

THE SNARL

Weird Fantasy Tabletop RPG

PLAYTEST 2 Stealing Thunder

Posthuman Studios
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THE SNARL: STEALING THUNDER GM NOTES

SUGGESTED BREAKDOWN

Setting Overview: 5-10 minutes

Rules Overview: 20-25 minutes

Simple Scenario: 1.5 hours

SETTING OVERVIEW

Topics to cover:

- Pillars & biomes: Canopy, Tangles, Mulch, Roots, Notches
- Sap, spirits, and sparks
- No ground, few metals, no stone/sand/glass, etc. Bone, ivory, chitin, scales, petrified wood, etc. used instead.
- No humans, different species
- Tribal society, small scale, gift economies, barter with outsiders
- Stealing thunder custom
- Threats: Blight and Creep, new scarcity & competition over resources

RULES OVERVIEW

- Skill-based, 2d10 vs Difficulty
- Crit Points (Diff +3), Twists
- One Modifier rule: +/-2 or edge/vex
- Failure w/opportunity (10+)
- Grit points, success w/consequences
- Actions (3 per turn), reactions (1/turn), and moves (and the icons for them)
- No Hit Points: jolts, strain, and wounds instead
- Combat Zones: Engaged, Skirmish, Ranged
- Environmental Aspects
- **Character Sheets**
 - Path
 - Skills
 - Defenses
 - Strain/Wounds
 - Armor
 - Abilities
 - Sap
 - Grit – abilities, enviro aspects, grim rewards, bonds/discords
 - Kit
 - Motivations (for XP)
 - Bonds (spend Grit when taking a risk)
 - Discords (GM invoke for -2, invoke to regain Grit)

SIMPLE SCENARIO

You have been tasked with stealing thunder from a rival clan.

The main intent here is threefold. First, give the PCs a few challenges to get used to the moves & mechanics. Second, give them time to explore the weirdness of their characters – unusual anatomy, customs, etc. Third, to introduce a threat and run a short combat.

SETUP

The PCs have recently been traveling with the nomadic **Branchwalker clan** through the Tangles and the heart of the Snarl. The clan, composed of dozens of folks of mixed species, provide safety and company. They travel on foot and in carts and covered wagons/vardos drawn by large draft beetles.

One evening, an elder scull by the name of **Treffa** invites the PCs to sit at her fire. She tells them that another nomadic clan, the **Rainchasers**, are hosting a festival nearby, to celebrate their founding. The Rainchasers and Branchwalkers have been rivals for decades, perhaps longer. She asks the PCs to *steal thunder* from the them.

Stealing thunder is a long-standing tradition of competing with a rival group and one-upping them for status. It can take many forms, from staged sports competitions and ritual duels to night-time raids and stealing cultural artifacts. She thinks the festival presents a great opportunity to show them up. The festival is open to most outsiders, but the Rainchasers know many of the Branchwalkers and would bar them entry. As new associates of the clan, the PCs could potentially talk or sneak their way in and then find an opportunity to undermine their rivals.

The festival takes place on a nearby branch in the Tangles called the Spiral. This branch extends from its pillar in a sort of upwards corkscrew shape, and does not connect to any neighboring pillars.

Give the PCs time to talk to Treffa, interact with other Branchwalkers, and get used to their characters and their physiology. Encourage them to make Cultures or Chronicles tests to learn more about the clans, customs, etc. If there's any gear they want, the Branchwalkers will gift it to them if it is available and within reason.

GETTING TO THE FEST

The idea here is to present some challenges to the PCs and get them used to skill tests. The Rainchasers have a few guards set at the bottom of the Spiral and on patrol, keeping an eye out for unwelcome visitors (rival tribes) or threats. This includes a few veetlings who are watching for flying intruders. The PCs have a few options for getting past them to the Spiral and the fest. A Nature roll might provide some hints.

