

# Harvest of THORNS



A Tribe  Sourcebook



Dream Pod

A Tribe  Sourcebook

## Harvest of THORNS

"I could feel it in the wind in those days, the cutting cold that would seep in through all the celebrations and the growing hopes. We forgot too soon that we were not a whole people, and that we still had enemies who could match everything we could do. We were lazy. We did not look to our own, we did not remember to remain ever vigilant. The price of that failure was a harvest of thorns, a bitter reaping that cost us blood and tears."

- Daus, Poet of the Fallen

Harvest of Thorns is a cycle supplement detailing one of the silent and hidden confrontations between the Guides and a circle of powerful Tribal priestesses. This book contains the story of a conspiracy reaching back over a decade, and the men and women caught up in its epic sweep. Included are complete resources for involving your Characters in this bitter feud, including a chance to stop a mad Z'abri lord and delve deep into the secrets of the Guides.

Harvest of Thorns includes:

- Full character descriptions and write-ups for a powerful new shadow-cast Circle.
- Further information about Z'abri heartstones and the powers of the Guides.
- Guidelines for running a campaign based on a war between the shadow-cast and the Guides.
- More than a dozen new NPCs.

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Table of Contents

T  
A  
B  
L  
E  
O  
F  
C  
O  
N  
T  
E  
N  
T  
S

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**CHAPTER ONE: FAIR IS FOUL AND FOUL IS FAIR ..... 4**  
 Omens in the Wind ..... 5  
 The Apprentice's Charge ..... 6  
 Silence ..... 6  
 The Seeking ..... 7

**CHAPTER TWO: NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL ..... 8**  
 Bitter Fruit ..... 9  
 Through a Glass Darkly ..... 9  
 A Judge's Defense ..... 10  
 A Lover's Perspective ..... 10  
 Confession ..... 11  
 Hints and Allegations ..... 11  
 The Planting of a Seed ..... 12  
 A Hidden Gift ..... 13  
 Baiting the Trap ..... 13  
 To Catch a Thief ..... 13  
 Daggers of Kindness ..... 14  
 Confrontation ..... 14  
 Confirmation ..... 15  
 Letters ..... 16  
 Final Judgment ..... 16  
 The Final Blow ..... 17  
 Ashes ..... 17

**CHAPTER THREE: MINISTERS OF GRACE ..... 18**  
 Family Ties ..... 19  
 Prayer of the Faithful ..... 19  
 Visitation ..... 20  
 The Witching Hour ..... 20  
 Secrets of the Grave ..... 21  
 A Son's Worry ..... 21  
 Tradition ..... 21  
 A Wife's Fear ..... 22  
 The Mousetrap ..... 22  
 Madness and Deceit ..... 23  
 Bringing Down the House ..... 23  
 Drama Offstage ..... 23  
 Truth ..... 24  
 Call to Unite ..... 24  
 Divided We Fall ..... 24  
 Shame and Fear ..... 25  
 Final Loss ..... 25

**CHAPTER FOUR: THE SERPENT'S TOOTH ..... 26**  
 A Cry in the Streets ..... 27  
 Hearth and Home ..... 27  
 A Daughter's Defense ..... 27  
 Full Summer ..... 27  
 Autumn Rising ..... 28  
 Winter's Cold ..... 28  
 Sibling Rivalry ..... 29  
 Darkening Season ..... 30  
 The Long Winter ..... 30  
 Year's End ..... 31  
 Rebirth ..... 31  
 Uprooted ..... 31  
 The Storm ..... 32  
 Vision ..... 32  
 Fallen Bridge ..... 33  
 Hom ..... 33

**CHAPTER FIVE: SWEAR NOT BY THE MOON ..... 34**

Lies ..... 35

First Blood ..... 35

Father's House ..... 36

    The Blizzard ..... 36

The Seduction, Part One ..... 36

The Offer ..... 37

    The Seduction, Part Two ..... 38

    The Seducer Seduced ..... 38

Absolution ..... 39

Crossing the Rubicon ..... 39

    A Confession ..... 39

A Shadow of the Truth ..... 40

Leaving Home ..... 40

A Sister's Betrayal, an Uncle's Rage ..... 40

    Confrontation ..... 41

    The Ride ..... 41

The Arrest ..... 41

The Cruellest Cut ..... 42

Seeds of Hope ..... 43

    Vision ..... 43

**CHAPTER SIX: BY THE PRICKING OF MY THUMBS ..... 44**

What the Thunder Said ..... 45

    Four Winds ..... 45

    Transference ..... 46<sup>xx</sup>

Shadow in the Evening ..... 46

Whispers of Immortality ..... 47

Sowing to Reap ..... 48

    Fair Harvest ..... 48

Come Like Shadows ..... 48

**CHAPTER SEVEN: WEAVER RESOURCES ..... 50**

Behind the Scenes ..... 51

    The Circle of the Sower ..... 51

    Den Hades' Vision ..... 51

So it Begins ..... 51

Theme and Mood ..... 52

    Not Wisely but Too Well: Judah the Cursed ..... 52

    Angels and Ministers of Grace: Alexei the Silent ..... 52

    How Sharper than the Serpent's Tooth: Anna the Prophetess ..... 53

    Swear Not By the Moon: Colette the Hopeful ..... 53

The Time of Reaping ..... 54

    Poisoned Future ..... 54

    The Cast ..... 54

    Quest Points ..... 54

    Poisoned Past ..... 55

    The Cast ..... 55

    Quest Points ..... 56

    Poisoned Love ..... 56

    The Cast ..... 57

    Quest Points ..... 57

    Poisoned Hope ..... 58

    The Cast ..... 58

    Quest Points ..... 58

The Shadow Cast ..... 59

    Lishan ..... 59

    Aucausin ..... 60

    Nidagresa ..... 60

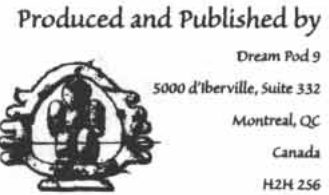
The Seeds ..... 61

    Judah ..... 61

    Alexei ..... 62

    Anna ..... 62

    Colette ..... 63



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## Chapter one: Fair Is Foul and Foul is Fair

Fair is foul and foul is fair

When the Seeds of Winter hang in the air.

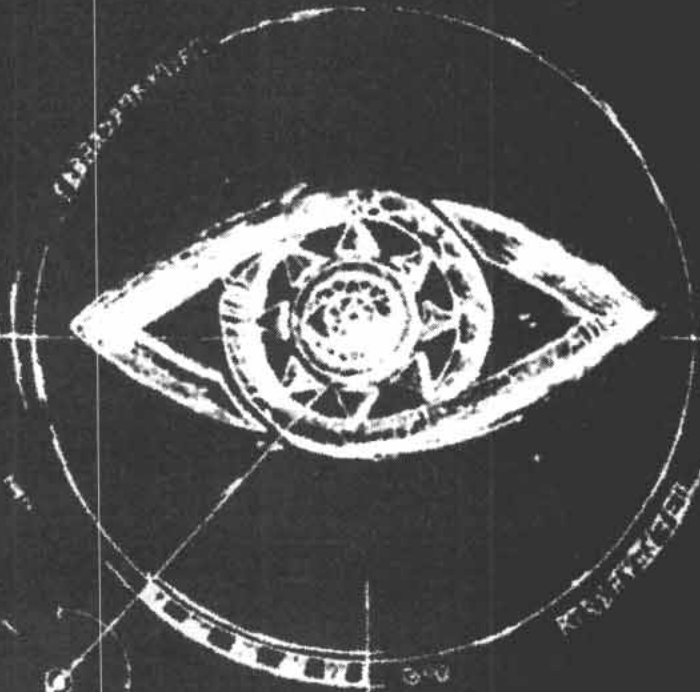
Their burrowing bodies fall to the soil,

Dipping to the dirt and smelling its toil,

Till the winds of autumn blow,

And the harvest of thorns begins to grow.

— Tribal Chant





## Omens in the Wind

From a conversation between Halos and Den Hades:

"Have you smelled it in the air? The scent of spent soil and smeared grime?" Den Hades' voice was tired as she spoke the question, half muffled against Halos' shoulder.

"I have." His reply rumbled out of his chest, the shivering sound of realization of a sin long forgotten. "Something is moving in the wind; something is leaving the scent of soiled hopes in the river and in the earth."

Silence for a time, then the woman asked in a lower voice, "Can you tell where it comes from? All that I can find is the smell, and it seems to come from all around."

Careful and considering came the reply, "It does come from all around. There seems to be more than one source of the stink. It is like it has been scattered around us in a falling circle, and now slowly closes in." For a moment it seemed as though he would say more, and then his voice cut off.

"The Voices?"

Halos nodded in reply, eyes closed and his breathing shallow.

"What do they tell you?" Den Hades' voice was caught between fear and harsh expectation.

"That a harvest of thorns is coming upon us, and will rend our skin unless we find the source of it."





**Zachari**

Born to two Blades of Joan, Zachari learned the pain of a parent's scorn and disappointment almost from the cradle, as his right arm and left leg were twisted and nearly useless. Bitter and angry, Zachari turned to thieving. He was far too careless for his own good, however, and was eventually caught stealing from a powerful member of the Weaponshapers Guild. His parents were humiliated, and decided to let him be cast out.

Once he fell Zachari found his real talent when he met Den Hades in Hom. Recognizing the spark of power in the young man, she took him under her rather harsh wing as an apprentice. Now Zachari is slowly developing into a Guide, and is held back only by his own belief that he never can do anything really useful or important.

**Highlights:** Talented, bitter, self-doubting.

**Attributes:** AGI -2, BLD -1, CRE +1, KNO +1, PSY +2.

**Eminences:** Devotion and Mystery

**Skills:** Dreaming 3/+2, Human Perception 2/+2, Lore (Dream realms) 2/+1, Music 1/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Sneak 2/-2, Streetwise 1/0.

**The Apprentice's Charge**

**From the recollections of Zachari:**

Den Hades pulled me out of bed by the hair, yanking me onto the dirt floor when I didn't wake fast enough. Tossing my clothes into a pile on top of me she growled that I should get dressed and then stormed from my room. You don't argue with Den Hades; that is the first lesson you learn in your apprenticeship. I pulled my clothes on, and boots still in hand went hobbling out after her.

Halos was there too, his face harder than I'd ever seen it. He kept looking out towards the night sky like there were omens written there. When I looked all I saw were hazy clouds over distant stars. While Den Hades crossed into one of the small rooms in the back, a room that I had never been allowed into, Halos came to me and asked if I remembered the lessons about deep trances and searchings.

I told him I did, thinking that I was going to have a chance to prove that I could be more than a mere apprentice at long last. He just watched me for several minutes, and I felt my elation drain away.

"Good." He said finally. "Because tonight Den Hades is going into one of the stones. You will watch over her, and if anything goes wrong it will be up to you to notice and then to fetch me. Do you understand how important this is, boy?"

I swallowed slowly and nodded. I had heard about going into the stones, but I had never actually seen it done. Going inside gave you great power, power to seek and find things that would be hidden from mortal eyes — maybe even from the Fatimas. It wasn't without a cost, though; one of the other apprentices had told me that if you slipped while you were inside, your spirit would never come back out.

Now I was going to watch my mistress go in, and I had to be sure she returned.

**Silence**

**From the reflections of Halos:**

I dared not enter the room where the woman who shared my bed and sometimes my heart went into the stone. We were too close on this and sometimes too many bodies are not company, but just a crowd. Especially for Den Hades and her pain and anger. I left her to Zachari, let him sweat and stew and fear her cutting tongue — it would do them both good.

As I loitered, looking out at the false gray light of the predawn, I tasted the wind for the tang of the power that surrounded us. Subtle and invasive, it was there, a smoke rising from scorched ground to touch my nose with fear. It could not be a Fatima that was doing this — it was both too much and too little for one of those. No, this had the taste of mere humanity all over it. Mere humanity with its endless capacity and endless emptiness.



Now, when I would have welcomed them, the voices that chorus inside my head till I feel like I am falling have gone silent. They will speak no more about the seeds of the harvest of thorns. Inside my mind there is a silence like breath being held, a sense of expectant watching.

I cannot help it; I feel that there is more here than even the voices know. There is something hidden even deeper than the stink of the plot which is slowly sliding around us. I cannot help but wonder if perhaps those who would destroy us are not wrong, if they do not have some reason for the hate that poisons the air.

## The Seeking

### From the memory of Den Hades:

Choosing the correct stone is always the hardest part for me. Sitting with the stones I knew best arrayed across my knees, I closed my eyes and went still, went deep. Each stone has its own tympan, a vibration like a sound half heard along the edge of the ear. That is how it has always been to me, a sound. Others see the stones in other ways, colors, shapes, tastes. . . it all depends on how one truly sees, I suppose. I wonder how many times someone whom we have guided has yelled at us because we would not simply tell them what to do. They do not understand that we do not tell them because we do not know — everyone must find their own path to the hearts of the stones. Telling someone else how to use a stone is much like telling them how to breathe. If only the fools would fall silent long enough to listen, they would understand.

Stillness settled over me as I took the stones out one by one. The sounds of one were just too high, the sounds of another grating along my spine like claws. No stone is ever completely pleasant, but for every journey there will be a stone that is the least unpleasant. The trick is finding it out, for the stones will try to lie to you. That is the part that the students learn the fastest, for those who don't do not live long. Even dead a Z'bri is still a passionate force, and no such thing should ever be dealt with lightly.

Distantly I heard the breath of Zachari as he leaned in close, watching my face with worry. I did not even have to open my eyes to know it; the wretched boy reeks of sweat when he becomes nervous. Pushing away those traces of the external world I slipped farther away from the shell of life as I came to the last two stones.

In my left hand a paean of distant sibilance quivered its way through my palm and into my wrist, the sound of old flesh gone to dust and crying out for the touch of blood to raise and rouse it once more towards the dance. In my right hand there was the dark, deep throb of a place lost in darkness and shadows, the sound of a heartbeat resounding from arched walls that stood ever shrouded and looming with the sense of inevitable weight. All that was worst of dark and bright hung between those two stones, and each seemed ready to swallow me.

I put the right stone aside, settling it into the case without having to look, and centered the last stone in my lap. I moved into the sound of sibilant hisses, endlessly serenading my soul away from worlds and times and sounds other than that endless rasping breath. Through the sound I moved, till the world flew away and I plunged through the river of hot sound, cascading over my skin with a lingering and flushed caress.

Into the depths I went, and before my mind the gates were opened. A flood poured out upon me, sudden and fierce as the floods of a storm that sweep down the great Canal to crush all before their white fury. Clinging tight to the heart that still beat calm inside my breast, and the feel of my own breath across my nose, I stood against the torrent.

I centered and recovered, and then I let the wave pour through me. A million spirits sang to me, swimming out of the deep pools to hold images before my eyes. I saw a thousand lives like stars spread out below me in an endless parade. Four of those stars gleamed suddenly, twinkling like they were wishing upon me, and I was swept close to them.

Their voices poured over me, memories not my own filled my mind and letters I had never seen filled my eyes. Scattered and shattered, broken into fragments and voices, the knowing came upon me and I saw. . .

## Chapter two: Judah the Cursed

Judge me! Judge me!

I have dirt behind my ears,

I have stolen candy in my pockets,

I have mischief in my eyes.

Judge me! Judge me!

But remember that the Goddess will judge you too,

And your nails are stained red.

—Agnite Song



## Bitter Fruit

### Judah the Cursed, Fallen Terasheban, speaks:

When they think I am not listening, I hear the members of my cell gossiping about me. "How did he get here?" the young ones always ask. "Why is he here?" I have lived in this corner of Hom for ten years now, and still they do not trust me. I am a bitter old man, and perhaps they are right to fear.

It was not always this way. Once I was respected, a Judge among the Tribes. Judah Thaim'on — I was proud, noble, and rising daily in Her favor. If you talk to most of the Fallen that linger in the streets of Hom like the dirty snow that collects in late winter, they will tell you that the Fatimas are death, that they themselves were wrongfully accused and cast out. But I was a Judge, and I will tell you differently. We are criminals, all of us, including myself.

Once, the world was brighter and the glory of Tera Sheba shone round Her children. There were fewer lawless then, and we, Her Chosen, drank in Her wisdom like the purest milk a mother ever gave her children. I had everything I ever wanted, from my earliest childhood on — everything, except a wife to share in my triumphs. I was weak. I know that now.

## Through a Glass Darkly

I was taken by the Evan girl the moment I saw her. Her father, a simpleton named Janus, came before my court, claiming a Joanite had assaulted him — a serious charge. However, it became apparent that the Evan was lying, and he was justly punished. I should have realized then that the fruit falls not far from the tree. But I was blinded by Rebecca's beauty, by her demure demeanor.

For months I courted her. I was nearly twice her age, thirty to her sixteen, but it mattered little. It was by the grace of Tera Sheba that I won her heart, and it was through her father's fear of the Thaim'on clan that I took her to wife. My joy was complete; I believed that the Fatimas smiled on me and my marriage.

I went to Griffentowne to live with my new wife's family. I acted out of respect for tradition as well as a desire to bring the Order of Tera Sheba to the outlying areas. The Evans of Griffentowne were good representatives of their Fatima, docile and gentle. I believed that true to their nature, they would prove fertile soil for the Law. Unfortunately, mine were not the only eyes to view the Evans as potential allies.

Galen Larakin, one of Magdalen's Diplomats, also lived among the Evans, using his charm and handsome face to manipulate the naïve farmers and bring them to his side. The balance of power shifted with my coming, and the Magdalite lost ground. He was a worthwhile adversary, however, and the debates we engaged in became legendary.

Those were happy days, glowing with the warmth of the sun over Evan fields. Life was measured in careful, orderly moments, and Rebecca made me happier than any man in Vimary. She was a good, dutiful wife, and longed for nothing more than my happiness and for a child to call her own.

Or so I believed. More the fool I.





