

HANGOVER CITY

A City Sourcebook for Dresden Files RPG

by Sue Wilson

Chapter Eight- The River Witches

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And The Ferry Back

The ferry takes them back again. This time the sun is on the Three Graces and the place they are leaving seems clouded. Angela sits deep in thought as the boat bounces over the waves. Eventually Cale can stand the silence no longer.

"Are you alright?" He asks. Echoing her own question on the way over.

"I don't know." She confesses. She looks over her shoulder at the small army that had escorted them back to the ferry terminal. "I expected something different." She confesses. She looks at Cale.

"Choice?" He suggests.

"I think its more than that." She says. "They seem so..." She shudders.

"Bigoted?" He offers.

"They are nothing like my pack at home." She says. Then he frowns. "No thats not true. They are but only in some very basic ways. We support each other like they do, but after that." Her shoulders shake, a shudder. "What they said about the Lycanthropes and Loups. Calling them throwbacks and saying if he had his way he would have them all killed at birth. It was barbaric." She glares back at the men on the dock. "I've know a Loup. It was a curse. He was a good man despite of it. He never deserved that."

"Its not just them they hate." Cale says softly.

She nods. "Jake Pym. He was with you when you picked me up. The man who talked to me first."

Cale nods. "Jake and his bro Simon."

"They are your friends." She says.

He nods. "And more. You get close in the Breed you have to. Survival depends on it."

"Why do they hate him so much?"

"He is gay." Cale says

"Must be more than that." She responds.

He shakes his head. "No thats enough." He leans forward. "The way they see it. you have a responsibility to have kids, to carry on the lines. Being gay gets in the way of that so." He shrugs. "To them Jake is failing in his duty. And for the wolves that is a crime worse than..." He stops trying to think of something relevant. "Genocide?" He guesses. "All those offspring that will never exist."

"But you don't think that?" She asks.

"Gods no." He responds. "Like I said, leaves more women for me." He smiles at her teasingly. "Besides Breed are more high tech than wolves, and Ream is carefully with the blood lines. We all get to wank into a bottle before we first see active service, just in case."

"EWWW." She recalls, "TMI Cale."

He laughs. "Seriously one way or another their will be little Jakes one day. May already be some, seeing as Ream doesn't need to wait to see if he manages on their own, given how impossible that would be! Bottom line, he doesn't have to bother about it. The only time it annoys me is when his boyfriend lets him off duty when the rest of us have to work late just because he fancies a shag."

"Like last night?" She asks, recalling how Simon relieved Jake which the words 'date night'.

Cale nods. "Upside of bonking the boss I guess."

Angela frowns. "Jake is sleeping with Ream?"

Cale laughs out loud, obviously amused at the idea. "No." He says. "Jake is with Bri. Brian is our dispatcher. He decided what jobs we go to."

"Like the police." She says.

"Just like the police." He confirms. "That's what we are, the fifth emergency service."

"Fourth." She corrects him.

He shakes his head. "Fourth is the coast guard. We're a port remember." He pauses, his eyes cast down to the water. A frown drifts across his face.

Confused she follows his gaze. "What?"

Then she sees it, a body in the water. A woman in a long grey dress floating on the surface as if being dragged along by the wake of the ship. She turns to yell but his hand reaches up to her and pulls her down. "Quiet." He commands.

"But." She looks back down, the body has rolled over and is looking up at them.

"She could drown." She says, even though it is clearly not the case.

The woman moves, her body arching and then she sinks deep into the mirk of the river. As her legs touch the surface she flicks them, causing a splash in the river that arches up and catches Cale on the side of the face.

"What was that?" She asks

"River witch." He says. He almost sounds scared. "I guess I should have anticipated this. You spoke to the wolves, they will want to get their edge in."

"I don't understand." She says.

He looks at her for a moment. "I think I should let Shannon explain." He says.

"Anything I say will just be horribly misogynistic." He responds bitterly.

She frowns at him. "What do you mean Cale?"

"Well if you though I was uncomfortable with the Wolves, you've not seen nothing yet."

The boat docks and as they come off a short rotund woman, her grey hair done up in a tight bun, all but blocks their way. She smiles at Angela and then glares at Cale.

"Young Man. Why did you expose this poor girl to Gunnar's goons?"

He sighs. "I was told to take her their by grandfather."

