me know if I fail to respect the feline mystique. Pooka, I heard you hired a subject matter expert to help you. From the photo you shared, it looks like he snatched your Rider tarot deck & passed out on a sofa. Is that right?

Pooka G

Yes, that was my familiar Pericles, also known as Shit Cat or Teen Cat or Cat with Thumbs. He's my beloved rascally rascal well learned in the ways of magic but that's really all cats. Show me a non-magical cat and I'll show you that you're actually showing me a dog.

Adam

That's probably right. Well, let's get rolling because we've got a lot to cover. The Bastet have 9 tribes, a lost tribe & a dead tribe. Multiple revisions of the material & a little commentary to add. We will cover the biology, society & beliefs of the Bastet. We'll give you the full scoop on their tribes, den realms & cat powers. Then we'll look at Bastet as both opponents & allies.

Each breed of were-creature has a traditional role. The werewolves are the warriors of Gaia. The were-reptiles, the Mokole, are the memory of Gaia. The Bastet are the Eyes of Gaia. What does that mean? After reading all the Bastet material, I don't know. Several books don't explain the title. One book claims they were the spies & messengers of Gaia but did such a bad job, the Corax were made to replace them. It was a Mage book, Ascensions Right Hand, that gave the best answer. Gaia wanted them to watch the humans & keep tabs. Watch some news. Browse social media. Give a weekly report. Nice work if you can get it.

Bastet biology is quite similar to the werewolves. They are vulnerable to silver. Rage works the same way for them. They regain Gnosis points on full moon nights. Gnosis points are spirit energy they use to fuel their Gifts. In their breed form they are not vulnerable to silver & their accelerated healing doesn't work. Breed form means in human form if they had a human childhood, feline form if they were born as a cat. Unlike werewolves, Bastet can accidentally change forms. Fail or botch a Willpower roll, make another Willpower roll at difficulty 7. Fail that & the Bastet must change form. Become a lion at a fancy restaurant or a barefoot tourist in the middle of the jungle. Bastet are a little more mellow than werewolves. Frenzy rolls have a +2 difficulty however jaguars & tigers don't get that benefit. They can take 5 forms. Human, big, muscular human, crinos is the half & half form. Crinos causes half Delirium in regular people, not full. Delirium is the irrational

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fear normal people experience when they see a hairy monster unexpectedly. Chatro is big cat form. If you think tigers are big, tigers in chatro are even bigger than that. Chatro has +1 die to bite damage, causes full Delirium & shows their smilodon heritage. Yes, every Bastet in chatro has a bit of saber tooth tiger from prehistoric times. Finally, there's feline or cat form which enjoys heightened senses. That gives vision in near darkness & -2 difficulty on Perception rolls. The stat bonuses for the 5 forms vary among different kinds of cats. The big cats like tigers, lions, leopards hover around +3 to strength & dexterity making them close to werewolves but not quite as buff.

Bastet are fertile once a year. After breeding there's a 30% a child will be Bastet. Children that are Bastet are placed with surrogate families. The Bastet child is watched from afar & another Bastet is appointed as godparent. The godparent also keeps tabs on the child until the first change when they collect him or her for a year of training. After that, the new Bastet is let loose on the world. Most Bastet are human-born. This is because big cats are becoming scarce in the wild. Light research online shows the big cat numbers are even lower now than 1997 when the Bastet book was published. Bastet are much fewer in number across the globe than werewolves. Metis are quite rare. A Metis is a Bastet with 2 shapeshifting parents. They have deformities but no social stigma.

Bastet can't enter the Umbra naturally like werewolves can. If they make it to Rank 4 they can learn a Gift that allows them to see the Umbra but even after achieving the 4th Rank they have to find someone to teach them the Gift. As a result, Bastet are more connected to Earth & know little about the Umbra.

That covers biology. Pooka, do you have anything to add?

Pooka G

I remember reading this thing in National Geographic about the evolution of cats when I was a kid. And this biologist commented, cats are an animal that Mother Nature pretty much got right the first time around. And I really like that.

And I kind of wish it shook out in the mechanics we get for Bastet, but... As much as I like things like the variety and attribute bonuses between the tribes I wouldn't call it a reflection of that idea.

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That's interesting about the populations too. I thought for some species at least populations were slowly increasing, although... still quite low. It's also worth mentioning that at this time of recording, a new cat species has just been scientifically described for the first time in a century.

Pooka G

Tilcayo of Bolivia, so that's pretty cool

Adam

Oh, I didn't know. That's pretty cool.

Pooka G

Yeah, it's in the news. I wanted to mention also that the Delirium piece points to an interesting cultural aspect here so the crinos werewolf echoes the wolfman trope you get in classic horror movies and the like and the game rationalizes that by saying it's a memory of the imperium when the Garou massacred humanity but it's the saber-toothed tiger that triggers the reaction for Bastet pointing less to this post-hoc justified media idea of what should cause terror and more to actual prehistory or what I imagine is actual prehistory and something genetic memory of being hunted by big cats.

The other piece of that is... Keeping it PG-13. Were-cats have a sexier reputation in modern Western culture. The Socto form for some tribes actually goes up in appearance, and it's described at one point as being a compellingly exotic form.

And for crinos and chatro, not all of them necessarily go to appearance 0. So... Maybe werewolves have been catching up in the zeitgeist since these books came out. Thanks to Twilight and true blood and whatnot but they're still working against the baggage of the wolfman and an American Werewolf in London and whatever else were-cats have less of that problem and benefit from the idea of cats being alluring and mysterious.

Adam

Well, that does explain some of those bonuses I was kind of scratching my head about, but go on.