### Louis Medi'on

The lesser son of a well-known family, Louis Medi'on always sought ways to draw attention to himself.

With his ingratiating manner and self-confidence born of arrogance, he managed to succeed, becoming first an Advocate then a Judge.

When Judah and Rebecca first married, Louis was a rising star among the Advocates in the Courthouse. His assignment to keep an eye on Judah was to be an important one.

After Judah's fall, Louis's career moved forward in leaps and bounds. Within two years, he was a Judge in his own right. There his

lack of skill proved to be a detriment, and within five years he had been exiled to Hom for abusing his authority as a Judge. At his trial, more information emerged regarding his involvement in Judah's fall, for which he was also condemned. He spends most of his time on Hom trying to avoid Judah and his cell, knowing that Judah will not show mercy in his desire for revenge.

**Highlights:** Arrogant, deceitful, calculating.

**Attributes:** CRE +1, INF +1, KNO +1, PER +2, PSY -1, WIL +1

**Skills:** Etiquette, 2/+1, Human Perception 1/-1, Interrogation 2/0, Investigation 1/+2, Law 2/+2, Notice 1/0, Read/Write (Tribal) 2/+1, Theatrics 2/+1

## A Judge's Defense

From the trial of Louis Medi'on, Fallen Judge:

I am not an evil man. Hear my words before you judge me, you who were once my brethren in the Law. Everything I have done, I have done for the glory of Tera Sheba. When Judah Thaim'on took one outside of our fold for his wife, I worried, but I knew he would not listen to me, then a lowly Advocate.

Not six moons after Judge Thaim'on left us, word reached the Courthouse of potential trouble in Griffentowne, growing tension with the Magdalite faction there. I was and am ever eager to serve the Fatima; it was an honor to be chosen to visit Judge Thaim'on in his Evan outpost. I was to observe his Court and report back to the High Judges. I was to be subtle, of course. To any who asked, I explained that I had been sent to assist Judge Thaim'on in his work among the Evans. Was that not the truth?

What I found disturbed me. The Court itself was well ordered, for the greater part. The Judge's household, however, was a different matter altogether. The creeping deterioration I witnessed there hinted at secrets well hidden beneath the surface of things. The Magdalite, Larakin, visited the homestead at all hours of the day and night and was often seen in the company of Judge Thaim'on and his wife, the Evan.

Fools and old women smirked behind their hands, wondering if Larakin had yet won over young Rebecca. They whispered that the Judge was so stern and forbidding that he would surely never knowingly allow such a union. They said he was a jealous man, and kept his pretty young wife under close watch, that he had eyes throughout the household guarding Rebecca's virtue. Wagers were made — within my own hearing! — as to when she would fall prey to Larakin's easy smile and wicked green eyes.

These simple farmers mocked their Judge behind his back, and his honor was threatened. I knew then that something had to be done. I began to formulate a plan.

## A Lover's Perspective

From the private letters of Galen Larakin:

You write to me, dear cousin, asking after the tragedy that befell the Evans of Griffentowne so long ago. I have no doubt, knowing Xstasis as I do, that you have heard rumors of my supposed role in the drama.

Allow me to first enumerate the players for you, my girl. First was Judah Thaim'on, exiled for nearly twelve summers now, as proud a Judge as Vimary has seen. The man could have given the High Judges lessons in the Law, down to each syllable. We knew one another from the start as men with opposing aims, but we respected one another.

However, Judah had one weakness, and all of Griffentowne knew it. I wish you could have seen her, cousin. One look from Rebecca's gray eyes would have sent you into agonies of longing. The sight of her hair in the afternoon light would have cost you many nights' praying to Magdalen for the grace to win her to your bed. That hair spilled down the curves of her back like the shining wheat that billowed in the fields. She was as lovely as the wild deer that roamed the woods, and nearly as timid. Who could blame her, when Judah watched her with the eyes of a starving wolf?

## Confession

Yes, cousin, I loved her. I was young, barely twenty, and part of me hated Judah for winning her love when he was so old, so forbidding. What could he know of Magdalen's pleasures? What could he give a young girl to keep her warm during the cold winter nights? I was a foolish boy, unwise in the ways of the heart. For do not let any deceive you, child: the pleasure and pain our Mistress gives us have as much to do with the heart as the loins.

I spent endless hours at Judah and Rebecca's homestead. Ostensibly I was there to debate politics and law with Judah, but, oh my dear, how many of those visits were the result of absolute longing to see Rebecca again! I took every opportunity to speak with her, used the most subtle tricks I had to woo her. She was as true as the earth she worked, though, as pure as the water that flowed over her fields. But in the end, none of that mattered.

## Hints and Allegations

### From the trial of Louis Medi'on, Fallen Judge:

Judge Thaim'on was blind to the truth. I knew the only way to open his eyes would be to force them open, ripping his illusions away. I knew it would be painful, but, like lancing a boil, I knew the pain would bring healing.

What do you say? Who was I to judge? You were not there. You did not see how our position was being undermined by the disorder in the Judge's own household. If a Judge cannot keep his house in order, how can he hope to keep the Tribes in order?

So unreasoning was the nature of the Judge's refusal to see what was so plainly before him that I knew I had to find solid, incontrovertible proof before he would believe me. I needed proof of the ruinous path his life was threatening to follow. Were things to continue, Judge Thaim'on would no longer be above reproach, and for a Judge even the appearance of impropriety is too much.

On my next return visit to the Courthouse, perhaps a month after I left it, I spoke to my superior, Marguerite Medi'on. I told her of my concerns and my fears for Griffentowne.

Her response was a moment in coming, but her words stern. "I tried to warn Judah of his folly before he married the girl. You must warn him of what you see. If he has retained his senses, he will assist you in your search for proof. If he has not, then we will have our answer either way, will we not?"

"Yes, Your Honor, we will." I paused, reluctant to speak my next words. "And if he will not listen to me, Your Honor?"

The Judge's cold blue eyes pinned me where I stood. She smiled, resembling nothing so much as a stooping hawk. "Then you will have discharged your duty, and Judah will become the responsibility of another. Return to Griffentowne, and do as I have instructed you."



### Galen Larakin

Galen Larakin is a man who has gotten almost everything he has ever wanted out of life. His classically masculine beauty and Magdalite charisma have served him well. Throughout his life, he has faced no defeat in his service as a Diplomat, come across no foe he could not best, found no man or woman who was able to resist him, save one. That one defeat nearly killed him.

Since Judah's exile, Galen has become bitter about his past, angry that the old Sheban cost him the one prize he sought above all others. With Rebecca's death, most of what made Galen a good man died as well. While he has not become cruel with age, he has become apathetic in his hurt and anger. His passions are feigned, except when he speaks of his past.

Highlights: Haunted, distant, angry.

Attributes: AGI +1, APP +2, CRE +2, INF +1, WIL -1.

Skills: Dance 1/+1, Etiquette 2/+1, Gambling 1/0, Grooming 2/+2, Human Perception 1/0, Notice 1/0, Read/Write (Tribal) 2/0, Riding 2/0, Seduction 3/+2, Streetwise 1/+1.

## The Planting of a Seed

From the recollections of Judah the Cursed:

I was not as blind as Louis believed me to be. As soon as he arrived in Griffentowne, I knew he had been sent to watch me. Of my household, only Rebecca seemed to believe he was truly sent to assist me in my duties. Louis had me deceived in one way: I did not realize he was spending as much time examining my wife's behavior as he was mine. I curse his name every day for what he forced me to see. When Louis returned after delivering his first report to the Courthouse (for I have no doubt that was the purpose of his journey), he requested to speak with me, almost before he had shaken the dust from his clothing. We met in my office, after I warned Rebecca that I was not to be disturbed. Louis seemed distraught. "Your Honor. . . Judge Thaim'on. . . I have news I have no wish to impart to you, and yet it is my duty." The great liar. I wonder still how he kept from smirking as he spoke. "There are rumors, sir. . . regarding your wife and the Magdalite, Larakin."

My face remained impassive through an act of will. "Wherever there are Magdalites, Louis, there will be rumors." He could not see my hands clench beneath the desk, could not hear my teeth grind together. My voice rang as true and cold as it ever had in judgment. "And what are these rumors, Louis? Is my wife taking her pleasure with the Magdalite out in the fields? Or perhaps the two of them are copulating in the barns with the rest of the animals?"

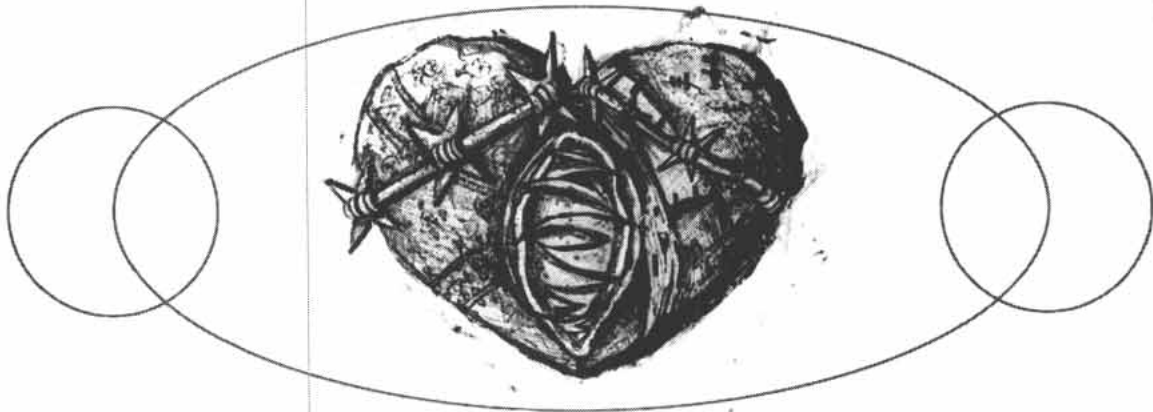
Twin spots of color burned in his cheeks as I spoke, twin fires of either rage or embarrassment. I did not know which, nor did I care. "Your Honor!" he exclaimed jerkily. "No, no, it is nothing like that, sir. But with all due respect, people do believe you are being played for a fool."

"How dare you." I allowed those words to sink in, waited for him to see the mistake he had made. "You come to my home and dishonor my wife, dishonor my very name, and all on the basis of marketplace tales carried by grandmothers and busybodies with nothing better to do with their time. Have you any proof of your allegations?"

As I expected, Louis shook his head cautiously, choosing his words with more care. "No, Your Honor. I was instructed merely to warn you of my fears."

"Consider me warned, then. Get out."

With a backwards glance he left my office, his head so low his chin nearly touched his chest. Try as I might, I could not get his words out of my mind. I knew Rebecca could never be false to me — yet what if I was wrong? The Magdalite was a handsome enough man, and Rebecca so trusting. That night as I lay down to sleep next to her, it was his laughing green eyes I saw mocking me when I closed my eyes. I saw how much time the two of them spent together. I saw him touch her shoulder as he smiled at her. The Magdalite whore. If Rebecca hadn't already fallen to his charms, I knew she soon would. Whether or not she had betrayed me with her body, I knew that she had betrayed me with her heart. Hatred for the man burned in my gut as I tossed restlessly in my marriage bed. Just before dawn, I found the answer to my problem.



## A Hidden Gift

I rose before Rebecca was even stirring, long before the sun began to pour its illuminating gold into the lap of the green fields. Hidden in a chest in my office was an artifact that had been passed down from my grandmother to my mother to me, a small piece of Tera Sheba's cloak, made into a scarf. Imbued with a bit of Her power, I knew it would keep Rebecca true to me. When she awoke, I was sitting beside her on our bed, smiling softly at her. Goddess help me, she was so beautiful. It was no wonder that Magdalite bastard wanted her. "I have a gift for you, my sweet."

"J-Judah? What has you up so early?" She blinked sleepy gray eyes, sitting up slowly. "A gift? What is it, dearest?"

"Something precious. It was a gift from my mother, who received it from her mother before that. And now I give it to you." I warned at the way her eyes widened. Opening the small cedar box, I showed her the long strip of fabric within. "This came from the hem of Tera Sheba Herself, my dear. It bears some of Her power." I glanced up at the fertility charms hanging over our bed. "I give it to you in hopes that the child you will bear will be both true and just."

Her lovely young face, still warm from sleep, lit in a bright smile and she threw her arms around my neck. "Oh, Judah! What a wonderful gift. I am so honored, my love. I will keep it with me always and hold it tight as I pray for our son."

"See that you do," I warned, "for to lose it would be a grave thing." A very grave thing indeed.

## Baiting the Trap

**From the trial transcripts of Louis Medi'on:**

Rebecca was as eager as any young girl to show off her new gift. It wasn't long before I heard of it. I found myself both encouraged and frustrated. Encouraged that Judge Thaim'on seemed to have taken my warning to heart, and yet frustrated, because that was not enough. The stories would not stop because of a scrap of cloth, no matter how blessed or powerful. I still required proof, and the girl needed to be punished.

With the artifact keeping the girl honest, there could be no proof. With no proof, the sniggering rumors would continue in Griffentowne. With the rumors continuing, Sheba's position would be weakened, and I would have failed. The old fool could not see that he was jeopardizing both our positions with his dotting blindness.

I knew there had to be a way of removing the artifact from the girl's possession. As young as she was, she would surely grow careless, leave it behind somewhere, drop it. It was only a matter of time. Time, however, was running short for me. After two weeks, I began to consider other alternatives.

## To Catch a Thief

Rebecca's care for the artifact was slowly lessening. No longer did she pray with it three times a day. I knew then it was time to put my plan into motion. There was one man in the household with reason to fear the Judges of Tera Sheba, one man weak enough to leverage into place as a tool. Janus, Rebecca's father, had been accused once lying to a Judge, to his daughter's husband, in fact. The old man claimed he acted out of fear of the Joanite he slandered. Janus had been punished, but I knew he still harbored bitterness towards Judah.

I caught him one morning and pulled him aside, glaring at him sternly. "I would have a word with you," I murmured.

"Yes sir, of course." The coward was quick to agree, all but flinching under my eyes. "What can I do for you?"

"There is talk," I smiled thinly, my arms folding before me, "that in your household is a powerful artifact of Tera Sheba."

## 2. Not Wisely But Too Well

"Yes, there is! It was a gift to my Rebecca." Janus remained eager to please, or more accurately, eager to keep his own hide safe. "She carries it with her always."

"A gift from Judah," I agreed. "That artifact is a trap for your daughter, sir." I sighed, reluctance weighing every word. "Judge Thaim'on has been listening to the marketplace gossip about your child, and plans to use the artifact to catch her in a lie. We must take it from her."

The old man's brow darkened. "How do you know this?"

I lowered my eyes, humbling myself before the old man. "As his assistant, I have been privy to his plans. But I cannot stand by and allow him to trap an innocent such as your daughter. Judah is a hard man, but I had never thought to see him stoop to something like this. We must stop him."

Janus nodded. "Gladly. I will get the artifact from her. If I just asked Rebecca—"

"Tell no one." I glared at him more sternly. "You do not understand our ways. Even now there may be spies eavesdropping on us. If you value your daughter's safety and happiness, take the artifact from her and tell no one of this. I will take the artifact and the remainder of my evidence to the High Judges and they will deal with Judah."

With spite in his old eyes, Janus hesitated barely a moment and then nodded. "I'll bring it to you."

## Daggers of Kindness

From the private letters of Galen Larakin:

My greatest torment these days is hindsight. Everything is so much clearer when glimpsed over one's shoulder, child. It all seems so obvious to me now: the heightened tension in Rebecca's household, the glint in Judah's eye every time he looked at me. Although she carried his gift, I could still sense the tension between Judah and Rebecca. She grew more pale and wan daily. I knew she was not sleeping. The corners of her mouth drew ever downward and her smiles grew scarce. My heart ached for her, but there was nothing I could do.

Finally she did come to me. We met one afternoon in the field nearest their home. I could see the traces of tears drying on her cheeks and I longed to brush them away with a touch and a smile. However, there were too many eyes watching us, so I merely took her hand. "Tell me what is troubling you, Rebecca."

"I have done something to anger Judah," she began carefully, as if a single ill-chosen word would shatter her. "He will not tell me what, but he looks at me with such hatred at times, Galen." Her lips, those perfect sweet lips, began to tremble. "I am afraid that he no longer loves me, and regrets taking a silly young girl to be his wife. D-Do you have any sort of Magdalite potion or charm to win back someone's love?"

The timid hopefulness of her words cut me deeply, and the way her face fell when I shook my head cut deeper still. "Of course he still loves you. Husbands grow angry all the time, my dear." I smiled at her, hoping to win a smile in return. I did not. "Judah could be angry for any number of reasons, none of them having to do with you. Unfortunately, his anger is probably making him cross with you." What I really wanted to say was, "No, he does not love you, he does not deserve you."

"Do you really believe so?" The hope in her eyes at that was the cruelest cut of all. "Perhaps if I were to. . . to write him a letter, telling him how much I love him." Her smile returned shyly. "Do you think that would make him feel better? Will you help me write it?" Her smile grew warmer still, and I could feel it searing my heart, cauterizing the cuts she had made there unknowingly.

"Of course," I managed. She squeezed my hand and kissed my cheek, oh such a fleeting brush of her lips! As she fled back towards the house for the means to write the letter, I began to think of writing her a letter of my own. If Judah proved to be fool enough to set her aside, I would be waiting.





## Confrontation

### From the recollections of Judah the Cursed:

The artifact was not enough. Tera Sheba forgive my blasphemy, but the treasure Rebecca carried with her was not enough to set my mind at ease. I heard tales of her still meeting the Diplomat, and in my mind those tales grew into absolute proof. But the artifact! Rebecca could not be false to me as long as she carried it. Unable to bear the uncertainty any longer, I left my duties early one day and caught Rebecca in our room. The room itself was in a shambles, and she stood in the center of it. One look at me and guilt filled her eyes.

