

MAD KALA STARGAZER

Name: Kamoe-Lani “Kala” Stargazer, a.k.a. “Mad Kala”

Theme: Outlaw

Class: Solarian

Homeworld: World (Okoro)

Age: “Born in the sixth season”

Race: Maraquoi

Sex: Zysha

Gender: Fluid, mostly female*

Alignment: CG

Deity: Desna

** Kala identifies as male, female or neuter depending on the situation. See below.*

CONCEPT

Character Concept: Exile from a hunter-gatherer tribe, Kala is an outlaw whose inscrutable and erratic exterior hides a damaged soul yearning for redemption and an almost naive faith in the power of freedom.

Five Words That Best Describe Them: Eccentric. Unpredictable. Impetuous. Audacious. Loyal.

What Do They Want Most? Redemption. To prove that she can put freedom to good use, make a difference and maybe even be accepted back home some day.

How Do They Go About Getting It? Journeying restlessly, seeking out risk and opportunities to prove herself. This has oftentimes before led Kala into disreputable company, and to her current outlaw status.

BACKGROUND

WHAT IS KALA'S BACKSTORY?

Birth and Family: Kamoe-Lani River's-End was born a *zysha*, the sacred seventh sex of her tribe. She didn't know at the time that she was something called a Maraquoi from a planet called Okoro. Her people were simply The People; the world was simply World. She was raised, the most promising of seven of her kind in the village, by the tribe's *sabelana* or songmaistre, the leading *zysha* named Ireq whose task was to show her charges how to be facilitators and lifesingers, to bridge the worlds of three kinds of male and three kinds of female and impart the Seventh Essence – that most ineffable part of the People's soul – to future generations.

Almost from the time she could talk, Kamoe-Lani knew the burden of expectation she bore. She was the anointed successor, the apple of Ireq's eye. And from the very first, she was torn between her happy and worshipful adoration of Ireq – alongside determination not to let her and the tribe and their ancestors down – and a yearning for something more.

The Lure of the Stars: The stars had held a powerful attraction for Kamoe-Lani (or “Kala”) ever since her first memories. Even in her remote village, the lights of the starships coming and going could be seen, the tales of the galaxy beyond could be heard. But much as she might yearn to, she never thought to actually travel Out There. Her appointed destiny was secretly stifling no matter how much she adored Ireq, but she indulged a secret passion for the galaxy Out There only in long nights spent staring up at the wonders of the cosmos. The rest of her tribe nicknamed her “Kala the Stargazer” for that habit of watching the night sky.

It was purely by chance that she happened upon the stranger on her tribe's lands. Well, not *quite* chance; she saw the flashes of the battle in the sky, saw the shooting star of his ship falling to World. The better word might have been destiny, that he fell in River's-End territory to be found by the one person in a thousand miles who would best appreciate finding him. That four-armed stranger in the twisted wreckage of his little scout ship, badly wounded and unconscious, was like nothing she had ever seen.

The Solarian Who Fell to World: The correct thing to do, of course, would be to bring him back to the Seven Paramounts of the village – Ireq among them – for those wise elders to decide what to do with him. But he looked so vulnerable, so alone. And he was from Out There.

She therefore took him back to the village and nursed him back to health without seeking anyone's permission. The Seven Paramounts were disapproving of her wilfulness, but they thought they understood: it was the simple curiosity of the young. When he was well enough to walk and speak again, the *kasatha* told her his name was Metweska. He was called a Starfinder, from the distant system whence so many of the Sky People hailed. His title sent Kala's heart to racing.

He was amused to learn her nickname -- he teased her that it was a good, solid *kasatha* name -- but as the pair shared stories of their respective cultures, he saw the way her eyes shone at the tales of distant worlds. He saw her watching the stars, and he sensed something in her. Metweska undertook to train her in a tradition of his people, by way of thanks for saving his life. At first her fellow-villagers were fascinated and encouraging... until the training began to manifest strange abilities in her that they had never seen before. Until it began to interfere with her lifesinger's training.

Strife Among the People: Ireq disapproved the most, ostensibly from fear for the tribe's future but perhaps also out of jealousy. She at first hinted heavily to the rest of the Seven that it was time for the *kasatha* to go; when they hesitated, he eventually went to them in her most sacred capacity as *sabelana* and demanded the Sky Man be driven out. Kala was both incensed and hurt by Ireq's opposition. The Sky Man's life-debt was to *her* and no-one else, and she swore that if Metweska was made to leave,

she would go with him. At first this stymied the Seven—a trained *zysha* was too valuable to lose—but it made them realize that Ireq was right. The stranger was disturbing the village and threatening the ordered world of the People. He had to go.