Pooka G

Why are they still so good looking? But I'll also point out the heightened senses thing, at least according to the Bastet book, which is my core text here. That applies to all forms except except homid. One bit in that book says in any form they can use pada, which is what's called the flamen response in biology. People sometimes call it stink face with cats where you see them kind of sniff around and then they open their mouth a little bit and it triggers these chemical receptors they have in the vomeronasal organ, which is the most fun organ name to say.

So imagine you see a person doing that or doing other cat things. Maybe not quite as far as like Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman licking her hand and wiping it on her head to clean off but other little mannerisms and things.

What other little elements of biology might bleed over? There are the eyes or former eyes of Gaia as mentioned maybe they have the habit in human form of staring the way a cat does openly reading people for as long as possible. So you can play these things up for humor, or just play it to be awkward and weird. Something to think about. And I do think they're a little bit cheated by not having full access to the Umbra. But when we get to Den Realms, it is such a fun concept so I forgive the imbalance.

Adam

We turn now to Bastet society & there ain't much of that. Bastet are loners. They rarely run in packs. Werewolves maintain home bases they call caerns. Bastet don't do that. Bastet prize secrets. They want to know the inside scoop on other Bastet tribes, other shapeshifter breeds, mages, vampires & other supernatural groups. Being loners & information gatherers, Bastet don't mind when one of theirs makes friends with any sort of supernatural, although vampires may draw suspicion. Bastet hold little regard for most of their acquaintances including other Bastet but form strong bonds with some individuals. The Folk is a term for all Bastet. During full moons they sometimes have gatherings called taghairms. It's a word from celtic and I am probably doing a poor job with that.

Pooka G

Taghairm. I don't know, I'm guessing.

Adam

That sounds better to me. I'm going to go with that. They learn each other's names, recognize accomplishments that can increase Rank & try to learn each other's secrets. Werewolves have auspices. Those are traditional roles like warrior, bard, trickster. Bastet have no auspices. Young Bastet who haven't finished their year of training are called kits. Bastet have their own litany, that's a set of traditional laws. They are so simple & basic I'll bet each of my listeners can write them down in 2 minutes off the top of their heads. Bastet are the only changing breed besides the werewolves that have their own glyph writing system.

The Bastet have allies among the Silent Strider tribe of werewolves. The Corax were-ravens & Bastet work together sometimes. Bastet & Ratkin don't get along. Big surprise. There are 9 tribes based on species of cats. We'll cover those in a bit. Pooka, anything to add on society?

Pooka G

So in my other life as a social sciences lecturer, something I used to teach is the difference between society and culture. The social dimension is what governs how people interact with each other and the understood roles that permit certain kinds of behavior in certain contexts.

Culture is what gives those contexts and the practices that take place within them. Meaning and something from which people can derive a sense of shared identity. The way the Bastet are presented here. yes, they're independent and they don't have much in the way of society. Although they do still have ranks and they do have dynamics like teacher student or parent kit to some extent just lighter than the pack focus structure of werewolves. But culture as a separate but related concept is where to me the Bastet material really sings. I remember flipping through Werewolf 2nd edition players guide reading the changing breeds sections and thinking, there's a lot to explore here, but they don't really go that deep. So then cut to me reading the Bastet book and holy cats, there is an entire separate setting in this book. You can very easily run a were-cat game without ever touching on the cosmology or traditions or social norms of the Garou at all. But the fact that they do connect is part of what made me really appreciate the scope of Werewolf as a game for the first time.

With apologies to die hard fans of Werewolf I give the Bastet book and I will not apologize for this pun, the lion's share of credit for pushing my idea of the game world in entirely new directions.

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But I know you want to talk about their mythology and beliefs. So I'll talk on my further comments about their culture after that.

Adam

Sounds good. Let's look at those Bastet beliefs. There are several & conflicting origin stories. Here's the best. A great mage & a great sabertooth tiger fought a dragon together. The dragon was killed but the pair of heroes lay dying from wounds. The moon blessed them with the creation of the Khara tribe, the first Bastet. The shapeshifting Khara tribe got wild & killed so many saber teeth & humans that the moon cursed them by making them vulnerable to silver. She scattered them to fight monsters across the Earth. Separated from other Khara, they bred with others & their bloodline thinned to extinction. But the modern tribes of the Bastet were created. Players Guide to the Changing Breeds gives this one. The Bastet were created last to help the other changing breeds with all the tasks they were carrying out. One book had a story of a great cat who spied on the moon spirit when she was bathing but there might be children listening so let's move on. Speaking of origin stories, the Bastet book gives us a detailed account of the sex lives of the great spirits at the dawn of time. Yes, Virginia, there is such a thing as too much information. Can you imagine a Dreamspeaker overcoming hardships to stand before the great Triat spirits & one says "Want to hear about our sex life?" No thank you! I did not risk my life getting through the Gauntlet to hear about that!

Bastet consider themselves close to the moon. Nights with a full moon are special to them. They acknowledge Gaia but there's less emphasis. The Weaver is called Rahjah, a male figure. The Wyld is Nala, a female figure. The Wyrms are Cahlash, a male figure. Bastet see Cahlash as the original entropy spirit of balance. The evils of the present age are blamed on Asura, a collection of evil spirits.

Bastet do not have tribe or pack Totems like the werewolves. Some follow personal Totems like the King of Cats.

Pooka, what did you think of Bastet beliefs?

Pooka G

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I'll quickly point back to my comment about the stereotype of horny cat people and just leave it there when it comes to that aspect of the mythology.

Adam

Yeah, as a person who knows about Japanese culture, people ask me, so what's with the cat girls?