"Judah," she fluttered, sounding frightened, "what are you doing here at this time of day?"


"Looking for you, my sweet." I tried on a smile to see if it fit. To judge by the way Rebecca began to relax, it must have. "I wonder, love, where is the gift I gave you?"

She offered a tentative smile, but I could read the sudden tension in her shoulders. One hand checked the pocket of her apron. From the way her expression wavered, I knew it was not there. I watched as she checked each of her pockets in turn. "I — I do not have it with me, Judah."

"Not? Surely you have not forgotten your promise to me to keep it always with you. Surely you have not lost it, have you, my beloved?"

"No! Of course not, Judah." Rebecca fluttered more, resembling nothing so much as a caged bird that may beat itself to death against the bars of its cage. I knew she was lying. "It must be — it is somewhere in the room, of course."

"Of course." I agreed with a silken voice I had not heard from my own throat before. "Find it for me, sweet. I want to see it in your hands."



## Confirmation

For nearly an hour, she searched the room again before my eyes. The tension I sensed from her slowly rose with each moment the artifact remained missing. Conversely, as she became more frantic, I grew calmer and calmer. I knew that every word of the rumors was true. If my heart broke, it was with a quiet snap that went unheard in the stillness of our bedroom. Finally, nearly weeping, Rebecca knelt at my feet where I sat, "I am sorry, Judah. I had it when I dressed this morning—"

"Do not lie to me, girl." The silken voice was gone. "I know everything I need to know now. All I lack is hard proof, and rest assured, I will find it." I hated her for being so beautiful, her head bowed before my feet. I hated myself for even then wanting to believe in her lying, whoring little heart.

"Judah, I don't—"

Her words were cut off by the sharp sound of my hand striking her across the mouth. "No more lies." Weeping in earnest, she covered her face, but not before I saw the blood trickle from the corner of her lips. I rose to leave the room, hardening my heart against her.

## Letters

From the trial transcripts of Louis Medi'on:

Not long after receiving the artifact from Janus, I would discover the final proof I sought. Watching the early morning routine, I noticed that any messages delivered to the household often sat unattended in a basket until well after breakfast. I availed myself of the opportunity each morning, looking for anything that might incriminate Rebecca. There, in that morning's messages, was a letter addressed to Rebecca, bearing the Magdalite's seal. I tucked it away to take to Judah later that day.

That afternoon, as I passed by the courtyard on my way to speak to Judah, I came upon Rebecca sobbing in the Magdalite's arms. In her hand was clenched a bit of paper. I could not get close enough to hear what was said, but I could see the bruise on her face and the hardness in his eyes clearly enough. I watched and waited while they soothed and consoled one another. As he rose to leave, the Magdalite brazenly kissed her on the uninjured corner of her mouth. Rebecca sat there a moment longer, then departed as well — leaving behind the paper she'd clenched so tightly in her hand earlier.

It was another letter, this one unsealed and in a woman's rounded handwriting. It was full of passion, that letter was, adoring and yearning at the same time. Addressed only to "My Beloved," it was signed with Rebecca's name. She'd tried to give it to the Magdalite and he'd left it behind. I tucked it with the earlier letter, and continued on to find Judah. I swear to you, I did not know, I *could* not have known what the result of my actions would be.

## Final Judgement

From the recollections of Judah the Cursed:

The house was in an uproar over the bruise left on Rebecca's lovely skin. I had retreated to my private chambers when Louis arrived with his two letters. I read them both over silently. The Diplomat's letter was trite and typical. He burned with love, he longed for her day and night. I expected no more from him. The other letter though, the one in Rebecca's own handwriting, it cut me to the center. It was all true, all the stories. The proof lay there on my desktop, in the lovers' own handwriting.

"What will you do?" Louis asked quietly after I set aside the letters.

I traced a trembling finger over Rebecca's letter before replying. "That is my concern, and none of yours. I thank you for your vigilance in this matter. Now leave me to consider what must be done."

"Will you denounce her, Your Honor?"

"Leave me, I said." My tone held a calm I did not feel. If the fool had remained there asking his questions a moment longer, I believe I would have killed him. "You will know my decision tomorrow. Leave me and allow me to decide."

Once Louis left my chambers, I felt the rage in my heart surge and swell. She was mine, and the Magdalite had taken her. Who would fault her for being enthralled by him? He was nearly as young and fair as she was, and I was a stern old man in comparison. If I denounced her, I would become a laughing-stock. I, Judah Thaim'on, Judge of Tera Sheba, would be laughed at by filthy farmers and simple fools. There would be no justice unless I created it myself. I brooded until the sun went down, then rose and went to the room I had shared with Rebecca, the bed she had defiled with his seed.

She was there, curled up and sleeping in our bed. Her delicate face was tear-streaked and the bruise I had given her earlier stood out starkly against her skin. My resolve weakened. She had loved me once; perhaps she could again. My fists clenched and I closed my eyes. Perhaps she could again. Until the next Magdalite boy came along. When I reopened them, I walked to our bed and picked up one of the pillows on my side of the bed. She stirred and blinked her eyes drowsily, "Judah?"

"Good night, my love," I whispered, then pressed the pillow down over her face. She made little sound. She did not even push at my hands. There were twin tears falling down my cheeks when her breast was finally stilled.

## The Final Blow

### From the private letters of Galen Larakin:

One of the servants found him kneeling over her body, still holding that cursed pillow over her face as he cried. The strongest men of the household held him bound for the night, until the Watch was summoned at dawn. When I heard the news, I thought it was a cruel joke. Then I heard the rumors that Judah had planned to kill me next, and realized what had happened.

The whole sordid tale came to light, Judah's consuming jealousy, Louis Medi'on's power-hungry meddling, even my own blind role in Rebecca's death. In a sense, all three of us killed her, cousin. I was the only one not sent to Horn. Griffentowne has been exile enough for me. Every day I see the fields she once walked in, hear the laughter of the children that should have been hers. Ours. That should have been ours. What Rebecca confessed to me the day Louis eaves-dropped on us was that she had finally conceived Judah's child, but was fearful of his reaction if she told him.

I could have seduced her, cousin, but in truth, I did not. I wanted her love and trust more than simply her body. The child that died with her should have been mine, and I should have taken her from Judah months before he killed her. I did not, and I live with that knowledge with each day. Each day I watch her golden sun die into the abyss of night here in this land that I can now only see as a forever-barren waste.

## Ashes

### From the recollections of Judah the Cursed:

Here I am but one criminal among hundreds. Here we live outside the love of the Fatimas, damned to existence without true life. I hear rumors of a movement growing here, of an Eighth Tribe that will spring from the Fatimas' castoffs. Lies. All lies. The other exiles here want to pretend that they are something special, that their status is something to be proud of, rather than a badge of shame. The children talk of hope and of freedom and love. They are fools. There is no love in this place, if love even exists. My small cell and I, we will show them all, prove to them that our rightful place is here in the dirt where we are. We shall keep them from rising. None here deserves more than ashes, and so on ashes they shall feast.



### Chapter three : Alexei the Silent

Madness is but another dream of reality.

Who can say which of us live in the waking world

And which of us within that dream?

I say I am wiser than you

For my eyes are open even as I dream.

—Dahlian Song





## Family Ties

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### From the journal of Alexei Zoy'on:

Death is something no Yagan fears, and yet that does not mean we do not miss our dead. I will miss my mother Zoya. She was a good woman, and I regret deeply that I was not present when her time came. I travel back to Mortuary tomorrow, having finished my duties here among the Agnites.

Clan Zoy'on is a small one in our Tribe, but we are close-knit. Mother was a respected Mordred, and as her only son, I have tried to follow in her path. Her sister, Rahil, is known among the Fleshers, with her son following in her path as well. Although we are small, we are spread throughout each of the guilds.

When I arrived home, Irina was waiting for me, her heart-shaped face pinched with worry and sleeplessness. Precious Irina, the love of my childhood who grew to be the most devoted wife a man could wish. For a silent moment, we held one another then she peered up into my face. "Rahil and Anton will no doubt be here shortly. They wanted to speak to you when you arrived."

I frowned slightly. My aunt and my cousin seldom showed much interest in my family. True, Anton and I had once been like brothers, but time and practicality had pulled us apart. We seldom saw one another, seldom spoke. Rahil was even more distant, as she always seemed caught up in strategies and plans to win influence among the Fleshers, and thereby win more renown for Clan Zoy'on.

"They didn't say what they wanted?" I asked. Irina shook her head.



## Prayer of the Faithful

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### From the prayers of Irina Zoy'on:

I hardly surprised when Mother Zoya died, perhaps less so than anyone. I was, perhaps, the only one to fear her death. I know, Old One. Death is not something to be feared, but the visions! The dreams and visions have been plaguing me since before Alexei left for Playground. They are never clear; they are only filled with the promise of pain and suffering to come. If it be Your will, let Zoya's death be the only suffering we face. Let that be the whole of it.

So many worry that Rahil is neither old enough nor wise enough to lead us. Be with her. The transition to a new leader is always difficult, but it is only more so if the Clan doubts the new Little Crone. Be with us all, Old Mother, and help us to join together in strength and harmony.

I would pray for my Alexei as well; he has been so pained by Mother Zoya's death. I understand grief, but it is the depth of Alexei's grief that I cannot understand. Surely he realizes that You came for his mother, and that she is safely across the Fold now? Help me understand and support him. Keep us all until You come for us.

## Visitation

From the journal of Alexei Zoy'on:

Everything has been turned upside down since Mother's death. That first night, Rahil came seeking my support within the Clan. She and Anton tried to reason with me, tried to win me over. I wanted to take my own time, and come to my own conclusions about what might be best for Clan Zoy'on. I needed the time and the space to put together the pieces left by Mother's death.

It was in thinking things over that I began to wander through our village in the evening. As I walked, I tried to still the growing ache within my heart, and to calm my mind so I could think. My concentration was shattered when I overheard a child's voice: "But she didn't cross over! I swear, Josef, I saw her!"

"You're a silly girl. Everyone knows that Baba Yaga took Grandmama Zoya away. Mother even saw it."

I stopped by the corner of a building and peered around at the two. The boy Josef looked to be perhaps eleven or twelve, while the girl was a few summers younger. She protested, "But I saw her! She walked past the well, just a little after moonrise, and she looked just like Grandmama Zoya. When she looked at me it made me shiver."

"Did she say anything to you?"

"No. She just looked at me like she knew who I was and everything I had ever done. I think we should tell Momma, Josef."

"No," Josef scowled. "Momma has enough to worry about. Just forget it. You shouldn't be out that late anyway."

"But—"

"I said forget it, Misha. Now come on. Let's just get the water and go."

I turned back and leaned against the building heavily. What if the little girl was right? I had to come back and see.

## The Witching Hour

That night, just before moonrise, I headed for the well. Irina looked worried when I left our home, but I smiled and reassured her. I just wanted to go for a walk, after all. As late as it was, the village looked deserted. Although the night was clear, it was dark without the moon's light, and the stars looked like impossibly distant fires.

Every shadow seemed to hold something hidden, every breath of wind promised to tell a secret. I sat down in the shadow of a building and waited. I didn't wait long.

An owl screeched overhead, sounding like nothing so much as a woman screaming a name. My name. I looked up to find the source of the sound, and when I looked back . . . there she was. The little girl had been right. It was my mother. Her gnarled hands and creased features were pale; so pale they seemed to glow in the light of the newly risen moon. She turned to look at me and I felt the flesh on my spine trying to creep upwards. Her eyes were black, empty pits that showed nothing in the way of emotion. Before I could speak, she turned and walked past the well and vanished.

I stayed out by the well until nearly dawn, but she never reappeared. When I returned home, just before the sky began to lighten, I found Irina still waiting up for me. I couldn't bring myself to tell her what I had seen.

The only thing I could do was to return to the well the next night. That second night went much the same. Mother's spirit appeared with the scream of the owl, looked at me, then walked away without a word. I was growing increasingly agitated, both from the lack of sleep and from the sight of the spirit, wondering what she wanted. On the third night, she finally spoke.

## Secrets of the Grave

On the third night, rather than looking at me and vanishing, the spirit beckoned me closer, into the darkness just beyond the well. I followed close behind. Despite the darkness, she was quite visible, looking like nothing so much as a paler, sadder version of her living self. "Hear me," she finally said, in a voice like the rattling of bones in Mortuary. "I have faced much to return to you, fought and suffered so that you might hear. . ."

"Hear what?" My mouth was dry and my voice hard to find. "Anything you have to say, I will listen, Mother."

"The truth, Alexei," the spirit rasped. "You were not here, you did not see what happened before I died."

"What happened. . ." I was repeating her words, not asking a question, my mind racing to follow her meaning.

"The Fleshers understand the ways of death, Alexei. How to bring it about, how to call Baba Yaga to come take someone early. . ." The owl screeched again overhead, as if on cue, then Mother added, "It was not my time, Alexei."

"Murder," I whispered. "Who?"

"The Fleshers know the ways of death," the spirit repeated. "And there are those who would seek to gain their heart's desire through my death."

Even in life, my mother spoke with a shadow on her tongue, and I had long since learned to pick my way through her word-mazes. The answer came clear to me, and it stunned me so profoundly that I leaned back against the nearest tree. "Rahil."

"You will find the truth," she agreed. Her eyes turned cold. "Avenge me. Bring forth the truth and save us from destruction." The owl screamed for the third time, and Mother looked up in fear. Her eyes met mine, and she faded from view.

## A Son's Worry

**From the letters of Anton Zoy'on:**

Change is often difficult, particularly when it is sudden and unexpected. I can understand this, Cousin Irina. I can understand that the people of Clan Zoy'on would have a difficult time at the loss of a beloved leader. This is only natural. What is unnatural is this divisiveness over Mother Zoya's successor, and it is this self-destructive behavior that must end.

## Tradition

Whenever a Little Crone dies, it has always been our way for the oldest woman within the Clan to assume the role of leadership. Only she possesses the wisdom necessary to lead. In truth, if my mother were not prepared to lead our Clan, then Baba Yaga would not have taken Zoya when she did! Now is not the time for us to allow doubt and fear to rule our hearts. Now is the time for us to re-affirm the unity that makes us a Clan, that makes us part of the Tribe.

To be honest, Irina, I am worried about Alexei as well. The grief he has shown for Mother Zoya verges on excessive. The honest outpourings of a wounded heart are swiftly changing to a disrespectful clinging to that which has ended. I know he will listen to you, dear cousin. We must help him see that his behavior threatens to dishonor not only the dead but also the living as well, and shows a lack of faith in Baba Yaga.

Perhaps together you and I can help him see the path from which he has strayed, and help him return to that path. If those who question my mother's role as leader see Zoya's only son accept and embrace our Tribe's tradition, supporting my mother as leader, then our unity will be restored. If we work together, you and I, we can soothe your husband's grief and aid Clan Zoy'on in its time of crisis.

### A Wife's Fear

From the prayers of Irina Zoy'on:

Old Mother, I am so frightened. I do not know where to turn or to whose counsel to listen. Alexei has hardly spoken two words to me since the last full moon, when he spent the night out walking. I had hoped that perhaps he was confiding in someone, anyone. . . but Anton's letter to me today confirms that as little as Alexei says to me, he speaks still less to the rest of the Clan.

If I could take his hurt into myself to heal him, I would. He will not speak to me of his wounds, but his eyes. . . his eyes are that of a wild animal slowly bleeding to death. His eyes look cornered and desperate and I see hatred in them whenever he looks at his mother's sister.

Be with him, Old Mother. I fear he is going mad with grief.



Anton Zoy'on

Much like his cousin Alexei, Anton was always very much his mother's son. He followed in her footsteps and never once questioned his mother's will. He and Alexei and Irina were quite close as children, but drifted apart as they grew older. Irina and Alexei were saddened by this, but did not question it. The truth is that Anton has always been in love with Irina, and losing her to his cousin was a difficult thing to bear.

Anton has his share of secrets, and no doubt knows more about Zoya's death than he is telling.

Highlights: Secretive, dutiful, orthodox

Attributes: AGI +1, APP -1, CRE +2, FIT +1, INF +1, WIL +1

Skills: Animal Care 2/0, Archery 2/+1, Athletics 1/+1, Hagglng 1/+1, Leadership 1/+1, Lore (Poison) 2/0, Lore (Yagan) 2/0, Read/Write (Gaelish) 1/0, Ritual 1/0, Synthesis

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### The Mousetrap

From the journal of Alexei Zoy'on:

Goddess help me, I am beginning to doubt my own mother. Her words ring true in my heart and in my soul, but my mind. . . my mind questions still. The spirit had the very appearance of Mother, it spoke as she did, and seemed to know what she knew. . . yet do not the very youngest of us learn of the trickery of spirits? How they can take on one form or another, even pull the very thoughts from one's mind? If this spirit was anything other than my mother's eternal soul, it could choose to lead me into disaster. For no other reason than the envy of my flesh and my senses, senses it no longer possesses — if in fact it ever did — this spirit could bring about the ruin of my family by toying with my hidden fears.

Irina looks at me daily with questions in her lovely dark eyes, the tender creased flesh around them pulled taut with sleeplessness and worry. How can I answer her questions, when I cannot answer my own? I could tell her, only to have her share my doubts. I cannot do that to her.

The deepest part of me asks the question I cannot bring myself to consider: what if there is no spirit at all? What if, out of sorrow, I took a child's tale and birthed it into the apparition I saw that night? What if this spirit, with its cry for vengeance and tales of murder, is nothing more than a lunatic fancy of my own devising?



## Madness and Deceit

I need more proof. I need a way to confront Rahil indirectly. I will see her face at that moment and I will know. Her guilt or innocence will be there for me to see.

Two nights from now we celebrate Rahil's ascension. Two nights from now, to liven our celebration, a troupe of Dahlians comes to perform for us, to sing and dance and act out tales of long ago. It is said they can bring any tale to life, if they but have it written. I think they will be happy to learn a new Yagan folktale. I think I will be only too happy to teach it to them.

