

THE CRAFTER

Rite of initiation

You are the hard-working hand that makes anything possible, the ingenious thinker of tools and buildings. Your greatest accomplishment was the oven where you make bread for the village, but over the last few moons your eyes have become so weak as to make it hard to work. You have been living in fear ever since, that the Chief would hear of it and cast you out.

But what the gods had in store for you was an even crueller fate. On midsummer's eve, through the mouth of the Seer, they claimed in sacrifice the most perfect man of the long hill: the Offering. You used to watch him as he bathed in the river-waters, his hair adorned with crowns of white flowers. Not only were you forced to watch him die, but to burn his remains and mix the ashes with your meal and bake them into bread, as the ritual called for. At dawn you gave out that blessed meal to the warriors, to grow their might in the coming battle. In vain.

The seven slices you have brought to the Circle are the last leftovers of that same bread. By now you can only tell the others apart by the sound of their voice, but the twins are so familiar to you that even their scent is enough: The Tiller carries about the smell of the earth, and the Herder that of his beasts.

Rite of passage

■ The Herder is always eager to help you, so much so that you have no doubt he knows about your loss of sight. Yet you have no fear he would tell anyone else. On midsummer he offered to mend the Chief's armour for you: You were glad to let him spread reeking grease over its studs, and even gladder to have a trusted ear to share your grief with. Oh, how sad the Offering's fate was! As you thought back to the river-waters, your mind grew murky and your speech turned to raving.

■ The Tiller is the dark shadow cast by the Herder. You had never liked each other, but on midsummer he came to you with kind words and many gifts. Among these were the white petals that the Offering loved to weave on the riverbank. In that moment, you knew: The Tiller would be the one to perform the sacrifice, and he had come to taunt you. So you thrust the sacrificial blade into his hands and cast him out. When you held the flowers to your chest, you smelled their scent, mingled with that of the Herder's beasts.

Rite of propitiation

In the eyes of the gods, people must prove themselves resourceful. To immolate the most perfect among you was a cruel act. Life only has value when lived in pursuit of beauty. The gods will smile upon the sacrifice of one with something yet to lose.