And I'm like, let's move on. Let's talk about something else.

Pooka G

Yeah. I mean vampire was a very thirsty game so this is not unsurprising in the *World of Darkness* and honestly it's refreshing compared to Garou sex life which often seems to veer into eugenics but I'll agree that these are paragraphs I didn't need here.

But I am very glad that the Bastet didn't just have a coat of paint on the standard Garou party line. It does feel like an entirely separate body of legends and ways to engage with the spirit world. I said that I wanted to talk about culture. So you mentioned the Bastet litany. I'm filing that under culture and beliefs rather than society because that's where I would stick those kind of abstract moral codes and I am just going to read it out because as you said it is quite quick. Honor yourself. Honor your word. Honor your kin and kind. Honor your earth and honor your silence. Bastet should be clean, truthful, just, fierce and quiet. They do also have their little mini creeds for the different types of renown but I'll skip those. Easy peasy, but importantly, it feels cat-like and not very wolf-like.

Rage is present, but it's not the driver. If you take the tagline of Werewolf, when will you rage? The implication for Garou is, what the flip are you waiting for? The implication for Bastet is how's your timing?

So I like how we're getting difference here. And to point to another piece you mentioned which I really like the writing system Garou glyphs have these jagged edges and chunky lines because they're made with the rough claw marks of wolves. Bastet glyphs are a sort of swirling flourishing calligraphy like you can imagine a cat doing with one delicate claw. And even if we don't get writing systems for other changing breeds, I like to imagine they each have their own. Do the

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Ananasi have letters strung between two threads that can only be made by eight hands at once? Do the Rokea use bite marks for communication?

I suspect the Bastet book went all-in on stuff like this because it was or partly because it was the first changing breed book and maybe then they decided they had to wind it back a bit. But I love how thoroughly they explore this.

Not quite the sameness. And another favorite piece of Bastet culture I have to call out are Tala. These are stories which are shared between Bastet when they meet, whether at taka taharrem whatever we want to say. Or just in passing. And I'll read the definition from the Bastet book glossary here. So Tala is a secret disguised as a story or a riddle. If you understand one, you've learned something. If not, you weren't smart enough to deserve enlightening.

There's a note elsewhere in the book about how you can use the gamecraft secondary ability to mechanize this a bit if necessary. I suppose Enigmas would do if you're going to use that method to drop hints that are crucial to the plot.

But really, it's a great role playing opportunity. Have the players meet this mysterious stranger who engages them in a riddle contest that might lead them in the direction they need to go, or have it be the barrier of entry for getting the trust of a valuable were-cat ally.

It presents a different mode of play that can be really fun at the table. And in-world, it's a reminder that a culture feels natural to those brought up in it. Of course you have to trade secrets and riddles if you want to hang out with the cats.

The Bastet book's frame narrative is also built around this idea, with each chapter opening with a story being told between three signature characters. And some of them get weird. So, use that as a reference. And the tribe write-ups also have some of that vibe in there, opening in character sections. Naturally, some of the most significant riddle secrets deal with their weaknesses.

Adam

And each Bastet tribe has different weaknesses. These special weaknesses are called Yava. Bastet make great efforts to keep their Yava secret from everyone outside their tribe. 3 Yava are listed for each tribe. The books didn't make it clear if Storytellers should use all of them or choose one. Most of them are interesting without being too strict. One is must sleep & can't be awakened on

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nights with no moon. One is all animals that aren't cats will avoid you. Supernaturals have a -2 difficulty when using powers against a Bastet if they know the tribe's Yava. I would probably use Yava in my games, even with Bastet player characters. However, depending on the ones listed for a given tribe, I may choose just 1 or 2 of them. Pooka, you mentioned some interesting possibilities for Yava. Can you tell us about that?

Pooka G

Well, what I like about them is that they have story hooks built in. Without a player needing to come up with individual expressions of them as they might for some other splat weaknesses like the Ventrue and their feeding preference or something. Yava are not common knowledge, so you have to be careful about managing player meta-gaming here, but you can build a whole story around discovering them - or preventing others from discovering them or as we'll see with the Ceilican recreating them. I probably would have all three in play for a given tribe but I wouldn't use the minus two difficulty blanket mechanic because I find them narratively more interesting when you have to actually game around the Yava. So, this one will follow a line of salt wherever it goes. Quick, get your Matter 2 effect going.

And then the same trick doesn't work for the next Bastet who's from a different tribe. So it's like, if you've got players who are trying to figure these things out. All right, especially if you've got players who are too knowledgeable about the games, make up your own Yava and go with those. Use the Echoes Flaw for inspirations or just your own experiences with cats who each have their own little peccadilloes. If I were to use my own familiar as a point of reference, one Yava might be that the sound of running water will immediately get him to stop whatever he's doing and bolt towards the source. And that's cats for you.

Adam

The tribes of the Bastet are where things really get interesting. For werewolves the tribes tie them to regions of the world & a cultural outlook. Bastet tribes are different species of cats. That ties them to different biology, different parts of the globe & different personalities. The tribes give both players & Storytellers a good grip on lore, story ideas & advantages. When the Bastet started in 1993 there were 8 tribes plus the Ceilican who died out on Earth but were rumored to have some survivors among the faeries in the Dreaming. 1997 brought us the Bastet book where the Ceilican

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were revealed to be not gone but carefully hiding. We learned the Khara, saber teeth, died long ago. The Ajaba, hyenas, are a Bastet tribe that was cast out. More on them later.

Every tribe has their own origin story. Some are interesting while others fall flat. The 9 tribes are Bagheera, Balam, Bubasti, Ceilican, Khan, Pumonca, Qualmi, Simba & Swara. Each tribe has different stat bonuses when they shift out of human form.