Sit in your place of honor, Aunt Rahil. Watch the Dahlians seek to amuse you with a tale of sister murdering sister. Watch the tale, and I will be watching you.

## Bringing Down the House

From the letters of Anton Zoy'on:

Our family is fragmenting before my very eyes, uncle, all due to Cousin Alexei's madness. He lost a mother, yes, as you lost a sister. Surely he can see that your loss is no less than his? Surely he can see that you are going on, that you have accepted Mother Zoya's death. The harder he fights accepting Mother as leader, the stronger the whispers within the Clan become. If Alexei does not regain his wits, this family will collapse around a center that will not hold.

I would plead with you to come speak with him, Uncle, but for the fact that Alexei seems to have vanished, taking Irina with him. Several nights ago Clan Zoy'on gathered to recognize its new leader. It was to be a grand party, both in remembrance of Mother Zoya and to honor Mother. A caravan of Dahlians had set up within our village and gave us many masques and dances.

## Drama Offstage

After supper, they offered to present a new version of an old Yagan folktale. We watched, as they unfolded a tale of treachery. There were two sisters, equal in all things save one: the older sister had a child she loved dearly, and the younger sister was barren. As we watched the story, the younger sister rose up and killed the older, stealing her child and claiming him for her own.

As the Dahlians portrayed the younger sister stealthily poisoning the elder, Mother became ill and was carried away from the crowds, no doubt the result of overexcitement and overindulgence.

As we waited for news of Mother's health, Alexei stood apart with the queerest smile, baring his teeth as if he would as soon devour us as watch us. Shortly thereafter, he drew Irina away from the party and they have not been seen since.

3. Ministers of Grace



Truth

From the journal of Alexei Zoy'on:

Mother of us all, help me. Goddess, I know. I saw her face when Dahlian poisoned Dahlian sister on that stage. Help me find a way to confront her, to see justice done. Mother's spirit was right all along. I was a fool to have doubted her.

I go before the Clan tonight. I will tell them everything. Rahil's sin will be hidden no longer. Then the Clan can heal. The hurt I will cause tonight is that of breaking a bone that has set badly in order to straighten the limb. Give me strength to face my kin and speak the truth You've given me. Tonight I will face the man who was once a brother to me. Now he is no more than the son of your murderer. I will remember that, Mother, but I pray I will not have to drive him down as well.



Call to Unite

From the oration of Anton Zoy'on:

We have all heard Alexei's words. It is a grave accusation he has made against my mother, against his own aunt, against Clan Zoy'on's Little Crone. I know there are those of you that see this as a sign that your defiance is rooted in fact rather than stubbornness. You say that Rahil was ever jealous of her sister Zoya. Look to yourselves, my family. Examine your hearts and determine how much of your eagerness to believe this tale comes from your own jealousy.

Alexei comes to us with tales of spirits returning from beyond the Fold. In truth, of those here now, who among you was present at Mother Zoya's death rites? How many of you saw Baba Yaga Herself come to take Mother Zoya into her cold embrace? Every Yagan knows that no spirit can break free of that hold — yet how many of you were so quick to believe ill of the Little Crone based on those mad tales?



Divided We Fall

Yes, I say Alexei is mad! All of us have seen his deterioration since Mother Zoya's death. He has shown himself unable to accept the will of Baba Yaga. So deep is his delusion, that he claims that Mother Zoya herself returned from death to tell him it was not her time to die, that Baba Yaga chose wrongfully! I ask you, who is Alexei, that he should question the will of the Mother of Death?

A family divided cannot stand. Without our family, we are nothing. It is time for us to put aside delusions and falsehoods and pride, and accept the will of Baba Yaga unquestioningly. We must stand together behind the leader that she has chosen, Mother Rahil.

Those who cannot are guilty of doubting the word of our Fatima, and deserve to be cast out. If Alexei continues to doubt Baba Yaga, then let that be his fate as well.

## Shame and Fear

### From the prayers of Irina Zoy'on:

I can no longer pray to the Fatima. I have failed Her as She has failed me. Forgive me, Goddess, for I have failed not only Baba Yaga but also my Alexei and all of Clan Zoy'on.

I heard Alexei's words that night, when he accused Rahil of murdering Zoya, and I stayed silent. Out of fear for myself, I did not tell what I saw the night Zoya died. As the rituals were performed around her, I saw the poison working in her. I saw it in the shallowness of her gasps, in the coloring of her skin. I smelled its fumes in Mother Zoya's last breaths.

I witnessed all this, and yet when my beloved needed an ally to speak on his behalf, I remained silent and said nothing. I am a miserable coward. If only I had defended him, perhaps Alexei would still be here in Mortuary, instead of starving and alone on that wretched island.

I knew Alexei spoke truth, and yet I did nothing. I cannot live with that knowledge.

As the same poison that ended Mother Zoya's life begins to move through my veins, I have only one desire. When Baba Yaga comes for my spirit, I will fight Her. I will fight to remain on this side of the River. Give me the strength. Let me support Alexei in this one final thing. . .

## Final Loss

### From the journal of Alexei the Silent:

I have been on Hom for perhaps two weeks now. All around me is talk of this "Eighth Tribe", but I have no desire to hear. I belong to nothing now. There are others here who share my beliefs. We are part of no Clan save that of Death. Not the Crone, only Death. Clan Zoy'on owes me a debt now that can only be repaid in blood.

Rahil took my mother, and in so doing, took my family and the only home I will ever know. For that alone I would desire vengeance. Until last night I would have been content to see Rahil removed from her position and punished for her crimes. Until last night I would have remained on Hom and mourned the loss of my Clan.

Irina came to me last night. She died in the same manner as Mother, only by her own hand. Her spirit begged me for forgiveness. When I left Mortuary, I had not lost everything. It wasn't until I saw her pale dead face that I knew what it meant to lose everything. They will pay until the ground of Mortuary runs thick with blood, until the smoke from the funeral fires chokes the very Tribe out of existence. I no longer have anything left to lose.



## Chapter four: Anna the Prophetess

We praise you Mother, from whom all life springs!  
Your birthing cries are in the moan of the winds  
And our rivers pour from the waters of Your womb.  
Your proud smile warms us in the summer sunlight  
And the rain is the touch of Your hand.  
Woe to those who have forgotten Your face  
They turn from You and surely they will wither and die.

—Evan Hymn



## A Cry in the Streets

From the teachings of Anna the Prophetess, Fallen Evan:

You are children. All of you. You believe that the Eighth Tribe belongs only to the young, but look about you! We are your mothers and fathers, and we have been exiled as well. Do not cast us aside. You believe that because we are old we can offer you nothing. Only we can warn you of the threat that lies before you! It takes a mother to see the trap that lies between us and the fulfillment of Joshua's prophecy. Listen close to me, my children. . .

## Hearth and Home

To an Evan, home and family mean everything. I believe that we have the hardest time adapting to life away from the Tribes, and are the most eager to find new families once we arrive. Some of us cannot let go of the families we left behind. I led the Pal'on clan, named for my mother Paloma, for nearly forty summers. I have three daughters who still live with the Tribes: Naomi, Lena and my youngest Emilia. Naomi and Lena have given me grandchildren, great-grandchildren. Emilia, the child of my old age, may yet end up cast out beside me.

## A Daughter's Defense

From the letters of Emilia Pal'on:

Beloved, I am sure by now word has reached you of Mother's banishment. While I am certain you are as stricken by this as I, wanted you to learn the truth from me, rather than the stories that are circulating through our Tribe. My mother did no wrong, Stephen. She only wanted what was best for our family.

## Full Summer

I never realized as a child just how different my mother was from all of the other mothers. I knew she was much older, and that my sisters were nearly adult when I was born, but I never realized that not everyone's mother made decisions that affected dozens of people daily. Mother did, however, and for the years she led, Clan Pal'on was as a healthy and growing field of summer. Eventually Lena and Naomi found husbands and had children, and together we took care of our lands. The land itself responded to our family's harmony; those were good, fertile years.

Finally, after the harvest this year, Mother knew it was time for her to step aside. She called my sisters and I to her one evening just after the last of the season's crops had been safely stored for the winter. How tired and frail she looked that evening! "My loves," she said, "I have guided our clan for most of your lives. This year's harvest will be the last I oversee."



### Emilia Pal'on

Born when her mother Anna was thought to be past childbearing years, Emilia proved to be a most pleasant surprise to everyone except her two older sisters. As the family, and indeed the entire clan, began to dote upon the girl, her sisters' resentment grew. Emilia is not oblivious to this fact, and works to defuse it when she can.

After Anna's exile to Hom, Emilia began secretly looking for ways to aid the Fallen, in hopes that some of her help would benefit Anna.

Highlights: Dutiful, loving

Attributes: APP +1, BLD +1, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL +1

Skills: Agriculture 2/0, Craft (Weaving) 1/0, Etiquette 1/0, Grooming 1/+1, Healing 2/0, Herbalism 2/0, Human Perception 1/+1, Leadership 2/0, Synthesis 1

#### 4. The Serpent's Tooth

I was frightened for a moment, certain that the Crone had come to her with a vision of her own death. Mother continued, "While I am still strong enough in body, and my mind is clear and sharp, I want to do what will be best for Clan Pal'on. One of you will bear the mantle of leader, but I do not doubt that the three of you will work together in harmony, much as my sisters and I did."

Lena, Naomi and I looked at one another uncertainly, and I finally spoke up. "Mother. . . surely you are not going to die?"

Mother laughed, a laugh that had suddenly grown heartrendingly close to an old woman's rusty cackle. "Oh, I will someday, I am certain, Emilia. But no, I have had no visitations from the Old One. However, I do not wish to leave the future of Clan Pal'on's leadership in question until I am on my deathbed waiting for Her, either."

#### Autumn Rising

The relief was a palpable thing in the room as she looked over the three of us, as we looked at each other. "Although I know that any of the three of you would do a fine job in my place, I must choose one. I will ask each of you a question, and tomorrow morning I will come for your answers. My question is this: which of your two sisters would you choose to lead Clan Pal'on and why?"

I spent the rest of the evening considering my answer. The choice that sprang immediately to my mind was Naomi. As eldest, she would have the most familiarity with the day-to-day life of our clan. However, I had long seen her rule her children and husband with iron spurs and a heavy bit, and worried that her style of leading would vary too greatly from the easy comfort of my mother's way. Lena, on the other hand. . . Lena's household was disorganized, her children undisciplined. If she could not bring order to her own home, how could she keep order within the Clan?

The next morning I was overseeing the last threshing of the grain when Mother summoned me. "Emilia, good morning," she smiled, sitting cross-legged on a mat as she wove straw into a basket. "I have already spoken with Naomi and Lena. . . have you an answer?"

"I do, Mother. I would choose Naomi, for she is eldest and the entire clan commends the order of her home." I paused then rushed ahead, not quite daring to meet Mother's eyes. "But Mother, she is so harsh at times. . . Have you not seen how Nathaniel, her own son, flinches from her voice?"

Mother nodded, and motioned for me to sit near her mat. "You have always been a perceptive child, Emilia. I know Naomi's weaknesses well. That is why I will stay with her and advise her as long as I can. Your choice and Lena's only confirmed my own instinct."

#### Winters Cold

That winter was one of the most difficult I can remember. As I had feared, Naomi almost immediately began to change the face of Clan Pal'on. Laws and rules became our focus, as if were followers of Tera Sheba and not Eva! Infractions were punished harshly, and our food was rationed even more tightly than ever before, even though our harvest that summer had been bountiful. Everyone knew Naomi was half-drunk with her new found position, but no one knew what to do about it. Throughout everything, Mother stood at Naomi's side. I saw the shadows that haunted her dear old eyes when Naomi was particularly harsh, but she stood by her decision — and all of Naomi's.

Finally one night, when the weather had turned particularly bitter, Naomi was berating one of our cousins, a pale, sick woman who had borne no children. Sarah had not finished a task Naomi had set before her, because she was so ill. Finally, Naomi slapped Sarah across the face, accusing her of feigning her illness. I could keep silent no longer. "Sister!" All eyes turned to me as I stood from my place near the fire. "Surely as a trained healer you can recognize the signs of true illness, can you not?" I smiled and spoke with a light voice, hoping to take the bite out of my words, hoping to help Naomi save face. "Sarah's work is easily enough completed tomorrow. If she is still unable, I will gladly do it myself."

It would have been so easy for her to back down, to allow me to do the work. We had all seen Mother change her mind countless times when a situation warranted it. There was no shame for her on that path.

Naomi's eyes narrowed. "So. I wondered when you might challenge my decisions, Sister. You have looked for this opportunity since I took leadership. Go ahead." She folded her arms.

"I have no wish to challenge you." Out of the corner of my eye I could see Mother, standing and watching us miserably. "Mother chose you, and I stand behind that. She offered to act as your advisor. Perhaps you could ask her now, what she would do in your position?" *I'm so sorry to do this to you, Mother*, I thought.

My apology turned out to be unneeded. "I will do no such thing! My decision is made. If it troubles you, you may leave us." Naomi's words fell into a sudden silence.

"What?" I was uncertain if I had heard her correctly.

"You heard my words, Sister." Naomi, *do not do this, do not*, I silently prayed, but she continued. "Any who cannot abide by a Clan's leadership are always free to leave it. I think it would be best for all of us if you did so, Emilia."

I looked towards Mother, and I was not the only one. "Naomi has the right of it. The traditions have always been so." She started to say more, but Naomi cut her off.

"There! You see! Mother agrees with me. I want you gone in the morning, Emilia."

There was nothing more I could do. By daybreak the next morning I was on the road to Bazaar, on my way to you and your Clan, beloved.

## Sibling Rivalry

### From the memory of Samuel Pal'on:

Mother Anna was what we always called her. She was actually my grandmother's sister. For as long as I could remember, she led our Clan. Mother Anna and her three daughters were held up as examples to all the mothers and daughters of Clan Pal'on.

However, some of us saw them more clearly than others. Oh, the youngest daughter, Emilia, she was a kind enough woman, but it hurt me at times to see how the two oldest, Naomi and Lena, often took advantage of Mother Anna's better nature. Emilia was so much younger than her sisters, closer to my own age. She was the unexpected child, the baby, and it was no secret that Mother Anna was very fond of her. It was no secret to Naomi and Lena either, and they scorned their sister whenever they had the chance. Mocking Emilia was the only thing that could truly unite them. But Mother Anna never saw that side of them, and nothing we could say would open her eyes.

When Mother Anna stepped down and designed Naomi as her replacement, I worried, as did much of the Clan. When the changes started happening, all we could do was hope that Mother Anna's influence might moderate Naomi's rule, and that Naomi would learn in time as her mother had. Then came the night Naomi ordered Emilia to leave. My only thought that next morning, as I saw how lost Mother Anna seemed, was to wonder who would watch over Mother Anna now?



### Samuel Pal'on

There are few within Clan Pal'on more dedicated to the family as a whole than Samuel. There is little he would not do in the name of family. He is not so naïve, however as to trust Anna's oldest daughters completely. His loyalty goes first to the clan leader, even after her exile. Should she die, he would then turn to Emilia.

Samuel is steadfast in his desire to reunite mother and daughter, and continually checks up on Anna in her exile.

Highlights: Loyal, strong, appealing

Attributes: AGI +1, BLD +2, CRE -1, FIT +1, PSY +1, STR 2, HEA 1, STA 40, UD 8, AD 6.

Skills: Agriculture 1/0, Athletics 1/+1, Combat Sense 2/0, Haggling 1/0, Hand-to-Hand 1/+1, Intimidate 1/+2, Mythology 1/0, Notice 2/0, Survival 2/-1, Throwing 2/+1



## Darkening Season

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From the memories of Anna the Prophetess:

It pained me to see Emilia leave the clan. I came so close to changing my mind and trying to revoke my decision to step down. The clan would have accepted it. I could have done it, but it would have forever changed the role of leadership in the clan. The position would have lost much of its respect, and I could not do that, not even for Emilia.

That season was a long dark one. As I supported Naomi as best I could, the only voice of dissension in the clan belonged to Lena. The two had always squabbled, even as young girls. Now their petty bickering was threatening to tear Clan Pal'on apart. At first Naomi tried to rule Lena with the same iron fist, but Naomi could not afford to lose Lena's support. There was much to do in our fields, and Naomi could not do it without Lena and her family of strapping sons to do the work. So the two of them reached an understanding, with the tension growing between them every day.



## The Long Winter

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Finally one evening, just as the days were beginning to grow long once more, I overheard an argument between the two of them.

"Naomi, she's stayed with my family long enough. Eva's Hips! She finds fault with everything I do! If I have to listen to her lecture me about my kitchen one more time, I'll scream."

"Well, your kitchen certainly isn't the most pleasant place in Lai, Sister." Naomi's voice carried to my place in the hall, and I stopped to listen, my old blood rising to my cheeks as sap rises in the trees. "We have no room for her. Mother must stay with you for now."

I heard the sound of Lena setting something on a table with a thump. "You said that at the beginning of the season, after she made you leader. I'm sick of it. You've fewer children than we have, and now you've a bigger home. Besides," the voice of my middle child took on a nasty, sneering tone, "surely she'd rather be with you as your advisor."

Naomi snorted. "She'd rather be with me so she can meddle, you mean. Ever since Emilia left, Mother has questioned nearly every decision I've made. No, Lena. I think it best if Mother stays with you for now. Was there anything else you wished to discuss?"

"I'm not done with this, Naomi. If you insist that Mother stay with me, Thomas and I will take the children and leave. All of the children." I could picture Lena's smug little smile as she spoke. Did my two children, my two eldest girls, really hate me so much? Had I been such a burden to them? Even if I had become a meddling old woman in their eyes, where was the respect due me as a mother? All my years of service, of sacrifice to the Clan, all of it destroyed by their hateful words.