To her face they acceded to her ultimatum, but behind her back they decided to get rid of the kasatha whether he wished to go or not. Kala never knew whether Ireq was part of this ultimate decision, and it was sheerest bad luck that she had snuck to his hut to seek an extra lesson at just the time the warriors came for him. It was worse luck yet that when the first one entered -- brandishing his knife -- a shimmering solar spear caught him directly in the heart. Kala's solarian weapon, the first time she had ever manifested it. The second and third warriors came in from the rear and nearly managed to kill Metweska, but they froze with shock at seeing one of their brothers slain at Kala's feet, by the *zysha*'s hand. People had killed People. It was the ultimate taboo.

Where the Eye Does Not See: From that moment she was an exile from her tribe. The River's-End name was taken from her, ceremoniously and in full, humiliating assembly before her erstwhile loved ones. Metweska, heartbroken on her behalf and feeling guilty for his part in her tragedy, took her with him out into the Pact Worlds, where she took the nickname Stargazer as a surname. But the trauma of separation from her People left her never quite right again. She always seemed to be looking at a slightly different world from everyone else. She grew more and more eccentric and erratic... and one day, with a hand-scrawled note of apology (for she'd only recently learned to read) she left him.

"Mad Kala" wandered among the outlaws of the Pact Worlds after that, falling in with the disreputable and learning to make a living out of them. She had freedom at long last, but at a terrible cost. She could never go home, she could never shed her past, the stars were hers but she had no idea what to do with them. But she knew there had to be a way to make the terrible gift of freedom mean something... even if it was only to live for the day when she could hear her tribe and family speak her name again.

The Burden of the Slain: The three warriors who snuck into Metweska's guest hut that fateful night were ritually chosen from each of the male sexes of the tribe:

- *Welim River's-End* was an *ilsha* (earth-sire).
- *Haken River's-End* was a *qlsha* (sky-sire).
- *Pekena River's-End* was a *susha* (water-sire).

They were best friends, and all were close to Kala before the stranger fell to World. The one Kala accidentally killed was *Pekena*. At her hearing before the assembled tribe, his brothers were overruled by the village's Seven Paramounts when they argued that she deserved to be punished in kind for her crime. It's their enmity that weighs on her the most.

The Abandoned Master: Metweska's full name was (and presumably still is) *Metweska Abalakin Uradowan of the Clan Tarsawa, Third Brand-Bearer of Tawtasheyo, of the*

House Inomedon. Scion of a Great Family going back to the homeworld – but a relatively minor family on the worldship *Idari* itself – he was gruff, blunt and cantankerous but generous and warm-hearted under his surface mannerisms. Kala has never seen or spoken to him since parting ways.

The Path of Years: Kala has no idea how old she is, especially not in Pact Worlds standard years. If pressed, she will usually guess “twenty-one” because, as the full count of a maraquoi's fingers, toes and tail, it sounds good. Dates since arriving in the Pact Worlds are much easier on a good day:

- She came to the Pact Worlds with Metweska in 313 AG.
- She parted company with Metweska in 314 AG.
- She served aboard three ships between 314 and now. The first was the *S.S. Joytree*, a smuggler ship, under the command of Captain Attar Rose, a human. The second, the *S.S. Khanyang*, was a pirate ship captained by a halfling named Big Jo Trusk who was afflicted by what Kala calls “short man's pride-sickness” (we'd call it “Napoleon syndrome”) and it was an all-around unpleasant experience that she recollects spottily. After that, she returned to smuggling as a gunner aboard the *S.S. Convinced the Theory Was Sound*, captained by the early-stage barathu named Arbetion Twirlip-of-the-Mists.
- Kala made a mortal enemy aboard the *Khanyang* when she refused to allow a vesk-- one *Kforuz “Red” Redgrin of the Bonewalker Clan* – to duel a fellow crewmember over a perceived slight to his honour. She was compelled to leave the ship shortly thereafter; Redgrin has vowed to kill her next time they meet.
- Various local authorities have warrants out for Kala's arrest on parts of Eox, Triaxus and Liavara, usually for smuggling-related charges... but on one of these worlds she is mistakenly wanted for a violent crime committed by another crewman of the *Khanyang*.

Kala encountered undead from Eox in her travels aboard the *Khanyang* and though she tries to remind herself they are not all bad, she is instinctively repulsed by them on an almost cellular level.