We'll start with the Bagheera. They are leopards & panthers. The Bagheera are the sages & diplomats of the Bastet. Often wise & well learned but their savage side comes out when offended or when trouble arises. They are the most numerous Bastet tribe. Many are in India. They keep close to their Kinfolk. Human groups like the Ambari Macho, Chui Mal, Beral Meye & Leopard Men of Chupa revere the Bagheera. Currently, the Bagheera are working hard to help non-Bastet were-creatures. In some places this is improving the reputation of the Bastet.

Pooka, anything for Bagheera?

Pooka G

Apart from the obvious Jungle Book references, I do like them. They're the ones I think you can probably most easily drop into a non-Bastet game. They're also the honorable types compared with some of the others, so I can see them forming a pact with more law-abiding mages or being a proper capital A ally.

Adam

The Balam are jaguars who live in Central & South America. They defend their wilderness territory with a dedication that may not be healthy. They are the most aggressive & intolerant of the Bastet. They don't leave home & don't like anyone who isn't a local. When they don't like someone, things usually get violent. Balam do sometimes decide to live outside their ancestral lands but those individuals are shunned. Pumonca Bastet occasionally wander into Balam territory & are allowed if they are respectful. There are some relations with Uktena werewolves from up north. They hate the Bubasti tribe of Bastet but we aren't told why. I don't see how they would come in contact with them. Balam rarely cooperate with each other or work together. The tribe was created around 1600 from the survivors of 2 bloodlines: Olouqui & Hovitl Qua. I'm not even going to apologize for mispronouncing that. That was hard. Balam magic was always violent &

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frightful. The Uktena make efforts to prevent Balam from recovering old secrets & rituals because they are so gruesome. The Balam hate werewolves for wiping out the Camazotz, shapeshifting fruit bats. The Balam write-ups make frequent reference to the Amazon War. For those not familiar, the Amazon War is a violent confrontation between Pentex forces like Black Spiral Dancers & fomori who are supporting destructive resource extraction efforts in the Amazon rainforest on one side. The other side is werewolves from foreign countries who travel to the rainforest to fight Pentex. The Balam just wish everyone would leave.

Pooka, what did you think of the Balam?

Pooka G

Just I want to point out I think I wonder if the one bloodline that was their origin was supposed to be spelled... oooqui which is the indigenous term for morning glory and preparations made therefrom. And pronunciation aside, I think if we went with its other name, Kwashiwish, that might have been even tougher. There's a lot to unpack from the idea that one of the roots of the tribe is a group of winged umbral war cats named after a psychoactive ceremonial plant. I am not qualified to dig into that.

Adam

Me neither.

Pooka G

But they're cool. They're tough to run as anything other than NPCs, I'd say. I like that they have this moniker two hearts based on their origins and also reflecting their shifting temperamental natures and also one of their key Yava. We should also mention that these tribe write-ups in the Bastet book, in addition to the thorough exploration of their history and legends and organization and all of that usual stuff they include a secrets sought piece which gives you instant story hooks and reasons for why this were-cat might show up. So the Balam come from cultures that have been suppressed for centuries but never fully died out so having them seek pieces of lore to help them reconstruct their identity, gives them a hook to find a knowledgeable mage. Possibly not to that mage's benefit, depending on how they came by the relevant piece of lore in their keeping.

Adam

The Bubasti are black cats native to Egypt. I love this tribe so I hope my listeners will forgive me if I spend some time here. They are descended from Kyphur cats that used to live wild along the Nile River. My online searches indicate Kyphur cats are fictional, invented for the *World of Darkness*. Although it isn't far-fetched to say species of large cats went extinct from North Africa. There used to be lions in North Africa but not anymore. The forms that Bubasti shift into are smaller than most other Bastet so their physical bonuses are slight. This is meant to reflect the difficult situation the Bubasti are in. Their cat species is gone, rumored to live on only as captives of the Followers of Set vampires who still live in Egypt. The centuries long fight with the vampires has taken a heavy toll on the Bubasti who suffer from multiple magical curses. There are so few Bubasti remaining the leadership of the tribe keep tabs on all members. They are thin & emaciated because of a hunger for food that is never satisfied. Although they lost many confrontations, they believe they'll die out if they leave Egypt. Some members live outside Egypt but not many. They are distrusted by other Bastet. They are experts in many forms of arcane magic. In the early 90s there was a focus on ancient Egyptian groups for the *World of Darkness*. The Bubasti fit into that space. Although not specifically called out, it is easy to imagine the 6 elders who govern the Bubasti have an alliance with Horus & his mummies. There is a level 6 Gift that allow the elders to extend their lives but I would change that. In my games, the Bubasti elders are mummies trusted by Horus. The vampire conflict between Osiris & Set decimated the Bubasti human Kinfolk. Bubasti hunger for arcane secrets even more than other Bastet. Most Bubasti give off a faint Wyrms taint detected by other shapeshifters making the Bubasti look for allies among other supernatural groups. Alliances with mages & non-Settite vampires are not rare. Rules state any who learn Hedge Magic paths at level 2 or higher will smell of the Wyrms to shapeshifters. The struggle against the Followers of Set isn't over. The Bubasti are very good at hiding in Egypt & they need to be. They have stolen many secrets from the vampires. Bubasti feel a kinship with mages due to the belief their original role was to protect human wizards from evil influences. Mages who want Bubasti support will be interested to learn freeing the captive Kyphur cats from the Followers of Set would allow the Bubasti bloodline to gain strength. However, if those rumors are true, the Kyphur cats have been so badly abused it will be difficult to rehabilitate them.