Naomi was silent for a moment. I waited for her answer with a quaking heart. "That threat will not support you forever, Lena. I pray to Eva daily that She may bless the wombs of our cousins so their families may grow. Very well. Mother will come and stay with us until the end of the season. But I want to hear no more complaints from you, or you and your family may go to the H'l Kar for all I care."

How could I stay when neither of them wanted me? I was a burden, a meddler. Naomi didn't want my advice, but Blessed Mother, she needed it so badly! I knew I could not make her see that. I had to find Emilia. I had to gain her forgiveness. Emilia would understand. Emilia would know what to do.



## Year's End

### From the letters of Emilia Pal'on:

Shortly after Midwinter, Mother vanished from Lai. I believe I received letters from every single member of Clan Pal'on. The Clan was in an uproar. No one seemed to have any idea why she left or where she'd gone.

The letters I received from my sisters were the most troubling. Naomi and Lena, for once, put aside their bickering long enough to bemoan Mother's disappearance. As one voice, they berated her for a lack of respect for the clan, they wailed over how they had been abandoned just as the Clan was at its most fragile. They condemned her for her selfishness. To judge from some of the other letters I received, they were beginning to sway the Clan to their view of the situation.

Goddess bless Samuel. Even when we were children together, I knew he had the kindest heart of anyone in the Clan. He wrote to me and expressed his worry for Mother, and gave me another view of Lena and Naomi's conduct. He looked for Mother every day of that long cold winter, and for that I will always be indebted to him.

## Rebirth

### From the memory of Samuel Pal'on:

I tried to find her. Every day after my chores were done I wandered through the frozen peninsula trying to find Mother Anna. As the winter wore on, though, my hopes began to wither away, chilled and cracked like the bole of a tree in hard frost. Naomi and Lena began to push for Mother Anna's exile on the grounds that she had abandoned her family. I had to find her before it was too late for her — and for us.

I had nearly given up hope as the weather made its slow turn from winter to spring. The snow was still on the ground, but you could smell the coming warmth in the air. I had been searching for nearly a week when I found her. The day was bright with sunlight when I first spotted a bundle of rags lying on the snow at the edge of the forest. As I drew closer, I recognized Mother Anna, but barely. She was a heartbreaking sight: filthy, wasted to nearly nothing, wearing only shreds of the clothes she'd worn when she left Lai. I have no idea how she had survived even that long.

## Uprooted

I began to weep, at first believing I had found her corpse, when her wild eyes opened and she began to speak. "Samuel. You must help me. I must find Emilia." Her words held the burning urgency of a madwoman, her eyes rolling to the whites like a fevered horse's. It seemed that she was using the last of her strength. "The visions. . . I must find her. It was all a mistake, do you see? Emilia. . . I have to tell her. Help me, Samuel. Help me."

With that, she fell into a swoon, uttering half-formed syllables, sound with no sense or meaning. I lifted her as if she were a child, and began to carry her back to Lai.

As we drew near to the family's home, those eyes, fixed in a skull's head, opened wide. "No," she said in a terrible voice. "We cannot go there. We must go to Emilia. They have cast me out. Eva loves me no longer. You must take me to Bazaar." What more could I do? I did not dare question how she knew of her Fall, when I myself had heard no word of it at all. I took her to Bazaar.

## The Storm

From the teachings of Anna the Prophetess:

I left my lifelong home, where I had seen my children born and raised, my husband die, with nothing more than the clothes I was wearing and some furs to keep me warm. My only thought was to find my youngest child and beg for her forgiveness. My only emotion was the deep, searing pain caused by my ungrateful children. I felt as if I had a serpent at my breast.

In my distress and pain I became lost in the wilds of the Sunblessed Peninsula. Dangerous no matter what time of year, Eva's untamed, blessed ground grows more dangerous still during the winter. Bitter cold, starving predators, those are the least of the dangers. It was only through the will of the Goddess that I remained safe and well.

I do not know how much time passed before I felt my Fall. The night was particularly cold, the wind cutting my skin and tearing my eyes. The tears froze to my eyelashes, the ice burning my cheeks. As I huddled beneath a tree and tried to sleep, an agony unlike anything I have ever known ripped through my soul. I screamed to the winds, knowing that Eva had taken Her love from me, but not understanding why. The fear and the shame and yes, the hatred, closed part of my mind away, and I fled into the growing storm.

## Vision

My voice rose with the winds, howling through the trees' skeletal branches. Ice pelted from the skies, raising welts on my face as I slipped and slid over root and rock. I reached a clearing and turned my face to the skies, screaming my defiance of Eva and Her Sisters, defying the Goddess herself, daring them, pleading with them to strike me down. Sleet stung and turned my furs to sodden, heavy misery.

As my body grew more and more miserable, more numb and cold, I began to slip away from it. A vision came upon me. I knew. I saw Truth as I had never seen it before. The Fallen are children, divisive children, like the grasping fruit of my own womb. The Goddess showed me what must be done. The arrogance of Hom's leaders must be reined in; they must be shown the way. They need a mother's hand to guide them.

But there is more than ignorance and arrogance holding back the Eighth Tribe. Among the Fallen are those who call themselves Guides. They propose to aid the Fallen, to help those lost children find the true path. They lie. Instead of guidance they provide only traps. They water the seeds of division and nourish the soil with false hopes. They seek only to destroy what the Eighth Tribe tries to build. In their twisted limbs and warped hearts I saw fire and fear, I saw a plague of thorns let loose across Vimary. Against the howling of the thunder I heard the howling of their victims, the howling of my youngest daughter loudest among them. I saw blood and sacrifice, blood and sacrifice till it wet the ground. I knew the face of it then, knew that blood and sacrifice could save us, or damn us all.

I realized what I had to do. I realized why my life had been spared and why I had lost everything. I had been given a warning, and it was my duty to see that warning passed on. For my daughter I had been given one last year of breath.

T H E S E R P E N T ' S T O O T H

## Fallen Bridge

When Samuel found me, I wanted so badly to see my child again. I pleaded with him to take me to her. As we reached Bazaar though, I realized there was no time. We went to the Fallen Bridge, where the broken and the angry crossed over into another realm. Samuel's eyes filled with tears as he vowed to accompany me into exile.

"No, Samuel. You must remain with the Clan. Clan Pal'on will need your help. Emilia will need your help. Find her for me, Samuel. The two of you may yet be able to save our family."

"But Mother Anna. . ." He gestured helplessly at the bridge, at the river.

I took his hands in mine. "Promise me, Samuel. Come to Bazaar on the first day of the new moon and I will find you there. But swear to me that you will go to Emilia."

Samuel's broad shoulders lifted in a heavy sigh. "I promise, Mother Anna. Please. Take care of yourself."

I smiled up at the young man. "The Goddess watches over us all, Samuel." I started over the bridge.

## Hom

Now you know, children. Now you see the vision the Goddess sent to me that night in the storm. Be wary in your footsteps, and mind whose counsel you follow. There is evil among us, an evil that many know exists, but few have put a face to. If we are to fulfill Joshua's prophecy, we must be alert for the tricks and traps He warned us of.

You leaders! You who call yourselves wise and seek to guide our paths! Choose your advisors wisely. Those who are outside of our past have no place in our future. Your mothers and fathers you have left behind. We are your family now. Heed us as you would a parent, or all will be lost.

As for the twisted ones, the murderers of Mercy and Forgiveness, I shall face them. I shall expose them and show them for what they are. I fear their power, I fear a great many things — but none of those can stop me. For my daughter, for you who are now my children, I will face them and cry my defiance and curses upon them as I once did upon Eva. I shall not let them stand; I shall not let them lead us down the dark path. This I swear on my blood and by my own sacrifice.

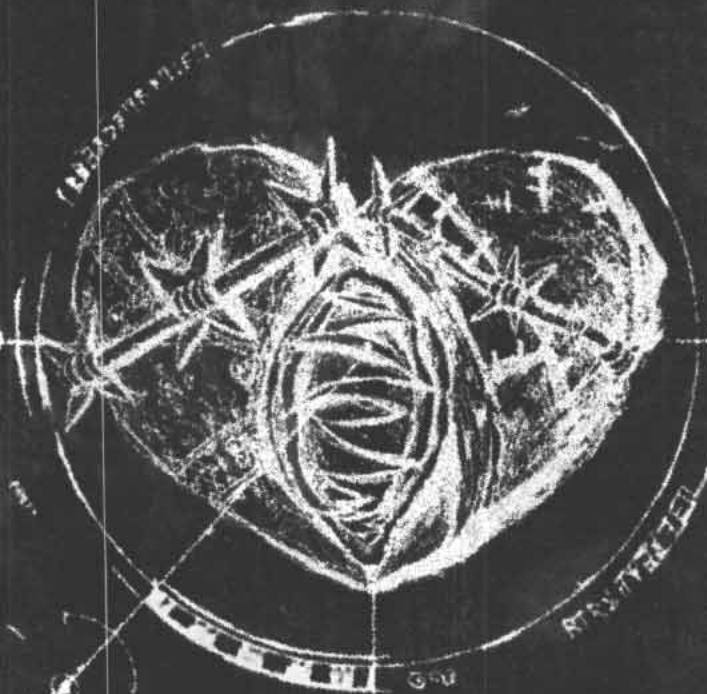


## Chapter 5: Colette the Hopeful

She had roses in her hair,  
A thousand petals that filled the air  
With the sweet scent of love fulfilled  
And Spring Returned.

She had roses in her hair,  
And a dagger in her hand,  
Marked with the blood  
Of her tender heart.

—Ballad of the Fallen



## Lies

### As told by Colette the Hopeful:

It was all a lie. Everything anyone had ever told me. That thought echoed in my mind as I fought to reach the Fallen Bridge. Everything I'd been taught about the Fatimas. Everything my family had shown me. Everything Demitri had told me, promised me. I made my way through howling winds and snow, snow that mixed with tears that fell and froze to my cheeks.

This wasn't how it was supposed to be. We were supposed to leave together. Blinded by tears and snow, I tripped and fell to the frozen ground. I hadn't the will or the strength to stand again, thinking I wanted to just lie there and die. The fingers of cold seeped through my clothes and I started to drift.

## First Blood

### From the confessions of Demitri Luther'on:

When the call to arms came to us in the barracks I could think of nothing other than the pride that swelled in my breast. Finally I would ride with the elite cavalry that my uncle had brought me into. Finally I would be a member of that proud, hard group in fact and not just on parade.

Marcus, my uncle, led us out along the trail blazed by our scouts. Coming to a slight rise we saw below us black forms against the white snow — huddled and running, dirty and twisted. Without hesitation the whole squad charged down into them, and the world seemed to spin about me as I drew my sword and plunged forward.

I still see that charge in dreams; feel the frost on my cloak, the clinging ice formed of my own breath as it rubbed my face raw. In my dreams the whole thing seems to happen so slowly, like a show put on in one of the Dahlian funhouses — everything distorting in the glass of memory. If only it had happened so slowly in life. . .

I remember a man, his face stretched tight over his high cheeks and bulging eyes, stopping to turn and stab at me with a spear of fire-hardened wood. I remember fury, red heat in my ears and eyes, that such a thing would dare strike at me. I remember red in the snow and the awful pounding of my own heart in my ears. I do not remember when I came down off my horse, nor do I remember when I first saw the little girl. . .

All that is left to me is the memory of my uncle pulling me back, hard arms wrapped about mine to stop my sword. All that is left to me is the image of that little girl, her arms and legs severed from her body as she twitched and thrashed her way into oblivion. . .

## 5. Swear Not By The Moon



### Demitri Luther'on

Born a Blade and raised by a close family, Demitri lost a good part of himself when his parents died. Though his uncle tried his best to take care of him, the boy grew to a man without enough human contact, much less enough loving contact. Weary and withdrawn he came of age and did as everyone expected of him, hoping that in finding a place in his Tribe he could find a place in his own heart.

The rage and blood that greeted Demitri shocked him to his core. No one had ever told him that his father's family went battle mad, and when Demitri killed a little girl something in him broke. Colette could have healed that broken part of him, but the conspiracies of man destroyed him. Now Demitri is caught between blind and burning rage and a weariness of life that may lead him to suicide. Unless something is done soon, he will die.

Highlights: Tired, broken, berserker.

Attributes: AGI +2, APP +1, BLD +2, FIT +1, INF -1, KNO -1, PER +1, WIL +1, STR 1, HEA 1, STA 40, ULD 8, AD 8.

Skills: Animal Care 1/-1, Athletics 1/+2, Combat Sense 1/+2, Dodge 2/+2, Hand-to-Hand 2/+2, Intimidate 1/+1, Melee 2/+2, Navigation (Land) 2/-1, Riding 2/0, Survival 1/0, Tactics 1/0



## Father's House

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As told by Colette the Hopeful:

I think I was fourteen summers the first time I danced in my father's house in Bazaar. Burning bright with the desire to serve *Magdalen* and please my family, I gave everything I had, singing and dancing before the crowds of leering men and women. Just on the cusp of being too young to be touched, that taboo made me all the more desirable. The night my father first made me available, after perhaps a year of being on display, fights broke out among the regulars to see who would win me. I don't remember his name. An old Dahlian, he had been visiting the house for years, as long as I could remember. He'd watched me grow up, he said. As he pawed at me he panted that he'd been waiting for me to grow up from the moment he saw me. He was not gentle, but the price was high and brought more honor to my family in *Xstasis*.

The next several years were like that. My oldest sister *Jessamin* was held up to me as a role model. She reveled in her work, never once faltering or hesitating before anyone with the proper price. She hated me because I was prettier, mocked me for wanting to stay on the stage rather than in some sour-breathed, heavy-handed man's crib. She didn't understand, none of them understood. Only when I visited *Xstasis* did I find peace. My mother and her sisters. . . they didn't sell themselves to the highest bidder, they chose and were chosen. Why could no one see the difference? Too, in *Xstasis*, were the Maskers, cousins to the Dahlians in their shows and arts. I wanted so much to be one of them.

Of course I wasn't completely miserable. We did well enough as a family. Unlike many we were comfortable, often with plenty of surplus to send to the family in *Xstasis*. And for every slobbering old man, there were beautiful women of all Tribes, seductive men, so many varieties of lovers and love to explore, I could often convince myself that I was wrong about our family, and could lose myself in the pleasures *Magdalen* wished for us.



## The Blizzard

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Then came the great blizzard of last winter. I remember that first night so clearly. I was dancing on the stage before a crowded audience. As I moved, my eyes closed, I heard the tromping of heavy boots upon the floor, felt the room grow warmer with more bodies. I looked and saw a small troop of *Joanite* cavalry, just in from the cold. From the looks of them, they'd had a hard ride. While most of them were eager to join in the ongoing revelry, one of them caught my eye. A young man, not much older than me and clothed in armor and sorrow, hid himself in the back of the room, not drinking, not eyeing any of the men or women who wished to press close to him. Before I could puzzle over his behavior, my father stopped the dance. "Colette!" he called and motioned me forward. "Come meet this gentleman." He gestured to the man I assumed was their leader. "Marcus Luther'on, this is my youngest daughter." Marcus was tall and roughly handsome, older than the rest and somehow hard looking. I wasn't disappointed that he'd chosen me for the evening.



## The Seduction, Part One

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From the journal of Marcus Luther'on:

The girl was just what I needed to take my mind off my nephew. He'd settled into the back of the room, still stunned and hurting. There was no talking to him, no reasoning with the bleak depression that had come over his face. Joan knows that what he did was not to be commended, but in battle such things happen. I'd grown hoarse with talking to him, and decided to put aside my troubles in the soft flesh of the delight that my host offered me.

From the moment she came down from the table on which she'd been dancing I felt that old need come upon me. Though she lacked the overripe form of her sister, there was something about her body, about her hanging hair and flushed skin, that made me feel every bit the man, and made me want her to feel it too.

When she came close enough I ran a hand over the curve of her belly, making the rings in her navel dance. To my hands, so long in the cold, she felt like fire.

"You look as if you've had a long, cold time of it." She said, and I could feel her lithe muscles pulling under her skin, dancing yet for my pleasure. Such a woman she was — knowing that a man wants more than just a quick bit of friction.

"And you look as if you've had a hot, slick time of it. . . ." I answered her, letting my hands roam over her as I slowly teased her towards my lap. It was an old game, and one that I found myself loving to play with her. Every move, every half-teasing, and always burning glance, touch, advance and retreat just made me desire her more.

Even she wasn't enough, though — or perhaps I'm getting old enough that the fires no longer burn so hot even when fed such rich fuel. Even with her weight spread soft across my lap I couldn't stop worrying about Demitri, and could stop thinking that he would need a woman such as this even more than I.

My worry proved to be well founded. The woman who'd gone back to Demitri pushed too hard, too fast. I caught him pushing her away out of the corner of my eye, and saw her stumble back over a chair with a look of scorn starting to spread over her face. I knew that the boy needed a woman who could play him. So I did my duty to my sister's son, and gave up not just a feast of a woman, but also a horse of my own stable.

## The Offer

As told by Colette the Hopeful:

He sat me on his lap and we bantered, the heat growing between us, until a disturbance came from the back of the room, a scraping of the table as the mysterious sad young man pushed Jessamin away violently. Marcus sighed, "That boy. . ." He looked at me for a long moment, then at my sister and the young Joanite. "How would you like to earn your family a fine horse?" he breathed against my ear.

I was stunned by the generous offer, one I could scarcely refuse. My father would kill me if I did. "I — I . . . of course I would." While I wasn't necessarily suspicious, I was cautious. "What would you require of me?"

Running his hand slowly up and down the small of my back, fingers trailing into the deepest part of the hollow, he whispered in my ear. "Fix that boy. He's never been with a woman, and I think he is afraid. Your sister, although beautiful, lacks the . . . talent to force him. I think you may well have the touch he needs."