- **Sneaking past:** If they do it as a group, this is a group Stealth test where everyone makes the test at -2 against a Mental Defense of 13. If at least half the group makes it, they succeed. If they go individually, it's individual Stealth (13) tests.
- **Talking Their Way In:** Outsiders are allowed, but the guards will question people about their origins in order to keep rival clans like the Branchwalkers out. This requires a Deceive move with edge against Social Defense 12.
- **Combat:** The PCs can always try to overwhelm the guards or a patrol they run into. In that case, roll Initiative and dive into the combat rules. Use the extra pre-gen PCs as stats for the guards. There should be 1-2 less guards than the PCs, and their Scrappiness is 3s/1w, meaning that they will surrender or flee if they take 2 strain or 1 wound. This should not be a tough fight; make it a teaser for later combat. Don't forget the environmental aspects!
- **Parkour:** At one point the Spiral does come close to a nearby pillar. A non-flying character could conceivably tightrope-walk some thin branches and then make a leap to get across. This would require Acrobatics and/or Athletics (13) tests. Use of ropes from someone's kit or the weavemother's webbing will give edge to these tests. Remember that falling PCs can make an Arrest Fall move as a reaction (Acrobatics (11) test) to stop themselves or someone else from falling.

THE FEST

The festival is a large open-air camp party with food, games, music, performances and more. ~100 people are in attendance. Paper lanterns light the way, the branch paths are festively decorated.

THINGS TO DO

Give the PCs options to socialize, play games, etc. Some ideas:

- **Mingle move:** Persuasion (11) test to get one of the following: learn useful info, befriend NPC, gather a rumor.
- **Perform for the crowd:** Provocation (13) test to entertain. May earn 1 unit of goods (used for bartering) as a tip.
- **Play games:** Insert any game of chance here. Victory gets 1 unit of goods (used for bartering).
- **Perceive:** A Perception (11) test will note that the Rainchasers have stationed 2 gukri guards around one of their wagon homes.
- **Discordant Options:** 2 of the PCs (Noora and Wootsen) have discords with Rainchaser NPCs. If the PCs run into those NPCs, it can present opportunities for roleplaying and conflict.

KNOWLEDGE THE PCS CAN ACQUIRE AT THE FEST:

- Names and capabilities of specific Rainchaser competitors. Names: *Geed, Thunmer, Skerling, Offt, Franzer*
- The Rainchasers have 3 stretchwing eggs (see below)
 - The eggs are guarded inside Sheevu's wagon
 - The eggs will be gifted to the Rainchasers (see below)
 - The size of the eggs (Nature (11) test)
 - Rainchaser elder Sheevu plans to show off the eggs to some respected guests later
- The Rainchasers are on alert due to some recent encounters with strange creatures in the area
- A Rainchaser herbalist is peddling a drug that causes severe drowsiness (see below)

STEALING THUNDER

The PCs have two good options for stealing thunder. The first one will get some recognition, but the second would be a major coup. There's no reason they can't do both! If they do only the first, the PCs should get the feeling that their victory is minor, and that stealing the eggs would have more impact – perhaps some Rainchasers mock them for their feeble efforts.

OPTION 1: WIN A COMPETITION.

There are numerous games of skill and prowess in which the PCs can compete. If the PCs are gravitating towards something, they note/discover that one of the main competitors is a champion of sorts for the Rainchasers. If they beat that particular competitor (requiring several tests against an evenly skilled competitor) and win the match, they can loudly claim the victory in the name of the Branchwalkers and steal some thunder. This will, however, draw the attention of other Rainchasers, who will tolerate them but watch them closely for the duration of the fest.