Pooka, did you like the Bubasti too?

Pooka G

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You can keep the Bubasti. I didn't mind them. I say this as gently as possible. I think you might like them more than I do. But I do, I think the Kypher cats are a pure invention for the game. Though the Bastet book also says they have servals in the mix for their catfolk. I'd like to see them have tremendous jumping power as a result. I don't know if you've ever seen a serval jump, but watch a video online because it's incredible. Beyond that, I don't have much to add besides the fact that if you're into the Egyptological corner of the *World of Darkness*, these cats have you covered. The obvious angle to explore is maybe with Mummy. You've got your Amenti who's into uncovering ancient lore. You've got their Bubasti sidekick with a lineage going back to the mummified cats thousands of years ago, and that's the buddy comedy we all need.

Adam

On to the Ceilican. This tribe is a mystery. There are few of them & they hide well. They pretend to be members of other tribes when they interact with Bastet. Most Bastet believe they died out long ago. They were introduced in the Bastet book. They disappeared from the 1998 Players Guide & Players Guide to the Changing Breeds. They were back in Werewolf 20 Changing Breeds. This is one of the Bastet tribes that has low physical stat bonuses. Although we don't learn the details, the Ceilican got themselves into trouble centuries ago. Interactions with the fey & evil spirits either made enemies or allowed those parties to learn secrets so vital, they gained leverage over the Ceilican that lasts to this day. The Ceilican don't just hide from other Bastet. They hide from everyone. They are descended from wild cats of Northern Europe. Which species & whether or not that species is alive today is a mystery. The Yava, the supernatural weaknesses, of the Ceilican are severe. Cold iron & silver bells can harm them. They have to change their identity each year. That usually involves moving to a new place. The tribe suffers madness. The Werewolf 20 book revisited their Yava with suggestions on lightening some. Worth a look. They gather in Scotland every Halloween. Many moved from the British Isles to North America towards the end of the Sorcerers Crusade era. They are the epitome of the tortured artistic type. They make Toreador vampires look like amateurs. Calling them unstable whack jobs may be an understatement & I wouldn't be surprised if they took it as a compliment. They pass secret messages to each other through recorded music. This is called the Silent Way &, yes, the name is deliberately misleading.

Pooka, if anyone has the inside track on Ceilican secrets, it must be you. We're recording this so just feel free to spill all their secrets.

Pooka G

Oh yeah, all of them. These are my favorite cats. On one of the two occasions that I actually played Werewolf, one of them was as a Ceilican named Kryska, which is Gaelic for heart shadow because I was a gothy 15 year old at the time. They are the tribe nearest and dearest to my heart, but this is all purely hypothetical because they don't exist. Not at all. Totally disappeared. But if you want to run with the notion that they do exist, I think they are the were-cats that fit best into the *World of Darkness* as a thing at large. In terms of their vibe as the tortured artists who constantly have to change their locations and identities I mean, lightening that seems like it would drop some of the interesting opportunities they provide. These are the cats who are most likely to turn up in cities, who are one of the tribes who will go places they aren't supposed to the most.

Who shared that. Gotta keep under the radar, paranoia driven by the Inquisition and whatnot with... vampires and verberna alike, and who deal with it all in classic gothic punk fashion. When I try to think of what examples I can of were-cats in modern urban fantasy, they seem to fall into this camp. They have flaws driven by their lives as people more than their inner nature as representatives of a big cat population and I think that's easier for most players to get a handle on. Add to that how steep they are in the mystical already, and I just see a lot of points of connection that extend beyond Werewolf, and a lot of madcap fun involved in exploring any of them.

They're more fun than the Bagheera. More mischievous than the Bubasti. More intense than the Qualmi and more laid back than the Swara so what's not to love? And low physical stat bonuses aside, they suffer the least I think in terms of social attributes. If you have a high appearance Ceilican who goes full crinos they're only going to lose two dots and might still be more attractive than your garden variety human. This does not counter the ongoing notion of sexy cat people hovering throughout the margins of this whole book. Toreador would still give them a run for their money, though, in my opinion. Maybe the cat will just have to go Socto, gain a dot of appearance and preen while the Toreador stares at them transfixed and shedding bloody tears. The tableau practically positions itself.

Adam

The Khan are tigers. They, like the Balam, are warriors among the Bastet. The original 1993 write-up plus The Players Guide to the Changing Breeds state the Khan are aggressive, short tempered & full of Rage. They resent humans. The Bastet book along with other write-ups took a

new direction. The Khan became noble & graceful in the Bastet book & most later books. The Bastet book has this “The Simba may declare themselves nobility, but the were-tigers fit the title.” I don’t know about you, but that sounds pretty catty. Another book has “grace & majesty that other Bastet can only dream of; even the Simba cannot match them”. I was disappointed by the change. I think the original write-up worked better. The noble, majestic Khan makes the mistake of making one Bastet tribe the best. They have the highest physical stat boosts, the best reputation, awesome Gifts. It’s no wonder for years I’ve seen fans on the Internet say they want a Khan for their character. The other tribes just aren’t as good. Moving on, Khans prefer simple lives & simple technology. There have been 4 wars among the Khan that reduced their numbers. The last was in the 1950s & was so violent it reduced the tribe to a little over 20 members & forced the Khan sultanate of India to dissolve forever. By the way, this matches well with their original depiction of being full of Rage. After the last Khan war, they scattered across the globe. Several books say the Khan will probably die out as a Bastet tribe before long. The Yava weaknesses of the Khan are pretty strict. They must sleep when the sun is down, they are tempted to kill defenseless children & they lose the ability to use their Rage if they turn down a direct challenge from anyone. I would tone those down. Bastet work hard to keep their Yava secret & those are hard to keep quiet. I would say their high Rage makes it hard to attract human mates. The Purr Gift is used by many Bastet to charm humans but I would say the Khan either can’t get it or have a high penalty when using it.