### Marcus Luther'on

Family is what separates man from Beast. Marcus has given his life to his family — both clan and tribe, and the Nation as a whole. The death of his sister was a hard blow for him, but when he inherited a child to watch over he did not flinch. For years he could not always be there for Demitri, but he spared all the time that he could. When Demitri came of age and proved qualified to ride with the cavalry Marcus was elated, though little of the emotion ever passed his worn face. Now the grizzled old captain has a new duty — keeping his boy safe, no matter how hard or painful it might be. Marcus has never once shirked his duty and he will not start now.

Highlights: Tough, experienced, secretly loving.

Attributes: AGI +1, BLD +2, FIT +2, INF +1, KNO +1, PER +2, WIL +2, STR 2, HEA 1, STA 40, ULD 9, AD 10

Skills: Combat Sense 3/+2, Dodge 2/+2, Hand-to-Hand 2/+2, Interrogation 1/0, Intimidate 2/+1, Melee (Swords) 3/+2, Notice 2/+2, Riding (War Horse) 3/0, Survival 2/0, Tactics 2/0, Synthesis (Devotion) 2

## The Seduction, Part Two

Somewhat reluctantly, I accepted his offer and moved away from him. Subtle in a way that Jessamin could never be, I took the young man a warm drink and sat with him, "I saw you when I was dancing and thought you looked cold. Perhaps this will help?"

He glanced up at me, eyes dark and as haunted and distant as the older Joanite's had been frank and hungry. "Yes. . . thank you." Warily he took the drink from my hand, letting the warmth soak into his hand.

"It's honey and hard cider, mostly," I offered with a soft smile, "and a few spices." As well as a small dose of something relaxing, yes, but nothing stronger. "It's my favorite this time of year." I watched him for a moment. "Was it a long ride?"

He nodded curtly. "Very long." His cape was still on over his armor, the dark material helping him to blend into the background. He was terribly handsome, with a strong, noble face, slightly dark skin and dark hair, but his eyes were what caught me — deep and endless brown that felt like Magdalen's touch upon me.

"Where were you coming from?" I asked, distracted by those eyes. "I'm sorry. . . was there anything more you wished? We don't have much in the way of a meal, but. . . I'm certain we could arrange something, if you wanted."

He took another sip, and then shook his head. "No thank you. I've no stomach for food." With a look around the room, he sighed, "I just want to lie down and rest, to sleep and put the day behind me." Then he blinked, as though surprised he spoke. With another drink he finished his glass and set it aside.

"Of course," I murmured understandingly, the warmth in my voice no longer feigned. "I can see to that, if you wish?"

## The Seducer Seduced

He blinked up at me, and then looked around the room again. Satisfied that no one in his group was paying him the least attention anymore he nodded softly, turning his eyes back to me. This time I could feel them linger a moment on the under slopes of my breasts where my dance costume did not quite hide them. "Please."

Rising from the table, I smiled again, fighting a small shiver from that intent gaze. "Wait here. What's your name? I'm Colette Liber'on."

"Demetri." He watched me as I stood, eyes holding me with lust, but also with something more: a look similar to that of a young child I once watched get caught in the river. He'd had that same look on his face while watching the ropes that his parents hurled after him, his lifeline. "Demetri Luther'on. Why are you so kind?"

The question caught me off-guard, enough so that the first answer to escape my lips was the honest one: "You looked as if you needed a little bit of kindness." Before long, he followed me upstairs.

I was his first. Although I've lain with countless men and women, I've never known anything like it, before or since. When it was over and we were panting and curled around each other, he told me he loved me. In all my time in my father's house, I'd heard lovers calling all sorts of names and obscenities and prayers, heard grown warriors weep, heard screams and whispers. . . but never, not once, had I heard something that pierced me so deeply and so unexpectedly. I knew then that I loved him as well.



## Absolution

From the confessions of Demitri Luther'on:

Eva's tribe is known for their talents at healing, but had you asked me on that night I would have said that it was a daughter of Magdalen who was a balm beyond any I had dared to dream of. In the tiny little hole in the wall that she used as her room she curled around me, body and spirit, and stroked my hair while I sobbed against her breast. It could not be the same night — it could not be. How in one night could I have cut the life from a little girl in the freezing swirl of white and black, and then found myself in the arms and heart of a woman who held me in the languor of musky darkness? I feared, I hoped, I thought that I must be lost in the River of Dream. . . but I did not ever want to return if that was so. Between the warmth of an embrace and the cold death of the world outside the shelter of her arms there was no contest.

## Crossing the Rubicon

As told by Colette the Hopeful:

The winds and snows blew bitterly outside, and when morning came, the Bazaar was cut off from the rest of Vimary. I avoided my duties as much as I could in order to spend time with Demitri. Beyond the sensual pleasures, we talked, as I've never talked to anyone before. I told him of my dreams of performing, of being able to choose my companions. Although he was a Joanite, he was able to understand that, and respect it. He told me about his childhood, growing up just on the outskirts of Vimary. He'd always wanted to serve Joan as one of Her warriors. His family expected it of him. Marcus, who had nearly raised him as his own when Demitri's mother had died, had been the one that led him out on his first mission, filled with hope and dreams of glory.

## A Confession

Sometime during the third night, Demitri confessed what had brought the troop so close to town. A group of squats were creeping across the frozen river towards Vimary. The Joanite warriors rode them down and killed every last one to prevent them from raiding Vimary's already thin winter stores of food and supplies. It was Demitri's first experience with battle, except it wasn't a battle; it was a massacre of barely armed, starving squats. I held him while he cried, telling me of how they killed them all, even the women and children. "I want to serve Joan," he said bitterly, "but I can't kill another child."

My heart felt as if it were breaking, listening to him. We talked long into the night, searching for a solution. He had no hand for making weapons, and he was too young to serve as one of the Templars. He spoke briefly of the Hermit Blades, but clung to me and vowed that he would not be able to bear leaving me behind. Sometime near dawn, I murmured, "Maybe we should leave the Tribes." I don't know what made me say it, but once I did, it seemed right. Demitri looked at me, shocked, but then it sank in to him as well. Neither of us was happy in our respective places. As long as we stayed with the Nation, we'd never be able to be together the way we truly wanted to be.

But how could we get away? All of the cavalry's horses were under careful guard, and with the storm still raging we'd never make it on foot. All of the horses were under guard, except. . . then it came to me. The horse I had earned from Demitri's uncle. As far as I knew, it was in the family section of the stables, and largely unwatched.

I held my lover to me and whispered in his ear, "Tomorrow night, love. We'll take the horse your uncle gave my father and find our way to Hom." There was a certain bitter irony to that, like biting tin. The price paid to bring Demitri and I together would serve as our escape from all those who would chain us. And it would be the last fee collected from a lover of my father's choosing.

## 5. Swear Not By The Moon

**A Shadow of the Truth**

From the confessions of Demetri Luther'on:

What was I supposed to have told her? Was I supposed to look into her sweet, open face and tell her that I and I alone had hacked the limbs from that girl? How could I tell her the full truth: that the others were hard men, but I was the only monster? So to her who gave me healing I gave a lie. It was the best I could manage, and even speaking of the killings was nearly the end of me. I wept like a babe in her arms, and choked on every word.

Then she spoke the words — she gave me the key to the cage that I found myself in. To leave the Tribes. . . I never would have dreamed it. I never would have thought of leaving Joan and Marcus and everything that I had known. That night in the snow, however, had changed everything. How could I be one of Her Tribe if I murdered little children? Better for us all that I take the woman who held me whole and flee from the chance that I might murder another child.

I did not know what Horn might be like, I did not know if I could live without my family. All I knew was that this woman offered me healing and warmth, and that I needed both more than even Joan's love.

**Leaving Home**

As told by Colette the Hopeful:

Demetri and I slept until late morning, and then made our plans. The storm was dying slowly; we had to act that night or face fleeing on a clear night without the storm to hide us. I was to gather together what supplies I could. Demetri was scheduled to make a foot patrol that evening (the troop had no desire to risk their mounts on what they considered a purely cursory patrol), and would meet me on the outskirts of the Bazaar. It would be several hours after the end of his patrol before anyone thought to look for him, or for me.

The night was brutally cold. Snow and wind watered my eyes, knifed through the furs and layers of clothing I wore. At times I thought the wind was going to pull me from the stallion's back. But I reached our meeting place, and I settled in to wait. The wind howled around me like a starving pack of wolves. The moon rose — although I couldn't see it for the storm — and I waited. I don't know how many hours I spent huddled against that horse. Terrified visions filled my mind: Demetri was dead, he'd forgotten me, he'd been caught. Several times I nearly turned and continued toward Horn without him, but I remembered his vows, how he could never leave me behind. And so I waited.

**A Sister's Betrayal, an Uncle's Rage**

From the journal of Marcus Luther'on:

While Demetri had dallied with the girl Colette I had taken the opportunity to get to know the girl's sister — Jessamin. Though she lacked her sister's inner strength and fire, she made up for it with certain other. . . skills. She was a bit too clinging, perhaps, but in the end that turned out to be all for the best.

Near the end of the blizzard that had kept us trapped in Bazaar for so long, Jessamin whispered into my ear after we had finished our play for the evening. "My sister. . . it is shameful to me. . ." she flushed all down her body at the betrayal of her speech, but could not keep silent, "She is seducing away your nephew. She plans to lure him away, to steal his horse and yours and take him off to some shameful life where she can use him. . ."

Shaking with rage I then climbed from our bed and went to find my sister's son.

## Confrontation

I found him in the stable, grooming his horse with calm, loving strokes of the brush. Before he knew I was there I knocked him to the ground and stomped on his chest so that the wind rushed out of him. Lifting him from the ground I shook him, cursing him to his face. "Have you forgotten the face of your father? Have you forgotten the love of Joan? What kind of serpent are you to betray us for an easy set of legs?"

The boy has stern stuff in him, but it is buried deep and has yet to be forged into true steel. Before my righteous wrath he crumbled, and soon was sobbing the whole story to me. He loved her, he said, and found peace in her arms.

Perhaps I should not have been so rough with him then; it was not his fault that he had succumbed to her arts so easily. I had, after all, chosen her because I knew he could not resist one such as she. Still, perhaps if I had raised him better in the first place. . .

"It was not love, you fool! Love is what your parents had, love is something that comes only through the grace of the Fatima. This is lust! She has used her arts and drugs and the power of her body on you, boy! Can't you see that she has taken your pain and turned it to her own ends?" I shook him and hit him and berated him until he understood. I had Jessamin show him the drugs that the whore had used on him, and finally he broke down. Sobbing like a pitiful baby child he told me all of their plans, and where I could find the girl.

## The Ride

I took the whole troop with me. They grumbled, but in the end they followed without question. We have ridden together for years, and my men trust my word as law. We stormed through the drifts of snow to the place where Demitri had said we would find the witch. She was there all right, with her stolen horse and her actor's eyes. She was shocked to see us, shocked to see my anger. As if she thought that I could be anything but furious at what she had done to my boy. I did not strike her, though I wanted to. I had my men bind her and put her across my horse to take her to her own Tribe for trial.

On the ride she tried to use her arts on me as well: the sway of her soft and supple body, the flush of her cheek, and the shine of her tear-filled eyes. I could feel her raising the fire in me even then — even in the cold and the rage and the knowing of what she was. I gave her over to one of the other men, knowing that she was a witch of great power. I made sure that she would not sit too long with any one man on the ride back, lest she tempt them into treason. Damn Magdalen and Her arts.

## The Arrest

### As told by Colette the Hopeful:

Finally, near dawn, I heard hoof beats coming out of the dying storm. I rose to my feet to find, not Demitri, but Marcus and the rest of the troop. They took the horse from me and shackled my frozen hands together. Every time I tried to talk, Marcus snarled, "Shut up, whore." He would tell me nothing of Demitri. Eyes that had watched me dance with desire and warmth were now cold and hard. When we reached the council grounds, I knew I would be banished. My only hope was that perhaps Demitri had also been caught, and would be banished with me. That we could still go on to Hom together.

I didn't have long to wait before the next new moon. One by one I watched other doomed souls dragged before the council, before the Fatimas, and then it was my turn. My crime was stealing the horse and attempting to subvert a Joanite warrior. I learned then what had happened. Jessamin, that envious bitch, had seen me gathering supplies and figured out what Demitri and I were planning. She went to Marcus. They caught Demitri before his patrol and forced him to confess everything. Jessamin was so dramatic in her testimony, nearly weeping for her fallen sister and her family's shame.

5. Swear Not By The Moon



Jessamin Liber'on

Jessamin has a certain reputation in Bazaar, and it is one that she both loves and hates at the same time. She enjoys the panting attentions that her notoriety grants her, but she always wanted to be something more. Exactly what that more was she was never quite sure: more subtle, more skilled, more ethereal, more desired than possessed, or perhaps a bit of all of those things. All Jessamin ever knew for certain was that whatever it was that she wanted to be more of her younger sister Colette already had aplenty. It never occurred to Jessamin that Colette felt out of place or cut off, or that the younger girl sometimes wanted to be more like her sister. All Jessamin ever wanted was to take what her sister had and have it for herself. No price would be too steep if she could just have that mysterious something...

Highlights: Wanton, deceitful, spiteful.

Attributes: APP +2, BLD +1, CRE +1, INF +1, PSY -1, WIL +1.

Skills: Dance 2/0, Etiquette 2/+1, Grooming 2/+2, Hagglng 2/+1, Herbalism 1/0, Human Perception 2/-1, Music 2/+1, Notice 1/0, Seduction 3/+2, Theatrics 2/+1.

The Cruellest Cut

From the confessions of Demitri Luther'on:

After Jessamin spoke Marcus prodded me forward with a fist to my kidney. I could still see the smoldering anger around his eyes, and knew that I had disgusted him more in this than when I killed the child. It seemed there was little in my fate but to fail those to whom I owed better.

Colette's eyes were hollow when I stepped forward. The left was shadowed, nearly hidden in the mass of a bruise that lay heavy on her face. She had been beaten, driven, and dragged, and now she was barely able to stand on her own legs. The corner of the lips to which I had pressed so many kisses now dripped blood.

I saw light in her eyes when she saw me, and I saw it die when I spoke. "The whore drugged me, then seduced me." It had been drugs, that first night. Jessamin had shown me them, let me smell them, and I remembered that taste in my drink. I should be angry, should be raging — but it was not drugs on any night but the first. "She wanted to leave the Tribes, and wanted me to come with her."

She twitched then, her face collapsing and her knees shaking like the slender aspen saplings in a high wind. Her eyes looked on me in horror, in a kind of dumb denial of reality. I could see it in her, the inability to cope with the sudden wounds dealt to her. In my dreams that expression is on the face of the little girl in the snow.

"I was weak, and the whore convinced me. Only my uncle's intervention saved me." It was my voice that spoke the words. Everyone heard them, though I remember them not. Once again my mind hid while I killed a little girl who had done me no harm.



## Seeds of Hope

As told by Colette the Hopeful:

Stunned, I heard nothing else. I couldn't even weep. I felt as if I'd been turned to stone. The judges had to ask me twice to speak in my own behalf. I stumbled "I — I earned that horse. The captain offered it to me if I bedded his nephew."

"Wrong!" The Magdalite Elder roared, outrage outlining her features. "That horse was your family's possession, and was earmarked to be a special offering to Magdalen Herself."

As if summoned, She appeared, standing before me. "So in essence," She murmured, "you stole from Me, My child. Have you no excuse for that?" She was entrancing, frightening, and even then I loved Her. She was the Perfection for which I had always yearned.

Then it came to me. I remembered what I'd always been taught, what I'd been raised to believe: Love rules all, passion holds sway. They are two of the most sacred emotions humans can feel. "Mistress," I pleaded, "You teach us that love is all important. . . I did what I did out of love for Demitri. I wanted him to be safe and happy. . ."

"Silence," Magdalen spoke softly, but the word carried deep into my soul. "You loved the boy, this I know. That is not your sin. Your sin is that you loved him more than you loved Me."

As She spoke, Her fingers touched my chest and the tearing began. Everything I'd ever been was torn in two.

I was cast out. Fallen.

## Vision

Drifting and drowsy with deadly sleep somewhere in the frozen waste, between my childhood home and the island I would come to call home, my eyes were opened and I began to truly see.

I saw Demitri, sobbing as he talked to his uncle. I saw Jessamin, talking to a wealthy Diplomat who visited my father's house from time to time. I saw him give her a jewel, saw her pocket it, and then go speak to Marcus with a smug expression. Magdalen's words rang through my semi-consciousness: "*You loved him more than you loved Me.*"

I saw the hatred in Marcus's eyes. And then I saw the Truth.

I saw fear in the eyes of the Diplomat. I saw fear and envy in Marcus's reprimand of Demitri.

I saw fear in the Fatima Herself.

Magdalen taught us all that love is over all. But no one under Her rule can ever know what love really is. As long as the Fatimas control our hearts, no one in the Tribes can know true love. A heart that loves is free, and only a heart that is free can love. Magdalen feared a love that went beyond Her, that had nothing to do with a blind devotion to Her cause.

Real love never comes from slavery, and slavery is what the Fatimas desire. The 'love' they claim is in the hearts of the tribe is nothing more than a shackle.

The Eighth Tribe will break that shackle.

*"They will create freedom for all, but it will be born of blood and sacrifice."*

I fear my sacrifice has only begun. It is spring now here in Hom, and the Fallen are stirring. I've found others like me, and I know what we must do. Demitri is lost to me unless he is freed, as all of the Tribes must be freed. The Goddess stands with us. With Her on our side and if we hold true, there is no way we can fail.

## Chapter six: By the Pricking of My Thumbs

In the season of thorns  
Trust is the white of death  
And hope its bated breath.  
—Yagan Song



## What the Thunder Said

From the memory of T'iphal:

No wonder things fell apart and the center could not hold, for there is no respect left under heaven. I fell nearly a hundred years ago, in the days of glory. I was put down by the animals and their too-clever minds. They cared not for the sacrifices I had made for them, cared not for the lessons that I was teaching them. Not once, not once in all the years of my burning did they listen. Not once as they thrashed and screamed under me, eyes rolling back in their heads did they listen.