Options for the Competitions are:

- A foot-race (Athletics and Endurance)
- A flying obstacle course (Acrobatics and Endurance)
- A high striker match (swinging a mallet to ring a bell; Athletics)
- A dance competition (Acrobatics)
- An archery contest (Missiles)
- A boxing match (Melee, first one to land 3 strikes wins)
- A wrestling match (first one to Grapple and then Restrain the opponent wins).
- A chronicler story-telling contest (Provoke)

OPTION 2: STEAL THE EGGS

Through mingling, perception, or other means, give the PCs the opportunity to learn that the Rainchasers have acquired a set of 3 (or more) precious stretchwing eggs. Stretchwings are large birds that are used to pull small airships over distances. The Rainchasers intend to give these eggs as a gift to the Branchwalkers, which would both raise the Rainchasers' status and burden the Branchwalkers with raising and caring for the creatures. If the PCs steal the eggs first, however, they will steal the Rainchasers' thunder.

The eggs are large, roughly the size of a small backpack. They are, of course, fragile. They require 2 hands to hold; the m'qwirl and veetling PCs may need to make an Athletics (13) test to carry one.

The eggs are kept within the wagon home of a Rainchaser elder, a vescid named **Sheevu**. Sheevu is preoccupied with officiating many of the festival's activities. 2 Rainchaser *gukri* guards protect the wagon while he is away. The wagon has a single door and 2 small windows.

Sheevu will make a point of showing off the eggs to some respected guests at some point during the festival. He will announced their plans to gift the eggs at this time.

The PCs have a few options for getting past the guards:

- **Stealth:** A Stealth (15) test will allow someone to sneak in via a side window. The window must also be unlocked with a Trickery (13) test. The clacker, *kaliocera*, or *weavemother* PCs will not fit, but the others will.
- **Distract the Guards:** A PC can make a Distract move to draw the guards' attention. This is a Trickery (13) test. If successful, it reduces the Difficulty of the Stealth test above to 13. The PCs could also devise a larger distraction to draw the guards away entirely for a short period (i.e., breaking up a staged fight).
- **Drug the Guards:** Among other wares, a Rainchaser herbalist is peddling a drug that will cause severe drowsiness. If the PCs barter for this, they can dose some food or drink and give it to the guards. This may require Deceive, Trickery, or Persuade move to pull off.

THE GETAWAY

Once the PCs have the eggs, they will need to get away quickly before they are discovered. This may require more Stealth tests, distractions, or other shenanigans. If they go back down the Spiral, they will have more guards to contend with, who may demand to inspect their bags.

UNEXPECTED TROUBLE

Just when the PCs think they are getting away, however, they run into some complications. A group of voracious skunksels (giant clever skunk-weasels, essentially) lurks nearby, and these creatures are fiends for stretchwing eggs. They catch the scent and will pop out of some nearby tree-holes and attack the party, attempting to steal the eggs.

SURPRISE

Make a Stealth test for the skunksels against the PCs' Mental Defense scores. Anyone whom the skunksels succeed against are *surprised*—for the first round, attacks against them have edge and they may not use reactions.

ZONES AND INITIATIVE

Everyone begins in the skirmish zone.

The skunksel that launches the attack goes first, blasting 2 of the PCs with its Noxious Spray. It will then attack one of the PCs carrying an egg and attempt to knock them prone. If it succeeds, it will engage them.

Everyone else goes in Initiative order.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS

Don't forget to choose environmental aspects at the beginning of combat! You pick one, let the players pick two. If you need suggestions, use: *Hanging Vines*, *Strong Gusts of Wind*, *Slippery Footing*

SUBTLE CREEP

Unknown to the PCs, these skunksels have also recently been infected by the Creep (rare to see in this area). All of the skunksels show subtle signs of infection, which the PCs may not immediately notice. If a PC takes a Perceive move (Difficulty 15) to look over the critters, they will notice that they have strange orange-colored growths around their eyes and snouts, partly hidden by their fur. If none of the PCs take an action to look by the end of the first round, give all of the PCs a free

Perception (15) test to notice this. A Reflect move with a Threats (13) test will identify it as a likely sign of Creep infection. The Creep is an infecting fungal menace that takes over and transforms creatures. In most cases, the Creep sticks to the Mulch and Roots. It is quite unusual to find an infected creature this far up, and this far from a Creep patch.