Sex, Gender & Kala's Past: Kala presents to conventional humanoid and other two-sexed species as attractive, androgynous and asexual. In fact she is perfectly capable of attraction, pleasure and the appreciation of beauty; but to her, amorous pleasure is more about a kind of sacred ecstasy brought on by music, the more repetitive and incantatory the better. She tries physical experimentation from time to time out of abstract curiosity but is mostly puzzled by it. At the end of the day she remains a *zysha* through and through.

She follows maraquoi *zysha* conventions of gender reference. Kala is a “she” when practising virtues her tribe saw as “feminine”: protecting and foraging for self and family, manifesting toughness, determination and guile, offering advice and

encouragement. Kala is a “he” when practising “masculine” virtues: hunting, tracking, cooking, crafting weaponry, slinging good natured insults, going on the offensive against a shared enemy of the People or their allies. *Zyshae* had latitude to do both as needed, and reserved their own *zysha* pronoun – rendered in other languages with gender-neutral pronouns like “ve” and “ver” -- for specifically sacred occasions when acting or speaking in the course of their duties as a lifesinger.

She also, despite her best efforts at understanding aliens, instinctively thinks of other species in maraquoi sex and gender terms. She will automatically try to size up alien males in terms of earth, sky and water, and alien females as being sharers, bearers and/or nurturing defenders. In rare individuals she'll see a union of these elements, which will fascinate her; rarer yet she will sense something like the Seventh Essence in them—especially in those who join an instinct for diplomacy with an appreciation of beautiful music, or who seem un-scannable as any of the “mundane” six sexes—and relate to them as fellow-zyshae (Arbetion Twirlip-of-the-Mists was one of these). She's learned to try her best not to talk this way out loud, because it invariably confuses people, but she sometimes forgets, especially at particularly crucial or emotionally-loaded moments of decision or character evaluation.

Almost nobody off the surface of Kala's homeworld has ever known her by the gender-neutral pronoun that would be proper to sacred *zysha* work, mainly because she's no longer in contact with other maraquoi and anyway thinks of herself as having lost the right to use it. Most often she identifies by the female pronoun, which is why it's used here.

WHAT THREE THINGS DOES KALA HOLD SACRED, AND WHAT THREE THINGS DOES SHE OPPOSE UTTERLY?

Sacred: Freedom, Family, Respect.

The last one is the respect all life pays to all life, including that of the hunter-gatherer for prey, and Kala's definition of “life” is broad. She has an animistic view even of entities most other sapient beings don't see as being alive at all – like security 'bots or even (with shuddering effort) undead – and she will insist on paying respect to fallen foes with a hunter's or defender's song-for-the-fallen wherever it's the least bit practicable.

Anathema: Betrayal, Oppression, Cruelty.

Betrayal is most especially betrayal of the duty towards family and People – she feels acute shame when confronted by the memory of having herself committed this crime, however inadvertently – and betrayal of duties of protection of a guest or adopted family member, a crime of which she can't help but impeach her former tribe in her heart even as she yearns with every fibre of her being for reunion with them.

HAS SHE EVER BEEN IN LOVE?

A *zysha* is a lover in a very real sense to any group of mates they have laughed, sung, danced, meditated, howled and wept with during the mating process, and has a lifelong bond with all of them. Kala had done her first two Mating Rites under Ireq's supervision before her exile and so technically left at least twelve “lovers” on her homeworld.

DOES SHE HAVE ENEMIES?

Oh, yes. See above.

WHO HAD THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON HER LIFE?

A tie between Ireq – who defined both her tribal life and her traumatic sundering from it – and Metweska, who ushered her into a new and vivid life without restrictions or apparent purpose.

She has profoundly conflicted feelings about both of them. Love, admiration and respect but also deep hurt and bewilderment for Ireq whose betrayal cut her so deeply. A mixture of awe and wonder, affection and regard and deeply-repressed blame for Metweska, whose gifts she cannot imagine living without and yet cannot reconcile to their price. Her regard for him runs very deep, though; he was one of the few males of an alien species in which she sensed a unity of earth and sky and a deep-seated quest for water.

PRESENTATION

WHAT DOES KALA LOOK LIKE?

Kala is a trim, fit and compact figure of short stature, with angular features often described by those encountering her as pretty, and has a coat of short, dark-blue fur. Her movements are graceful and deliberate and her face often looks misleadingly serene. She has long, lustrous dark red hair which she still wears in the style of the River's-End tribe, a kind of mohawk tied back into myriad tiny braids that in their turn are bound into one long braid down her back.