I’m going to include here the material from the Hengeyokai book. It’s 5 pages & only talks about the Khans in East Asia. They dislike & avoid all Bastet that aren’t East Asian Khan. It says there are 100 Khans in the world, more than the Bastet book. The Gift of the Cricket is a Gift for overhearing secret conversations at a distance. Very cool. I also like Heaven Thunder Hammer which is a level 5 Gift for dropping lots of battle damage on an opponent.

Pooka, did the Khan intimidate you?

Pooka G

Well, they are pretty intimidating. But I would let them have the Purr Gift, because tigers can purr. Or more properly, they chuffle, which is like purring, but when you weigh several hundred pounds. So that de-intimidates them a bit to me.

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To your point about the rewrite of them. The rewrite may make some, by many objective measures, the best of the tribes. But I also think about how tigers are what they call a flagship species in conservation. Kind of iconic in human culture. And you can see in other places around the *World of Darkness* too, like when there's a growing understanding and keeping pace with real world research in certain cases.

There's like the whole alpha role idea with wolves, which I'm given to understand has turned out to be nonsense. I think maybe that evolving view of tigers as animals outside the game might have something to do with the representation of their were types in the game.

I can't speak for people on the Internet and why they make the choices they do, but that's just something I think about. Probably we could do a comparative study with this on D&D as well but my guiding principle is always that.

A good story is the most important measure of a splat's suitability for a character. None of that would stop me from playing one of the Ceilican instead of a Khan if they existed because I don't generally spring for playing flawed paladin types and that Khan is no exception, no matter how much Rage they have.

But I am 100% here for them going toe-to-toe against the Simba. Who I don't really care for either.

Adam

The Pumonca are next. This tribe is cougars, also called pumas, from North America. They are called the Storm Walkers. They are loners & travel constantly looking for trouble to resolve & secrets to learn. They don't like to leave North America although later books say they visit the Balam of South America. Their human Kinfolk are predominantly native Americans. Horses, dogs & other animals that aren't cats won't tolerate Pumonca. The 1998 Players Guide gives them a close relationship with the Thunderbird spirit. Players Guide to the Changing Breeds states they are bitter & resentful, feeling cut off from everyone else. It says they have a hard time advancing in Rank even though earlier books give a solution for this. That book had a lot of material that was walked back by the Werewolf 20 book so I wouldn't take it seriously.

Pooka, what's your take on the Pumonca?

Pooka G

I'm cool with them. They make good one-off foes or potential allies as the Bastet books states that they're protectors of the land to the utmost but they also have no love for magic so that could kind of go either way. There's just not a lot to go on though in part because they don't have much organization and they come from such a diverse array of cultures. I do see a story opportunity in a different direction, where we often get these news reports of mountain lions and cougars on the edges of human settlements. And you can run with that idea by having a Pumonca on a one-cat mission to take down their corner of suburbia or something. Whether that's to the benefit of the local mages or not.

Adam

The Qualmi tribe is Canadian lynxes. They are called the Riddle Dancers. They prefer to remain in the northern reaches of North America. Their human kinfolk are mostly native Americans. This is one of the Bastet tribes with low physical bonuses. Physical confrontations are not their preference. They love riddles, mysteries & magic. They love riddles & puzzles so much it's very hard for them to stop when dealing with people. They have Gifts that can confuse people & paralyze their minds. When people are smart enough to resist these powers or answer their riddles, Qualmi admire them. They are so solitary they don't like being with anyone for long. The one year training period for new Bastet is shortened to 6 months for the Qualmi. Any longer than that & the teacher or student might toss the other out a window just to get some quiet. The Qualmi have alliances with the Uktena werewolves. They also get along with the Gurahl were-bears.

Pooka, did the Qualmi confuse you?

Pooka G

Pleasantly so. They are my other favorite after the Ceilican. All the stuff I was saying about Tahla before and how it changes the mode of the game, you can achieve the same ends on a single character level by throwing a Qualmi into the mix. Have them turn up to harass or just test a wandering group of mages who are more likely than most to resist those mind powers and to win a friend for life. And by friend for life, I mean the Qualmi will say, wow, you thought your way around my riddle. You're the kind of humans I like to be around. I'm your capital A ally now. Put it on your character sheet. And they actually say that in character, and then they run away and

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disappear until such time as the storyteller decides they need to return. That's my kind of Qualmi. they're also They're noted as the tribe most likely to hang out with werewolves as well as the Gurahl so you have a solid connection to garden variety Garou as well. They just seem fun to be around if you don't mind puzzles and games, so I'm all for it.

Adam

The Simba are lions. They started in Zaire but spread to sub-Saharan Africa, Ireland, India & the U.S.. Their traditional role is leaders among the Bastet. But trying to lead Bastet is like herding cats, if you'll forgive the expression. Sorry, I couldn't resist. The Simba tend to live & work in groups called prides. They are the only Bastet who coordinate well & although some do live solitary lives, they do not need that kind of lifestyle like most Bastet do. A group called the Amadu'o is more aggressive & growing in influence because of Black Tooth, more on him later. The Mayi'o are down to just 3 prides in the Kalahari according to the Bastet book. They are more peaceful. Starting in the Bastet book, the Simba became the bad guys. They became arrogant, annoying & constantly complaining about how they should be recognized as kings. Later books compare them to the Khan tigers whenever they get a chance & make it clear the Khan are better. I was disappointed to see the Simba change. I think the original write-up was better.