On the 2nd round of combat, another skunksel will enter the fray that is more obviously transformed. This skunksel enters in the ranged zone. It has orange-colored eyes and strange, tentacle-like fronds erupt from both sides of its mouth, undulating in a creep way. It has extra abilities due to its Creep infection (see below), including an ability to eject a small crystalline dart from its mouth.

SKUNKSEL KNOWLEDGE

What the PCs know about Skunksels with a Reflect move (>) and a Nature (11) test:

- Skunksels are medium-sized omnivorous mammals. They live in cavities and burrows within the pillars.
- Skunksels *love* eggs. They particularly have a taste for stretchwing eggs.
- They are not usually overtly aggressive.
- **Crit:** They have a nasty Noxious Spray ability.

SKUNKSEL TACTICS

The skunksels will target PCs who have eggs. First they will use their Noxious Spray to inflict jolts, then they will attack and attempt to use their Anklebiter ability to knock people prone. They may also attempt Disarm, Grab, or Trip moves. If they acquire an egg, they will immediately flee the fight with it.

These skunksels are unusually aggressive (due to their Creep infection) and will fight to the death/incapacitation.

PROTECTING THE EGGS

PCs who are carrying eggs will need to be careful with them! If they are knocked prone, they will need to make an Acrobatics (13) test to not break the egg they carry. If they are disarmed, incapacitated, or an egg is otherwise knocked from their grasp, it has a 60% chance of breaking.

If an egg is broken, roll a Potency 2 effect against the Social Defense of any skunksels in the same zone. If it succeeds, the skunksel spends 2 actions slurping up egg juices on its next turn.

SKUNKSELS (4–6)

Use a number of skunksels at the beginning of the fight equal to the PCs minus one. If the PCs are struggling, you're short on time, or you want to give them an easier win, reduce their number by 1 or 2. Remember that an additional Creep-infected skunksel shows up in Round 2.

If the PCs are easily dispatching the skunksels, 1 or more additional ones may suddenly transform during the fight, acquiring additional Creep abilities.

If the PCs are losing badly, Rainchaser guards may hear the sounds of combat and show up to save them (thus stealing some thunder back ...).

Initiative: 6

Mental Defense: 14

Physical Defense: 14

Wound Point: 17

Social Defense: 13

EGO: +0 **FIT:** +3 **INT:** +1 **PER:** +0 **REF:** +3 **WIT:** +2

Skills: Athletics +4 (+6 jumping), Melee +4, Missiles +3, Perception +3, Stealth +4, Survival +3

Armor	1	○
Strain	6	○○○○○○
Wounds	3	○○○

- **Claw/Bite:** Natural weapons.
- **Lunge:** In the skirmish zone, you may take on a jolt to seize the initiative.
- **Great Leap (>):** You can make olympic vertical and horizontal leaps. You make high jumps and long jumps with +2 and such jumps take only 1 action for you, instead of 2.
- **Noxious Spray (>>):** Targets take 1 jolt and must make an Endurance (13) test or acquire the poisoned condition. Poison effect: take 1 jolt at the beginning of each turn for the duration of the encounter. Skunksels are immune to the spray of other skunksels.
 - **Small Area Effect (~5 meter radius):** You can choose to target everyone in an engaged cluster (affecting both friend and foe in that cluster alike), 2 targets in skirmish, or a single target in ranged.
- **Anklebiter:** When you strike a target, you may expend 1 jolt to knock them prone.

EXTRA CREEP ABILITIES

The more severely infected skunksels have these extra abilities:

- **Crystalline Dart (>):** Ranged attack, shot from its mouth. The skunksel may expend 2 jolts to ignore Armor on this attack.
- **Mouth Fronds:** +2 on Grab moves.

RESOLUTION

If the PCs win the fight, they will likely have questions. How did these skunksels become Creep infected? The Creep usually stays confined to the Mulch in this area. Do they warn the Rainchasers or return to their clan?

If they return with one or more intact eggs, they will have effectively stolen thunder from their rivals—congratulations!