Her dress and appearance is a curious mixture of functionality and whimsy. She clearly dresses with the basics of survival in mind, favouring comfortable travel clothes adapted to her physique. But joined to this, when she's not on a job requiring stealth (and sometimes even when she is) comes a riotous exploration of every cockamamie trend the Pact Worlds have had on offer:

- She wears a tattered but still voluminous feather boa apparently made of synthetic firebird feathers.
- She thinks metal studs and spikes are pretty and wears bracelets, chokers, elbow and shoulder pads and belts featuring them as decoration wherever possible. These often come mixed with clashing animal prints from half a dozen different planets and lacy underthings misused(?) as accessories over other clothing.
- She favours a collection of sunglasses and goggles – like many maraquoi she often finds the brightness of standard settings off her home-world jarring – which in her case come in a variety of bright neon or pastel colours and various star, heart and half-moon shapes.

- Much of her sober travel garb comes decorated with a kaleidoscopic assortment of patches and decals, many of them featuring butterflies and some of them weirdly tasteless. In an echo of her onetime calling, she's fascinated by some species' mating practices and representations of the feminine and the masculine, and the back of one of her travel jackets features a well-endowed naked lashunta male sporting a come-hither look and kept barely modest by the letters of the phrase *"I Got Your Lashunta Magic Right Here!"* She's equal-opportunity; the back of her matching second-favourite jacket features a voluptuous pin-up pixie girl who leaves nothing to the imagination surrounded by the slogan *"Float Like a Butterfly with La-La!"*
- Her favourite t-shirt is a white, pink, maroon and orange tie-dyed affair that features animagraphics of a neon-green butterfly and a scrolling purple-lettered phrase translated in fifteen different languages: *"Well, That Did Not Go the Way I Planned."*

The overall effect is a curious mixture of frontiersman, colour-blind club kid and never-was rock star. Where she can get them, she often smokes a melange of healing herbs from Okoro – non-intoxicant and neutral in any other effect, they just soothe her and remind her of home – wrapped up in the style of a cigar.

Other than her hair, her footwear is the clearest testament to her background. Kala regards boots and shoes in general as torture devices and escapes them whenever possible, preferring soft sandals at a minimum and bare feet whenever remotely possible.

WHAT DOES KALA SOUND LIKE?

She speaks noticeably-accented Common, and what she has to say is often a little hard to parse. (She'll greet people by saying *"It is a day like any other night,"* that sort of thing.) Kind of like if Neytiri from *Avatar* had just finished huffing glitter-glue while reading weird poetry.

She will very often refer to herself in the third person: *"Kala thinks your orbit may soon intersect starlight, and she's sorry about that"* or *"Kala, he will do what water calls for doing."* This is not normal for maraquoi any more than it's normal for anyone else – someone with training in psychiatry will recognize it as a symptom of a species of dissociative identity disorder – and is one of the habits that earned her the "Mad Kala" epithet.

WHAT ARE KALA'S MOST PRIZED POSSESSIONS?

There are three of them, two of which are pendants: one is a soapstone carving of a stylized singing *zysha*, a gift from Ireq when Kala completed her first supervised Mating Rite with success; the second is a cheap, gift-store Desna symbol in translucent pink neo-plastic which she rushed out and purchased from a little shop on Absalom Station when she first realised that she was going to be a Desnaite believer.

The third item is an iron ring surmounted by a sizable blue crystal wrapped in minutely-

engraved golden wiring. This, a gift from Metweska, is not only her first and thus far only solarian weapon crystal but also a memento of her time with her teacher. The micro-miniature engraving is a kasatha Solarian blessing: *"May thy specific gravity pull toward the greater good, and be resonant all the orbits of thy years."*

WHAT ARE KALA'S COMFORT AND DISCOMFORT ZONES?

She has developed a surprising taste for trashy nightclub music since coming to the Pact Worlds—possibly it reminds her of incantatory Mating Rite music on Okoro—and one of her absolute favourite things to do is dance. She pursues dance the way the randier members of another species might pursue sex.

She finds the formal occasions of urbane, refined and "civilized" peoples utterly disorienting and excruciating. Class- and wealth-based pretensions simultaneously confound and repel her. Her personal Hell is a dinner party filled with inane banter from people whose opinions aren't half as profound as they think they are.

WHAT ARE KALA'S UNEXPECTED QUIRKS?

Kala has become something of a junkie for three different kinds of Pact Worlds pop culture: Ysoki family dramas (possibly because their big, sprawling, chatter-prone families remind her of the vast extended family of River's-End); Kasatha religious art shows (meditative, deliberate and traditional, these soothing products were a favourite of Metweska's and remain a connection to him); and Android soap operas (she's fascinated by the unfamiliar complexity of sex, gender and life changes these admittedly cheesy romantic dramas tend to revolve around, a kind of complexity that sets androids apart from many other alien peoples). When she has down-time she's often watching one of these.