Pooka, it sounds like the Simba did not exactly impress you.

Pooka G

You know, I thought about quipping here that I'd rather watch Tiger King than Lion King, but I'm not going to go that far. But, yeah. No, they didn't. They don't impress me much. Call me unconventional, if you will. I'm just indifferent to lions compared with almost all other big cats. Maybe it's their overinflated reputation in culture, but I don't know in the case of these games in particular. I agree with your assessment that they were changed for the worse. They were made too much like the Garou, to point. Just to put it frankly. And I wonder to what extent like the lion king film, which I think did come out between the original Players Guide and the Bastet book, might have impacted those cultural ideas of lions that might have worked their way in here so I don't have any particular love for the Simba. But, I will say they have one of the most intriguing Yava in the mix and I quote to defeat a lion steal his roar. In it you may find a bit of his soul. He will not harm one who holds that soul until he finds his roar again. Just reading those three sentences, my

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mind is already working overtime trying to figure out how to translate that into a story arc for a game.

They also have the note that a rope made out of lion's mane will hold them fast, which is pretty cool, but doesn't demand the same mental exercise, which I love, of coming up with how the hell exactly any of these things work. So I'd drop one in a game purely to run with those ideas.

Adam

Obscure Forces wrote for Soundwaves. Little Spirit there, a little Prime. We could do this, folks.

Anyways. The Swara are cheetahs, also called the Silver Folk. Their traditional role is messengers for the Bastet. They are fast, secretive & nervous. If you get up in the morning & notice someone drank all the coffee without making another pot, you might have Swara in the neighborhood. Many of them still live in central Africa although they have a reputation for traveling the world without settling in one place. Being smaller than many other Bastet they have traditionally been pushed around. This has made many paranoid & they have a hard time making friends with others. They have a hatred of the Garou but I don't remember seeing a reason. The Swara are able to learn a Gift at Rank 2 to enter the Umbra. They keep this secret from other Bastet who aren't able to learn that Gift until Rank 4. The Swara learn much from spirits in the Umbra but keep it to themselves. This results in a broader perspective than the other Bastet tribes.

Pooka, how about those Swara?

Pooka G

How about them indeed? Cheetahs used to be one of my favorite animals as a kid, and then they kind of fell off in personal importance but I still dig their fastest land animal appeal so eat your heart out velociraptors. And I like that idea of a caffeine Swara skulking about, so I'm going to have to run with that.

Anyway. Good on them for getting into the Umbra with ease. Presumably they just outrun the Gauntlet and slip across. They're rather similar to the Pumonca in that they're also pretty isolated and protecting the land, but that paranoid twitchiness makes them more suitable for like a one-off NPC you get information from rather than one you have to face in a fight.

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I guess that's the 9 Tribes.

Adam

That's it. One of the really interesting things about the Bastet is their Den Realms. Being were-creatures, they have a natural affinity with the spirit world but they cannot enter it like most of their cousins. To make up for this, they have a unique ability to create their own realms in the Penumbra that duplicate the corresponding land on Earth. It has been hinted this is the origin of the Shallow Realms that mages learned to create. Mages lost that knowledge over the ages, at least those below Oracle status. If you want to read more about Shallow Realms see page 53 of Dead Magic 2 which describes a large one in Australia. Did the Bastet share their knowledge with mages in prehistoric times? Do the Bastet think mages stole the secret from them or are they even aware of the issue? The books don't say clearly. Mage's Revised Edition hints the secret of Shallow Realms is waiting to be rediscovered. If it is, how Bastet would react is up to Storytellers.

Shallow Realms & Den Realms are similar but not identical. Den Realms exist in the Penumbra. They have a gauntlet wall of their own separating the Den Realm from the rest of the Penumbra. Shallow Realms make a mini Penumbra of their own that is on our side of the Gauntlet. But let's get back to Den Realms. A Perception + Occult roll is needed to detect someone else's Den Realm. In Mage games, I would make that an Awareness roll. A Bastet who has a Den Realm lays claim to the physical space on Earth that corresponds to the Den Realm. The Bastet will patrol it either on Earth or in the Den Realm. The owner has 3 special abilities. First, they can enter & leave the Den Realm & take others with them. Second, if the owner is in the Den Realm or the corresponding territory on Earth, he can peek through to get a good view of the other. Third, when in the Den Realm the owner can disappear & reappear nearby as long as there's an object large enough to block an opponent's view. They can do that a number of times equal to current Gnosis score. Den Realm is a Background from 1 to 5 dots. A Bastet must be Rank 3 to acquire a Den Realm. That means starting characters can't have one. Den Realms originally ranged in size from 3 to 243 square miles. That's the size of the city of Toronto. The Bastet book revised that to 1 to 20 square miles in wilderness & middle class house size to 5 square blocks in a city. I recommend the sizes in the Bastet book. The Bastet book gives us details on how one Bastet can get a Den Realm from another.

As a Mage Storyteller, you may have a player visit a Den Realm & state he's going to re-invent Shallow Realms on his own. I would rule to create a Shallow Realm, which is considered lost

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knowledge, a mage must either learn the secret from a mage who can do it, recover old writings from mages who had the secret, or know the Rote for creating a Horizon Realm. If they are working from old documents or re-working the Rote for Horizon Realms I would make it a downtime research effort & require a month or more.

Pooka, do you have anything to add on Den Realms?