"No excuse. She should have come to us." The woman snaps. "I suppose you would have left us out completely if my girls had not been so observant."

"No Miss Shannon, I am sure Ream would have..."

"Ream, what would he know." She grumbles. "He is the worst of the lot."

She offers her arm to Angela and her smile reappears. "Come on my dear. Let me show you real scouse hospitality."

"Well actually Cale is meant to stay with me." Angela says.

Cale looks at her, his eyes widening almost with fear. He tries to shake his head in protest.

"Really." Shannon responds. "Well if He Must He Must." She commands.

Cale's shoulders sag; an air of defeat about him.

"Come then Breed. If you are Bulldog for the day, keep to heel." Shannon instructs as she leads Angela towards a waiting minibus with "River-view Day Care" plastered along the side in large colourful letters.

The building Angela is taken to is a large newly built brick construction on the water front. They drive through a security gate and a large female guard glares at Cale until Shannon assures her that he is with them.

Inside the complex appears to be a collection of flats with a large communal garden and play area. Looking round it takes her a few moments to realise that all the adults are female. Even amongst the children there are few male older than ten. Everywhere there is the sound of children playing and women gossiping. That is until Cale gets out of the mini bus. Suddenly the space is silent, the adults staring at him with expressions of disgust and the children edging closer to their mothers.

"Bloody marvellous." Cale mumbles.

"Do not cuss." Shannon chastise. "I will not have the children learning violent tongue from you Breed member."

Shannon leads them both over to a small office in one corner, as Cale moves inside Angela can hear the noise of play and chat starting up again. She looks at him curiously.

"It's the y chromosome." He says pointedly.

"A curse of birth, you can not blame him." Shannon says. Her comment is so reminiscent of Cale's previous statement on the boat that Angela laughs.

"Something funny my dear?" Shannon asks.

"No. Not really." Angela admits. She nod through the window to the action in the garden. "Why did they behave that way?"

"Men are not trusted here. Most of my girls have escaped violent partners or fathers.

We offer them a safe haven. When it is breached it can be unsettling.”

Angela looks at Cale. He just shrugs. “I guess when all is said and done I am a man of violence.”

“All men are violent.” Shannon says. “It is their nature and their curse. We can pity them, but we can not cure them of it. No matter how hard we try.”

“And what are you?” Angela asks.

“Selkie.” Cale says.

Shannon slaps him. The blow comes from nowhere and catches him across the face.

Despite all his training he does not have chance to react it is so sudden and unexpected. He sits in shock for a moment before slowly starting to move his jaw.

Eventually he remembers to say “Ow.”

“You do not use that term in front of me.” Shannon glares, her accent suddenly strongly Irish. “I am no whore who drowns her husband for his wealth.”

Cale reaches for his jaw, feeling it almost as if he is checking it has not been dislocated. “Ok. Point taken. Sorry.” He says.

Shannon looks at Angela. “We are the river witches.” She glares at Cale as if her look itself can impress the term into his mind. “And we are the guardians of the river and the mothers who depend on its waters.” She snaps at Cale. “And don’t you ever forget it Hu-Man.”

The River Witches

The Selkie are Hexen-seals with the power to change into the form of seals using magical pelts or cloaks. The Selkie appear in legends all over the North sea.

They can be 'captured' by mortals who find their cloaks and hide them. Traditionally the captured Selkie became wives and mothers of the fishermen, although in some case they can be persuaded to grant wishes in exchange for the return of the cloak.

Many of these women have also displayed some limited magical ability, always revolving around the sea, and it has been noted its strength seems to depend on the state of the tide in the area of water they are inhabiting. Commonly referred to as Sea or River witches. Selkie witches can create new cloaks from the skins of a seal living in the waters they command and gift it to to any woman they deem worthy (usually their own children). Once worn the cloak becomes bound to her and makes her one of them. When a Selkie dies the skin rots away.

Only daughters are born to Selkie. Although captured 'human' selkie can have children of either sex. Traditionally fathers were sailors the Selkie tempted overboard. Although in modern ports there are a more reliable source of human males willing to mate now a days and "drowning the mate when he has done his bit" has gone out of fashion.

Liverpool has a small community of Selkie living in the mouth of the river, around the docks and out in Morecambe Bay. They are always referred to as 'the river witches' as the term Selkie has unfortunate connotations amongst the Irish catholic community. They have a love hate relationship going with the Mages Council, who consider their magic to be something of a joke.