Kala also carries with her a bound copy of a bizarre academic monograph titled *Interplanar Sapient Positioning and Motility: Hexapodia as the Key Insight by Arbetion Twirlip-of-the-Mists, SPI*. This was a gift from her last Captain—a scholar before his life as a smuggler—which she promised to read despite the near-certainty that she will never make heads or tails of it. A promise made to a family member is a promise to be kept, and she will often be found sound asleep after having made an abortive run at another page of it.

SUPPLEMENTARY: MAD KALA'S OUTWARD SYMPTOMS.

Kala is more than just quirky. She is genuinely suffering from mental illness as a result of being traumatically sundered from the People. There are thus other things that may sometimes seem like resultant "quirks" -- these may not be unexpected to someone capable of diagnosing dissociative identity disorders, although they may confound someone who expects childhood abuse or trauma rather than tribal separation anxiety to be the source – in Kala's behaviour:

- Her recall of her past is highly variable. There will be days when she does not recall anything about even very significant figures in her life that she may have mentioned. Patches of her life as an outlaw alternately are completely lost to her or become painful obsessions.

- Emotionally loaded experiences often seem to temporarily or permanently delete themselves from her memory, even minutes after the fact and especially if they involve combat or killing. This can create uncertainty about events even for her: someone could confound her with an accusation of a murder about which she genuinely doesn't recollect either her own guilt or innocence.
- She periodically gets inexplicable headaches and pains in her right arm (the arm with which she accidentally killed Peken River's-End). She can be prone to medicating with alcohol or drugs when this happens.
- She often seems not to feel or acknowledge pain even when wounded.
- She suckles her thumb when sleeping, in the manner of a very small infant in her nurturing-defender's pouch.
- In times of extreme personal anguish or trauma, she will occasionally "lose time" and wake up in strange places with no idea how she got there.
- Very occasionally, she experiences storms of emotion – predominantly guilt, sorrow, or rage – that she can't explain or relate to anything.

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

Religion: Kala is a genuine believer in Desna. Encountering the creed of Desna worshippers was a shock of recognition, an external manifestation of what she felt inside since her first childhood memories, and she was a swift convert. She also likes that Desna's worship requires action rather than rituals -- especially not the kind of rituals which would make her feel like she was betraying River's-End traditions, which are still dear to her.

Politics: The politics of the civilized peoples of the Pact Worlds are largely inscrutable to Kala, for the most part. She thinks of things in personal, situational and tribal / family terms.

There are exceptions. She tries to be understanding of aliens and not to rush to judgement, but can't help feeling disgust for those who kill members of their own peoples in war, crime or "business." (This feeling is at once the programming of maraquoi tribal ethics and the shadow of her own guilt.)

She also has very definite opinions of those who practice the enthrallment of others, which to her mind is never acceptable no matter what excuse is made for it. This can seem like radical politics because it extends to those who accept the impoverishment of certain classes of people in the name of "order," like the "good" people of AbadarCorp and the wealthy upper crust of Absalom Station; but it's as much the instinctual reaction of someone born to the relative egalitarianism of the hunter-gatherer tribe as anything else.

She's an avid sports fan, since to her sports are the next best thing to the worthy endeavours of hunting and foraging that civilized societies have to offer. Her opinions

are cast in maraquoi terms about the varying virtues of manliness and femininity, though, and make little sense to non-maraquoi. She respects brutaris for its earth-and-water virtues, for instance, but thinks Starlance is a superior demonstration of sky-virtues.

Things She Will Balk at Killing: Kala's hunter-gatherer background is still deeply imprinted on her. She finds it hard to watch the wasteful hunting or unnecessary killing of animals, especially where proper respect is not paid to the creature's soul with song.

Things She Will Kill (or Die) For: According to the Maraquoi tradition of hospitality: someone to whom she owes her life, or who owes their life to her. A member of her tribe or family; this still applies to adopted families however circumstantial, and for her is a way of connecting to some part of her lost tribe at home. Someone whom she has made a guest in her family.

Her first experience of killing was traumatic enough that she deeply dislikes it, though, and avoids it when she can.

How She Would Choose to Die: She would die in the arms of the River's-End tribe, forgiven and understood at last and after sharing all the stories of her wanderings with her songmaistre *Ireq*. Failing that, dying in defense of an adopted family would do. (It's not Plan A, though; there's always a glimmer of hope for that first one.)

Would Most Like to Be Remembered For: Doing something meaningful and brave. Bringing something good into the cosmos, however small, even if it's just an extra day of life for a comrade.