Pooka G

So first of all, can we talk about how excellent this idea is for cats who are extremely territorial in a way that is low key until it's not. I used to live with a cat whose favorite hiding spot was in the three inch gap between the floor and the underside of the cabinet beneath the powder room sink and let me tell you nothing is more heart-stopping than being on the toilet in the middle of the night and just watching a paw slowly emerge from under the decorative molding. So, taking the notion of what domestic cats can and will do with the smallest quantum of space and turning it into a mechanical advantage that partially or entirely makes up for the inability to step sideways naturally, that was a masterstroke. With the Shallow Realms versus Den Realms distinction I'm in favor of having these things be more openly a part of the Mage world but being kind of broad spectrum incomprehensible the Pooka and changeling have something similar with respect to the Dreaming and I think there's something in Wraith about frequently haunted spaces in a lower trial rating. So these things exist. Where the Bastet distinguish themselves in the array of not quite here nor their spaces is that they can create them pretty easily compared with what a mage has to go through and the depth of their personal connection.

It's more in line with what we see with the Domain background, the kind of mind palace that mages do. I do agree that the smaller scale of the Bastet book is more appropriate, but within that realm they get so many cool powers.

To clarify the one you mentioned, they can step sideways at difficulty 3 within their realm and take people with them, but others have to follow a difficulty that they set. And with the background, you can decide you want to set the local gauntlet as high as 9 for everybody but you. So that's some serious mess with the walls between worlds mojo.

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Throw in the teleporting and the ability to see what's going on within the borders and the homing sense that they get, and it is a travesty for any Bastet not to take this background to use as their base of all operations. Just make sure you dedicate enough time to protecting it.

Adam

Before we get into the lost tribe I wanted to talk about the Bastet book from 1997. Like the other breed books, it is the definitive source on Bastet. 3 later books had Bastet write-ups but they were mostly repeated material that was edited down to a few pages. I read the same paragraphs more than twice prepping for this episode. Stat bonuses & Den Realms were revised for the Bastet book. I find no fault with the revisions. Character creation is the vital chapter in this book. It enforces setting, it lets players know if this is something they want to try in your game. It offers solid possibilities to Storytellers in terms of stats, Backgrounds, Merits & Flaws. There were lots of references to movies I've never seen. A note from the author up front tells us domestic cats were used for inspiration throughout the book. From documentaries & zoo visits I see a lot of differences between the big cats & domestic cats but talking to Mage fans, it's clear they connect their cats at home to the Bastet so I can't fault the author's decision. Being in tune with so many gamers probably isn't a mistake. I loved the Joshua Gabriel Timbrook art. He sold me on the idea of were-creatures. Page 26 has an illustration of a Bastet standing on a pile of skulls. Skulls are marked with Sphere symbols for mages, clan symbols for vampires & tribe symbols for werewolves. Bastet are tougher than everyone! Then you look at their stats Oh, well. A cat can dream. We get 10 Bastet of note. Ten Thunders is a young woman who runs a cocaine empire in Colombia & the write up makes it clear there's nothing wrong with that. Pooka, if I found out you were running a drug empire, I wouldn't hold it against you.

Pooka G

Thanks.

Adam

However, if you used your fortune to bribe the Mage20 SRD project, that's crossing a line. Momma Treebender is a very un-Qualmi Qualmi. Seriously, how can a Qualmi do business with anyone without driving them nuts? Asante Jua is a Swara assassin. Who does he kill? Why? There's so little info on this Swara I'm wondering why he's here.

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Ok, Pooka. What did you think of the Bastet book?

Pooka G

Well, like I said, this was kind of my ur text for the Bastet. I had the 2nd edition players guide, but a lot of the information in there didn't really sink to me in the same way as this one. It's also worth pointing out that this is primarily a Brucato-authored text, with some additional words by Bill Bridges and Rich Dansky, so there's some serious Mage chops in the mix here although Dansky was responsible for the khan and the Simba and we weren't too excited about those changes.

So you can see that same sort of deep interest in the backstories and various cultural expressions that come out of the game that I would say characterize Brucato's writing and sometimes overshadows the mechanics to an extent for me that's a feature not a bug. I know others may disagree. It also explains a lot about the presentation of the Ceilican when you understand they're fleshed out by the same person who wrote Power Cords. Definitely agreed on the importance of art in this book. I loved that piece. The skulls. That was my favorite in the entire book And it really does bring the splat to life. I want to also call out, in addition to Joshua Timbrook, Alex Shakeman and the iconic Ron Spencer as helping to kind of define the look here. Apart from mentioning those names, I'll reiterate what I said before. This book really illustrates how you can take a somewhat obscure corner of a game, not the most just somewhat, and run wild with it opening up entire areas for a table to explore

The other breed books followed suit with even more obscure corners. So for example, despite their preferred habitat, who thought there was going to be as much depth to the Rokea as they ended up getting? So never underestimate what a target word count and a heaping ladle full of passion can get you. The specific crunchy bits or discrete elements the Bastet bro brings to the game.

They're a mixed bag like Den Realms and the sample patron spirits and the huge variety of Gifts all things I can get behind the signature characters and the secondary abilities. Yeah. Shrug. What draws me in is the depth of the lore here, and the story hooks that appear in practically every other sentence making it feel like I can run an an entire game within this space alone and it will feel unique. So this remains one of my favorite Werewolf books and hands down, paws down, if you will, my favorite of any Werewolf splat book.

Adam

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I'm feeling fickle today. Why don't we stop right here? Why talk about the Ajaba & Bastet Gifts when I could goof off instead? Pooka, you with me?

Pooka G

I have already found a comfortable sunbeam and will be here for the next several hours.

Adam

We might be back for part 2 later & we might not. We'll just have to see where our fancy takes us.