It is possible that the fight draws the attention of the Rainchasers. Perhaps, if the PCs are losing badly, some Rainchaser warriors step in and chase off the remaining skunksels. If any eggs are destroyed, the Rainchasers will be quite upset. If the eggs were kept intact, the Rainchasers will express respect for the PCs' capabilities and for keeping the eggs safe ... even if they did steal them. If the PCs defeated the skunksels, they will give begrudging thanks for dealing with such a threat. They will acknowledge that they have encountered similar Creep-infected creatures in the area – this is something all sapients of the Weald should be concerned with, rival or not. Whether or not they allow the PCs to leave with the eggs may be up to the specific circumstances and final negotiations.

NPCS

- **Treffa**, Branchwalker clan, elder scrill. Stats below.
- **Sheevu**, Rainchaser clan, elder vescid. Stats below.
- **Geed**, Rainchaser clan, clacker tinker. Once mocked Noori (Noori's discord). Use Clacker Tinker stats.
- **Skerling**, Rainchaser clan, fuzzleclaw trickster. Killed Wootsen's cousin in past dispute (Wootsen's discord). Use Fuzzleclaw Trickster stats.

TREFFA

Branchwalker Clan, Elder Scrill

Initiative: 4

Mental Defense: 15

Physical Defense: 14 **Wound Point:** 17

Social Defense: 16

EGO: +3 **FIT:** +2 **INT:** +2 **PER:** +3 **REF:** +1 **WIT:** +2

Skills: Athletics +3, Cultures +5, Deception +4, Melee +3, Missiles +4,
Nature +4, Perception +6, Persuasion +6, Provocation +6, Threats +4

Armor	1	○
Strain	5	○○○○○
Wounds	3	○○○

- **Barbed Tongue:** Your long, prehensile spiked tongue is considered a natural weapon; it is treated as a weapon attack (not unarmed), but you may not be disarmed
- **Tremorsense:** You are attuned to movement and vibrations you feel through the ground, other surfaces you touch, water, or even through the air (such as those made by rapidly beating wings). This sense is directional but has a limited range (~10 meters in air, ~50 meters in surfaces/water, farther for particularly stronger vibrations).
- **Tremorspeak:** You can convey simple messages to others with Tremorsense via ground/surface vibrations. You generate signals by drumming, stamping the ground, tapping a surface, or clicking body parts together. Rain, wind, and other noisy environmental aspects may impede communication.
- **Ultraviolet Vision:** You can see ultraviolet wavelengths. Colors and patterns are visible to you that others with normal sight cannot see.

SHEEVU

Branchwalker Clan, Elder Vescid

Initiative: 4

Mental Defense: 16

Physical Defense: 15 **Wound Point:** 18

Social Defense: 14

EGO: +2 **FIT:** +2 **INT:** +3 **PER:** +2 **REF:** +1 **WIT:** +3

Skills: Athletics +3, Cultures +4, Deception +4, Melee +4, Nature +5,
Perception +4, Persuasion +5, Provocation +6, Threats +4

Armor	1	○
Strain	5	○○○○○
Wounds	3	○○○

- ï **Chem Signaling:** You can exude a chemical signal only detectable by Enhanced Smell or Scent and only translatable to other vescids. This spray lingers in an area for up to 3 days (subject to environmental conditions). The common signals are: danger, food, shelter, and distinct territorial markings.
- ï **Flight:** You can fly.
- ï **Multi-Limbed:** You have extra arms that you may use to hold multiple items at once. You gain +2 on Grab moves.
- ï **Scent:** Your sense of smell is especially keen. You can detect nearby exhalations and food sources, gauge what people have recently eaten or where they've been, and catch the scents of others from kilometers away when downwind. You receive edge on Perception tests where smell is a factor and you can make Track moves to follow a trail by scent alone. Wind, rain, smoke, pollen, and strong odorants can impact your sense of smell.
- ï **Stinger:** Your stinger is considered a natural weapon; it is treated as a weapon attack (not unarmed), but you may not be disarmed.