Of all the factions they are the most politically active in the mortal community, engaging in local 'women's issues' and running a number of safe houses across the city for women and their children escaping domestic violence - something they can relate to after centuries of being "kidnapped and used for breeding by violent men" - which is their spin on the legends. They have close ties with the Dingle Mothers support group, a mortal collective who share many of their aim.

Selkie Template

Musts

Selkie skin - cost -2 and includes

Item of Power [+1 item bonus](YS page 167)

Beast Change [-1] (YS page 174)

Echoes of the Beast [-1] (YS page 163)

Human Form [+1] (YS page 176)

Aquatic [-1]

Immune to cold [-1]

Optionals

Channeling - weather [-2]

Ritual - Marimancy [-2] Magic relating to the sea

Face: Shannon

Shannon is the leader of the River witches. She lives in the Dingle and runs a small charity providing "support for destitute mothers and their children". She is a short rotund woman with grey hair which she wears in a bun. Her age could be anywhere between 50 and 70, though she is nearer to 150. She is a fairly common site in 'bed sit land' as she bustles around checking on 'her girls'.

Her personal magical abilities are actually quite limited, focusing mainly on creating talismans which act as warning tokens or provide some level of shielding should they be attacked.

Location: The Dingle

The Dingle lies to the south of the city, adjacent to Toxteth. It consists of rows of all but identical 2up-2 down terrace houses of red brick lining streets that slope down towards the river. Many of the houses are owned by a local housing association who specialise in renting to single mothers and their families; a successful business model as they can rely on the housing benefit to ensure a steady minimum level of payment. The families live in focused communities based on the streets. Children are constantly in and out of each others houses and titles like 'Mi Brother' and 'Aunty' are freely thrown around with little regard to any blood relationship.

Being close to the river, and full of women headed house hold it is perhaps not surprising to discover this place is a hot bed for the River Witches. Most streets have a representative living on them, quietly keeping an eye on her girls, encouraging them to make the best of themselves, keeping an eye open for threats, mentoring those with ability, and most importantly, dealing with any disputes with 'other streets' which can arise as the gangs of children vie for dominance.

There are also a number of safe houses scattered through the area that the River Witches can use to hide their charges, should that be required. Most are just 'normal' 2up-2downs that are not currently rented out by the housing association. But there is a purpose built refuge for the most serious of case; Riverview is a new brick built complex down on the water front. It has security guards and full CCTV coverage to keep those living there safe. Additionally each flat has a panic button system and a magical back up incase the system is 'hexed'. Finally there is a tunnel in the cellar that leads out to the river which is

hidden beneath the water even at low tide. This allows the River Witches, and those they are protecting, to enter or escape unobserved.

Location: Bootle and Kirkdale

Historically the Dingle is a protestant area, settled by welsh immigrants (and more than one welsh witch). The catholic equivalent is in Bootle in the north of the city around the docks. Other than the stronger accent, with carries a more pronounced taint of Irish, the communities and their behaviours are broadly the same. The houses in this area, except for the size, are very similar to those in the Dingle; typically they are 3-4- bed room and have attic space converted to provide more living space for the larger Catholic families.

There is a small community of River Witches just 'over the border', in nearby Kirkdale. They live in a collection of houses above a range of shops which they uses as cover for their activities; one is a Cafe, another sells prams, cots and (advice on raising young children and babies) and the finally one is a 'hippy-health food shop' which is a good source of herbs and similar paraphernalia for potions and talismans.

Location: Hilbre and the mudflats

A collection of 3 small islands at the mouth of the Dee and the mud flats of Liverpool bay are the home to a community of seals and the natural home of the Selkie. With the help of the Green Knight, Emma Clayton, the River witches managed have managed to get the area listed or protected by numerous agencies: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), Sensitive Marine Area (SMA), Natura 2000 site, Ramsar site.

The islands are own by the Wirral council, though there are a few private houses on it. One of these is a small cottage is owned by Miss Hilda Bergensdotter, who claims to be descended from St Hildeberg (who the Island is named after). She is the oldest of the river witches and is often seen down on the mudflats as the tide comes in collecting shellfish and talking to the seals and tending to those nearing the end of their lives. She has little to do with 'Those City Types' but is the best source of the skins needed to make new Selkie.