No, obstinate, obdurate and centered only on the little bits of flesh between their ears or between their legs they refused me, refused themselves. I thought, perhaps, that they had learned when they fell upon me with the axes, when my life's blood seethed and spurted from the horrid wounds they hacked into my adopted flesh. As I twitched and released myself, as my blood dyed their hair to red and they howled their lust with eyes of fury free, I thought they had learned. But even then I failed. Even then they were able to turn from me, to force down the deep animal and do the "civilized" thing.

They murdered me and learned nothing from my passing. In the last moments of my passing I left a gift upon their world, a bit of myself that could yet remain to draw forth the lust of the eye. I left my heart as a stone upon their world, that I might be remembered and respected for what I had done for them.

## Four Winds

I did not understand what they thought when they picked me up and hid me from the eyes of their brothers. I did not understand what that damned shining one was until he and his legions of howling seraphim descended upon me. He forced himself upon me, and through me he went to the realms that are forbidden to those who yet know the joys of blood and pulse and breath. They learned nothing! Even now they seek out what is not theirs and leave behind that which they should do.

In time I came to know them, those foul beings that pressed their spirits through mine, that used my death — my death in sacrifice! — to further their own work. I could do nothing but exist as they pressed through me, used me, raped my spirit and forced me to become a dumb draft animal to pull their cart along roads of spiritual mud. I was dead, and from that no one may return.

Or so I thought. So I thought, until I realized that it was not so. I yet was, I still thought and hurt and went raw with hate that seethed through the deeps of what should have lain still. I am. In this world I am, and in their world the stone that was my heart yet lingers. It is a gate, a power, a link of potency and spasm.



6. By The Pricking of ...



Angus Oliv'on

Born in a Dahlian caravan to Magdalite parents, Angus grew up one step ahead of the Watch and one lie away from banishment. A liar, a thief, and an unrepentant scoundrel, Angus was always loved by everyone that met him — for a while. Eventually, however, his light fingers and wagging tongue would always wear out his welcome, and off he would go. The only reason that Angus wasn't cast out of the Tribes long ago was that he never stayed in one place long enough for anyone in power to get a good hold on him or get enough evidence of his heresies to actually bring him to trial.

Angus met the love of his life in Aucausin. What more could he ever hope for? She was beautiful, willing, and powerful enough to cover all his bills — so long as he served her well. Seeing that her service involved lying, corrupting the innocent, and running laughing into the night, it was simply a match made in heaven.

Highlights: Roguish, cynical, glib.

Attributes: AGI +1, CRE +1, INF +2, PER +1, PSY +1 WIL +2

Aspects: Manifestation

Skills: Acrobatics 1/+1, Athletics 2/0, Combat Sense 2/+1, Disguise 2/+1, Dodge 2/+1, Forgery 2/+1, Human Perception 1/+1, Notice 1/+1, Seduction 1/0, Sleight-of-Hand 2/+1, Sneak 2/+1, Streetwise 2/+2, Theatrics 3/+2, Synthesis 2.

Transference

It is a link they all want. That I can use, that human desire to possess and to hold — that is the desire I always tried to teach them. Now I will use that power, and I will rip new songs from screaming throats. That bitch that forced me to pull her from bank to bank of the river, that bitch that treated me as if I was an unminding beast and not a dead lord, will bleed red for me and bear my seed.

She thought she had all from me, that she had seen all that my far-flung powers could see. She thought that she was the mind that guided my body, that yoked my might to her will. She thought so many things, and all of them were false. Though I could not stop her from riding me, in the end I managed to turn her from some of the paths that she should have seen, some of the things that she should have known.

Now she thinks she knows what rises up to greet her from the handful of dust that is the flesh of that world. But there is more that she did not see that I did, more that I can use that she cannot.

They killed me and learned not their lesson. Now I must, for their sake, rise again.

Shadow in the Evening

From the letters of Angus Oliv'on:

Well, exalted one of the long and luscious legs, I have to say that things are not going quite so perfectly as we could hope. As you instructed me — and quite delightful was the instruction, if you don't mind me saying — I arranged with the girl's sister to get the dancing child embroiled with that lovely little bit of beef, and the results were nothing if not spectacular. (I do have to recommend the house's peephole show, though I bet it will not be quite so intriguing as it was that first night.)

Once the two had made the beast with two backs it was a simple matter to swing them round and round till the girl fell off the merry-go-round. That, however, is when things started falling apart. Though she is satisfactorily obsessed with getting her boy back the problem is that the boy is looking interested in getting back with her as well. I'm afraid that your little Marcus toy wasn't quite as hard a man as you made him out to be. It seems that he actually is worried over the boy's recent suicidal bouts, and with the new developments in the Tribe the fact that the girl has been exiled may not be enough to put him off letting his prized nephew find the bit of tail that makes him happy.

As of the moment, I'm trying to get the sister to work on Marcus. I don't know how successful she'll be. While she is quite good at working with her mouth, her ability to work with her brain seems a mite more limited. Sad really, she might have made something of herself other than a quick tumble someday. I wish we had kicked her to the gutter rather than her sister. Still though, as long as Marcus is uncertain we should still be able to bait the girl with the prize bit of meat.



I have been thinking that it might do some good to the cause, were I to pop off to Hom for a bit. I worry that if the girl slows down for a second her natural intelligence might be able to reassert itself. If, however, I can put a burr under her saddle and keep her bucking (in more ways than one, if it wouldn't be mixing business with pleasure) she should stick to the course we need her to.

My only worry is that if these Guides are as dangerous as you say they are, then they might be able to see through my feeble ruses. Though I wish you all the honor in the world, oh giver of burning kisses, I have to admit that I do like my head and my spirit where they are in relation to the rest of me, and have no wish to be tossed and turned by nasty things with big teeth. So while I think that the girl's future path requires my personal guidance, I would like your opinion on the matter before I make my move. Until then, I remain your humble servant.

## Whispers of Immortality

### The whispered message of a skull:

This night I feel the earth drawing its last breaths, my mistress. I feel the opening of the grave and the purging of the bones therein. A fountain shall they form as they rise out of their rest, a pacing of time and tide to overturn the Vault. I feel all these things, I know all these things, and yet I have not eyes to see or tongue to tell.

From fear to hope and to fear again I have crawled on my belly. From pain to peace and to pain again I have flown through the air. Your bidding I have done, and now I wish for freedom from this human head, this clattering jaw. Twice I have killed for you and I wish no more. Death enough already clogs this world and fills the spaces between with the stench of rot. Such is not what was meant to be.

In dreams I plagued that man with visions and fears. I lied and filled his heart with hatred. I turned him against his own flesh and turned him against his own life. I filled him with hate till his heart burst and his wife burned out her own soul. She died from the inside, immolated like the moth's body when the flame is done. I killed her to feed his wrath and set him and his clan to the torch. For the love I once bore you I brought back my memories of every cut and blow that life had ever dealt me and dealt them to him who deserved it not.

In the woods and the wild I found the one you vexed. She was wearing the very clothes whose threads you had burned upon your altar, and I knew their smell. I found her weeping and praying, weeping and starving. Her mind was an open thing, a seeking thing, a broken thing. To her I could have shown the truth of breath and the hope of death. For you I lied. For you I burned into her mind a lie, a sound and motion that marks the death that leaves the soul to lament. Now she walks upon the path you wished, now she walks towards a death that she does not deserve. I do not know whether to pity her or you. She at least will be true to the lie she has been given, while you turn your back on the truths you have been shown.

I came to you for the sake of Baba Yaga. I lied for you for the sake of the bonds that have been between us. Now daughter mine, I tell you, set me free. I have served out your purpose and turned that man, that woman to ashes. Now let me rest and face your fate alone. I am leaving, I am leaving and nothing of me shall remain.

## 6. By The Pricking of ...



### Skull Spirit

There is a power that comes from bones, and none know this better than the Yagans. What few even among that Tribe realize, however, is that there is more to the world of spirit than simple ghosts. Even when Baba Yaga has led a person's soul through the Fold, there is still something powerful about their remains. Some few among the Yagans have found secret ways to use the skulls of their ancestors to bind and control spirits.

These beings, though not actually the spirit of the ancestor, take up some of the memory and power that the body's original spirit had. Skull spirits are versatile, intelligent, and take up many of the attitudes of the dead towards their summoner. Thus using the bones of one who loved you in life can bring a willing spiritual aide.


What even the Yagans do not know is that though the spirits may start off loving and helpful, they are all malicious in their hearts, and will inevitably betray their summoners.

**Highlights:** Versatile, malicious, patient.

**Attributes:** As deceased, WIL +3.

**Skills:** As deceased.

**Powers:** A skull spirit has powers that mimic the abilities that the deceased had in life. Thus a skull spirit bound into a Yagan priest's skull could have Curse of Dream and Dream Travel.



## Sowing to Reap

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From the musings of Lishan Haverkin:

There is little in life that fills me with such a deep and lasting content as the time of sowing. I love to stand on the fields of Lai with the sun beating down on my shoulders like the weight of a blanket, spilling across my thinning hair to drench the deep, rich soil with gold. The smell of the ground rises up to you, filling your nose with the scent of birth and loam, the rich deep darkness that nourishes and raises life. It is there, down in the dark of the womb and the earth, where life really begins. Once the sun shines down upon your shoulders and warms your eyes with the million colors of the Goddess's world you have already been formed. It is in the dark that we are formed, in the dark that we are shaped. That is the power of the deep down things, the dark and the churning womb.

That is why you have to be so careful when you sow, because of the power of the soil. When you gather up the seeds to be cast into the turned furrows of reeking earth you must sift through them carefully, you must check to be sure that you do not have a sack of good seeds mixed with seeds that will grow thorns. It is so easy to simply throw wide a hand and let the mixture of seeds sift to the ground, and thus to offer up a bitter harvest.




## Fair Harvest

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The traitors, the Goddess killers that live on Hom, never learned this lesson. They never knew the soil. I feared them when I first saw their faces, feared them more when I learned of the harm they had done. I feared for my life, for my soul, and for the life of my dear Eva. How could I allow them to stand when they might do so much more harm?

From my youth I was taught that mixing thorns with seeds was the worst thing that one could do, a petty sin and an ugly stupid one. I only hope that Eva will understand why I did what I did. For over ten years now I have been waiting for the harvest, placing one poison seed after another into the bag of those murderers. A bitter old man, a blind old woman, an ashen soul, and an eager young girl — all poison ready to burn the soil and grow thorns to cut the hands of the harvesters. The ones who call themselves Guides are so eager for whatever dark crop they are growing that they never thought to check all their seeds.

Sloth and blindness always have a price. For those two the price will be the Seed of Stone that my dreams have spoken of since I was a girl. We shall have it from them; we shall turn its power to the use of the Fatimas. Their harvest will place food upon our plate and leave them with bitter thorns. I can only hope they choke on them till they die.



## Come Like Shadows

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A conversation between three women:

**Lishan:** Well met, sisters.

**Aucausin:** Well met by moonlight indeed.

**Nidagresa:** Enough of pretty words. The time of the harvest is on us now. What we have long wanted will be ours soon enough. Are you both ready to the task?

**Aucausin:** There can never be enough of pretty words, sister. It was pretty words that marched our pawns into place, pretty thoughts that drew them all to us. As to whether we are ready to the task, I think you forget your place by asking. Crone you may be, but you came to the plan after both Lishan and I. We had started down this path long before you lifted your head out of the bone yard and realized that there was a world beyond your corpse-fires.

**Nidagresa:** You forget yourself, sister, to speak so to me. I came last to this circle true enough, but that means little in the way of resolve. The old often totter and the feeble often forget the path no matter how long they have been upon it.

**Aucausin:** As well you would know, daughter of a trai —

**Lishan:** Enough! Both of you stop this. You are starting to natter like fishwives at market. We are better than this. We must be. Enough has been lost already without us losing our sisterhood. In this, and in all the rest, we must stand together.

**Aucausin:** Of course, sister, of course. Forgive my tongue, Nidagresa.

**Lishan:** To answer your question, old sister, we are ready. I have waited so long for this that it seems only half-real — but I am ready all the same. I can almost see the tears that shall stand in their eyes, and I feel no regret. Sometimes the herd must be culled for the good of all.

**Nidagresa:** You are wise, young Lishan. I think it fitting that you hold the stone for our sisterhood. I am too old to be sure that I would hold it long enough to master the beast before my own passing.

**Aucausin:** I have no wish for it myself either. The stone I will leave to the two of you. My concern is that those ugly things be cut down now, before they can lead other sheep down their path towards the twisted ways they serve.

**Nidagresa:** I too wish them dead. That, I think, is the only failing of your plan, Lishan. We cannot be sure they will die.

**Lishan:** True, sisters, true. It does not matter though. The body may live on long after the spirit is gone. A husk can do only so much harm. If we cut their spirits and disgrace them before their ragged collection of followers than they will be dead in everything that matters.

**Aucausin:** Granted.

**Nidagresa:** Once we have the stone you are right, they will not matter. That stone is the key; I can feel it in my bones. There is something there. . . .

**Aucausin:** I see the beauty of blood in it, the beauty of blood and surrender that we have forgotten. We have become so separate. That stone holds the keys to that.

**Lishan:** I know sisters, I know. That stone holds the key to rebirth. From that stone our future will be born, and the end of the dreams of the twisted ones and their fallen followers. Now go, return to your places of power and wait. When the girl strikes it will all begin and we must be ready. Till then sisters.

**Aucausin:** Till then.

**Nidagresa:** Till then.

(Exit Lishan)

**Aucausin:** Poor child. I do pity her, if not the other victims. How could she think that we would let her have the stone? What would she do with it, grow more food?

**Nidagresa:** We all see what we want to see, sister. Who knows, maybe she plans for us what we plan for her? Do not be too proud; till that stone is in our hands we will not know for sure that we have done well. Now good night, I have work to finish before the moon sets.

(Exit Nidagresa)

**Aucausin:** Good night, sister. I wonder if you realize how true your words are.

(Exit Aucausin)

# Chapter seven: Weaver Resources

Who can call forth the past?

My breath

Who can make the Goddess's memories dance?

My words.

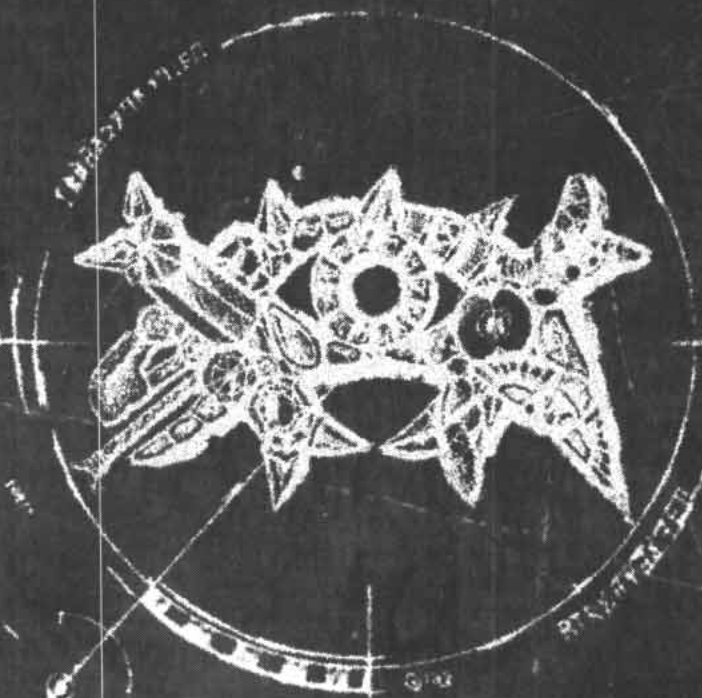
Who can call forth tears, laughter, delight, and fear?

My dreams.

I am the storyteller, I am the guide.

Listen now, and know.

— Invocation at the beginning of a sacred story



## BEHIND THE SCENES

Behind the stories presented in the book lingers a malignant force, an old and angry force that is trying to shuffle its way back to the mortal coil. The stories in this book actually began long ago, just after the closing of the Fold. In that terrible time a lord of the Z'bri named T'iphal was fallen upon by his palace servants and slain in a sudden and brutal uprising.

T'iphal, however, was not content to simply fade away. He believed that his purpose in existence was to teach his brothers and sisters of the flesh what they had forgotten. T'iphal used his last bits of life to form a heartstone, the physical manifestation of his soul. Linking the deepest parts of the River of Dream and the physical world, the heartstone was a powerful tool, and one that could be used by those with the correct knowledge.

T'iphal was a very spiritually potent lord, and a master of the old arts. Though he lacked the raw power of Tibor or the knowledge of some that became Melanis, he was trained in the ways of the spirit world. So when his spirit was used by the Guides, a focus of so much energy and so much interest, he was slowly able to start waking from the long dark sleep of the ages. Over a span of years beyond numbering he slowly drew himself from the reality of death, and dragged the spark of his mind back towards life. It was not easy, and even for so potent a lord it took pain and skill. In the end, however, T'iphal brought himself back to a sort of quasi-life, becoming aware of the world through his heartstone in much the same way that others used his heartstone to become aware of the depths of the River.

Despite all his power and knowledge, even T'iphal could not cross the final line between the living and the dead without the efforts of someone on the other side. He also could not fulfill what he saw as his destiny while the Guides, who were wary of the power of so ancient a heartstone, watched over him. He reached out through dream to convince a heart already filled with hate to help free him from the Guides.

## THE CIRCLE OF THE SOWER

While T'iphal was waking from his long dream, a young Evan was initiated into the ranks of Eva's Shamans. As part of her training she was told that the Guides had helped to kill Mary, that those twisted things were responsible for the death of Forgiveness and Purity. Idealistic and passionate, the young woman decided to make the Guides pay. The other Shamans were following their own plans of vengeance against the Guides, but for Lishan it was too little. With a heart full of hate she went into the spirit realms on a vision quest to try and find some way of hurting the Guides as they had hurt the Tribes.

Though Lishan was powerful, she was not powerful enough to reach the deepest realms of Dream where T'iphal's soul lay — only those using a heartstone could reach to that depth. She was, however, strong enough to draw near enough that T'iphal felt her hate and reached out to her. In a series of subtle and invasive dreams and visions he turned Lishan's hate towards his own goal. The way to hurt the Guides, he convinced her, was to take from them that which was most important to them: their respect among the Fallen, and their precious heartstones.

The effort involved exhausted T'iphal for years, but the damage had been done. Lishan turned her considerable talents towards puzzling out a way to harm the Guides. She contacted two other priestesses of the Fates, one from each of the other Tribes in that union, and shared her plans with them. Together the three used their influence to slowly fill Hom with poisoned seeds, people whose destinies were well enough known to the circle that they felt they could control them. These seeds fell to the soil of Hom and found rich earth there, growing in power and influence while the three sisters watched on.

## DEN HADES' VISION

Even though they were subtle and careful, the Circle still underestimated the true abilities of the Guides. Following Halos' intuition, Den Hades went deep into the realms of Dream to search out any secret plots aimed at her or her lover. She saw deep into the past, and was given a vision of the histories of the four primary seeds that the Circle of the Sower had planted.

## SO IT BEGINS

Now a shadowy war of twined destinies and dark motives is beginning. T'iphal is waking, and has started sending omens into the dreams of the three sisters, hinting that the time of harvest is nigh. The three have therefore set their plans in motion, using the seeds they had so carefully planted to grow a harvest of thorns that they hope will strangle the Guides. The Guides watch and wait, hoping that they will be able to turn their enemies to allies and that they will be able to find the source of this threat against them, which is far more important in their eyes than simply stopping the current plot.

The Player Characters will be drawn into the middle of this secret conflict. With little information, not knowing whom they are supposed to trust or whom they are supposed to save, they will have to make their way through a tangled history of pain and betrayal in order to save four lives and to stop a demon from being reborn upon the earth.

## THEME AND MOOD

*Harvest of Thorns* is about the cost of fate, and the ability of individuals to change it. The four major NPCs in this book have great potential to help or to harm the Guides, the PCs, and the Eighth Tribe. They have been set out to bring a great and bloody blow against the Guides and the easiest way to stop them would be simply to kill them and have done with it. The cost of that path, however, could be high, as the Guides have seen that the four could be part of tipping the balance for the Children of Prophecy in the future. The Player Characters are confronted with the choice of following an easy path to save the moment, or going through a more difficult trial to help build the future.

Of course, **Tribe 8** is also about blood and sacrifice, and so it may be that while the Characters are able to save some of the seeds, they may have to destroy others of them. Doing so, however, should not be a casual event. If the Player Characters can see themselves reflected in the lives of these four exiles, if they can see the human suffering and pain that the four have been put through, then being forced to kill them will strike deeper at the heart. Blood and sacrifice is not an easy future, and so the pain of necessity makes up the final element of this scenario.

Below are outlined several quick ideas for getting the Player Characters acquainted with the Seeds, giving the PCs an entry point into the epic plotline.

## NOT WISELY BUT TOO WELL: JUDAH THE CURSED

- While the characters are on or near the Fallen Bridge a newly Fallen man staggers across to Hom. Though he is quite good looking he has obviously been beaten and stripped, and is barely keeping his feet. When he passes the Joanite watchtowers Judah and two of his men will attack him suddenly and for no obvious reason. They will try to beat the man, Galen, to death. Galen, for his part, will try his best to kill Judah as well. If the characters step in both men will accuse the other of murder, but if pressed will refuse to talk about the matter. Judah will spurn the PCs, and leave Galen to them if it is obvious they will not let him kill the man (he may be angry, but he will not kill anyone else to kill Galen). Galen could be convinced to talk if he is helped and befriended on his first hard days in Hom.

- The Characters have something valuable stolen from them, something that they care about and cannot simply replace. While they are hunting for it they come across Judah, who is utterly unpleasant to them. When he finds out that they have been robbed, however, he offers to help them. Even in the pit that is Hom, Judah still believes in seeing justice done. He will use his Truthsaying and investigative abilities to help the Characters recover their lost items. Once the thief is found Judah will try to cut off his hand as punishment, and will only relent if the PCs force the issue.

- One of the PCs is falsely accused of a crime against another Fallen. Though they are innocent there is a great deal of evidence against them, and some powerful people want to take the opportunity to hurt the characters. At a rant, the Characters are brought forward to stand before the assembled body of the Fallen and be judged. Judah steps forward to help the PCs, making it clear that he is acting out of a sense of justice and spite for the Fallen as a whole, and not because he cares about the Characters one way or the other. After the trial he helps the Characters find the people who set them up, and if possible has the fiends put to death.

## ANGELS AND MINISTERS OF GRACE: ALEXEI THE SILENT

- Through one of the many mistakes that characters make, one of the Player Characters ends up poisoned with a Flesher poison (such as the one on page 50 of the *Book of Legends*). With little time to spare, the PCs need to find someone capable of curing the poison (or of helping a character already wise in the ways of poison make a cure in time). Grim and silent, Alexei comes to help the PCs. It is obvious the whole time that he aids them that he finds the situation deeply troubling, but will not speak of it. Alexei tells the PCs that the only way they will get an antidote made in time is to steal some of the ingredients from the Yagans. He will help the PCs sneak into Mortuary to get what is necessary. While there he will attempt to kill a Yagan Flesher, and will have to be stopped to keep from compromising the Player Characters' mission. While he can be made to see reason, Alexei vows to kill the Yagan someday. After the poisoned PC is cured Alexei tries to make the Characters swear not to tell anyone of the route he used to guide them into Mortuary.

- One of the Characters has felt a presence in his home, though not one that is ever threatening. It has come and gone over the course of weeks, and no one seems to be able to figure out what it is. One night while the Character is sleeping he is troubled by visions of a lovely but worn and aged woman sobbing and begging him for help. The Character wakes (or others of the cell hear him cry out in his sleep and come into the room) to see a ghost trying futilely to shake the Character awake. The ghost begs the PCs to aid her husband, and becomes both hysterical and dangerous if they refuse. If the Characters will aid her she leads them to an alley not far from Ile Perdue where Alexei lies nearly dead. The PCs must heal him or get him to a healer, and when he wakes he tells them that he was attacked by a man who had a face like a Black Owl. If the Characters investigate they may find out that one of the Black Owls was sent to kill Alexei because the Crucible believes that he is a danger to the Nation.

• There are ghosts that are far less amicable than the ghost of Alexei's wife, and the PCs find themselves on the receiving end of a ghost's anger. Someone that the Characters have killed or wronged returns from beyond the pale to wreak havoc in their lives. The ghost feeds them nightmares and terrors, gives those they are dealing with chills and makes others uncomfortable around the Characters. Needing advice (for this ghost is trickier than most, and even former Yagans could be at a loss) the PCs are directed to Alexei, who knows more about ghosts than any man should. He tells them that the way to lay a ghost to rest is to find what went wrong in its death and try to mend that. The PCs must then confront the sins of their own past, though Alexei will aid them if they ask. At first Alexei will be (for Alexei) open and honest, but as the path that the Characters walk turns more and more like his own haunted past he withdraws and finally vanishes, leaving the PCs alone.

### HOW SHARPER THAN THE SERPENT'S TOOTH: ANNA THE PROPHETESS

• Though Anna was a stickler for tradition and had a great love for Eva (one that still burns, even after her fall), she was also a kind woman who would never willingly let anyone starve. While she was the head of her clan she would occasionally smuggle food to the Fallen. Now that Naomi is in charge the food has stopped. The PCs are assigned to go to the clan's lands and try to arrange to get the food before winter sets in and starvation runs rampant. The clan, however, lives on sacred lands and tries to capture or kill the Characters when they come to bargain. Samuel could aid the PCs in escaping, asking in return that they help him unite his lost mistress and her estranged youngest daughter.

• The PCs, down on their luck and desperately needing either food or equipment for an undertaking, are given sudden and unexpected charity from a Tribal woman. Emilia, feeling sympathy for those who are now in the same situation as her mother, offers to help the Characters obtain whatever they need with no thought of recompense. Her obvious sorrow and her generosity should influence the Characters to try and find out what is wrong with her, or offer to repay her. If they do her request will be simple, to find her mother and keep her safe. Unless the Characters already know Anna, Emilia will not ask to see her mother, as she is under the belief that Anna wants no part of her now.

• In one of the flare-ups of tension between the Fallen and the Tribes the PCs come upon a group of Herites beating a man to death. The man is obviously unarmed, and is offering no resistance to the beating, he simply pleads that he must find his mistress and begs for his life. If the PCs step in and save his life the man will turn out to be Samuel, who tells the characters that he has to find Anna because her eldest daughters are plotting to kill Emilia to keep her from trying to gain control of the clan.

### SWEAR NOT BY THE MOON: COLETTE THE HOPEFUL

• During a Joanite raid in Bazaar, the PCs run into Marcus and his company hunting down Colette, and have a chance to come to her assistance. Just as things get really rough, Demitri comes along. The two lovers haven't seen one another since Colette was banished. Does he throw in with the Fallen? Or in his bitterness, does he try to wipe them out utterly?

• Colette approaches the cell and tells them her story, and has a plan. She says that she knows Demitri truly loves her, and that he is being held against his will among the Tribes. She wants the cell's help to kidnap him from his family. If the cell agrees, this will bring them in direct conflict with Marcus and his cavalry, and potentially members of Colette's family as well. What happens if the cell kidnaps the wrong Joanite? This hook can also be used to force Colette's hand into stealing the stone, or could be used to keep her from doing so.

• The Z'bri stage a series of raids on Vimary. The members of the cell find themselves fighting alongside Demitri's troop. After the battle, he surreptitiously approaches them to bring him news of Colette. Do they trust him? How do they feel after finding Colette and hearing her side of the story? More importantly, how do they get word back to Demitri and do they tell Colette that he's looking for her? This could be expanded into a larger plot with the cell acting as go-betweens for the star-crossed lovers, dodging their respective families.



7. Weaver Resources

THE TIME OF REAPING

The following quests are given in a standardized format. They all contain a short set-up for the quest, a list of the NPCs involved, important locations, and then a short description of the possible paths that the quest might take. In order to remain as flexible and open to Weaver use as possible, each of these quests is left brief. Every Weaver can add as much detail as they need to fit their groups' playing style, making the plot come alive for their own Players.

POISONED FUTURE

Anna is the first of the Seeds to come up against the Guides, and she does so in a typically blunt way. For several weeks Anna's rants about the Guides have been growing more vehement and more urgent, and many have started to listen. While Anna herself is mostly peaceful in her railings against the Guides, some of those whom she has influenced have decided that the time for words is past. A small group of radicals, a mixture of Herites and Doomsayers, have started to gather with thoughts of blood on their mind. They reason that if Anna is correct (and they firmly believe that she is, such is the power of her words) then they must do something in order to protect their futures.

The Doomsayers have found that it is nearly impossible to uncover anything about the Guides using Synthesis, and that has only increased their fear. Together with the Herites they have started to worry that the Guides mean to set themselves up as quasi-Fatimas to rule over the Eighth Tribe. Needless to say these desperate folk are not going to sit by while this happens. So they have decided to start a war against the Guides. Fearing that the rest of the Fallen would not understand (they have seen how Anna's words are often scorned), they have made their plans in secrecy, and planned to move against the allies of the Guides before the Guides themselves. By doing so they hope to weaken the Guides and make them fearful and prone to showing their true colors.

In the dark of night the new Cell, which calls itself the Thorns of Freedom, attacks and kills Richter, one of the Guides' newest apprentices, along with two of his companions. The murders are done swiftly and quietly, but the results are made very public, the three's bodies nailed to the Gallows and their eyes and tongues cut out.

THE CAST

Archetypes listed may all be found on page 112 of the *Tribe 8 Companion*.

The Thorns of Freedom is comprised of five members. Thomas is their nominal leader, a paranoid man who fears anything that he cannot understand. A Doomsayer of some ability with Synthesis, he has long feared the Guides for the power that he suspects that they wield. Thomas is a Doomsayer archetype, but with Melee 2 and BLD +1.

Thomas' long time associates Alexander and Shadrach are former Joanites who were exiled for cruelty and a love of blood that wasn't acceptable even in the Warrior's Tribe. Both follow Thomas with a near religious devotion, their slightly simple worldview entirely trusting of every word he speaks. Both are Herite archetypes with BLD and STR +1.

Susan is the only member of the Cell who openly questions Thomas, but that is not surprising as Susan questions everything. Unfortunately she also fell deeply in love with Anna, and the woman's words stirred her beyond her normal skepticism to leap headfirst into Thomas' murderous plans. Susan is a Herite archetype with CRE and KNO +1.

The last member of the cell is Old Tom, an ancient former Yagan-cum-Doomsayer. Old Tom is something of a mystery, even to the members of his cell. He has been known to wander off for long stretches of time with little to no explanation for his absences. Now, however, he is fully present and pushing his younger cellmates towards action quite violently. Old Tom is secretly in league with elements of his old Tribe, including Nidagresa, who is using him to help start the war with the Guides. If he is captured he can be interrogated, but has little information to give other than that one of the Little Crones was urging him to kill the apprentices. Old Tom is a Pellis Artisan archetype with PSY -1.

QUEST POINTS

While violence and murder are not uncommon on Hom, such a public display of brutality is still shocking and horrifying. That a young man known to be an apprentice of the Guides was targeted, and that his body was mutilated and left in one of the most sacred spots on Hom is even more terrible. Most who learn of the crime suspect that it was a strike against the Guides, a message to them. Inevitably this leads to threats made against Anna, who has been decrying the Guides loud and long for some time now. Many among the Lightbringers talk of holding a rant to judge Anna, and some of the hotheaded Doomsayers with ties to the Guides obviously don't want to wait for a rant; they want to take justice into their own hands.

Anna, for her part, is shocked at the murders. Despite her hatred for the Guides and what she thinks they represent she truly never expected anything like this to happen. Any violence she had foreseen was strictly limited to the Guides and not to innocent children. She is, however, unwilling to denounce the actions, as she sees it as the beginning of a war and hopes that the crisis will bring the Guides to their destruction.

Two nights after the first murder (if the PCs have not already influenced the situation), another of the Guide's apprentices will be attacked and brutally murdered. This time his body is left, eyeless and tongueless upon the steps of the Temple. At that point anger spills over the Doomsayer community and several attempts are made on Anna's life. The Lightbringers call a rant to clear up the matter, but unfortunately for Anna the fact that she does not speak out against the attacks, and in fact comes to support them if pushed far enough, seals her fate. Unless the PCs can convince her to let her feud die she will be torn limb from limb by the enraged members of the Eighth Tribe.



Getting Anna to speak out against the killings, even just to proclaim her own innocence, will not be easy. Anna is more than willing to die for her beliefs, and if she thinks that her death will help hasten the Fallen's rejection of the Guides then she will willingly become a martyr. Even if she can be convinced that her death would not change anything she will be unable to compromise her position — in her eyes it is all she has left. The PCs' best hope of getting through to her is through her daughter Emilia. If they can bring about a reconciliation (difficult under the best of circumstances) between Anna and Emilia, they may be able to use the daughter to talk sense into the old woman. With her daughter's help the Characters may be able to convince Anna that her vision was a false one, and that she needs to find a reason to live and not a reason to die. Even if the Characters had not met Anna or Emilia before the troubles it would not be hard to learn of the girl, as she and her loss figure prominently into Anna's speeches. Anyone who had ever heard Anna speak could tell the PCs of her lost daughter.

If Anna publicly apologizes and recants her anger against the Guides things will still not go well for her; she will have lost almost all respect in the eyes of the Tribe, but she will live. The Thorns of Freedom are another matter altogether. Susan will want to stop the killings after Anna's declaration, but the others will try to continue. The PCs may have to track them down (probably with Anna's help) and end the threat themselves.

### POISONED PAST

Many years ago Judah gave an artifact that had been in his family for years to his wife, hoping that it would keep her honest and prove that she loved him truly. Now that artifact, a bit of Tera Sheba's robe that had been turned into a scarf, has come back to haunt the cursed man. The symbol of everything he lost and everything that went wrong in his life was sent by Lishan in the company of a newly fallen Evan in order to stir Judah into madness.

The girl, a cute little thing with a clubfoot that she kept carefully concealed, comes to Hom bleeding and crying, but with more possessions than most. For some reason the Joanite Watch did not strip her of her possessions or hassle her very much at all. She is lovely enough, even beaten, to attract much attention — most of it unsavory and harmful. She is lucky, however, for before any of the wolves that linger around the Bridge could have at her, Halos comes through the crowd and takes her aside. Several witnesses see them speaking together, and the girl seems terrified of the old man, but also unable to look away or leave his side. The two of them leave together, heading along the Winding Road along the north bank of Hom.

The next morning the girl is found dead, raped and drowned or smothered. Her body is caught in a tangle of branches that stick out from the bank into the rapid water of the Great River. Like the bad penny that he is, Judah happens to be on the scene. While everyone else is tired and upset by another pointless murder, Judah stands stone still and stares. The girl looks enough like Rebecca to be her sister or daughter, and tied around her wrist is the scarf that he had so long ago given to his wife. For his whole life Judah had lived for justice and law, and failed himself and everything he believed in when he murdered his love. Now he sees the same demon rise up again, but this time done by a hand other than his. All the hate, the guilt, the rage, and the helplessness that burn through Judah find an outlet, a way to explode without destroying himself. Every bit of hate he holds for himself is projected onto the murderer of this little girl. It takes the former Judge less than an hour to find out that the last person that the girl was seen with before her death was Halos, and then not even the Guide's fearsome reputation will be enough to stop Judah's mad assault.

### THE CAST

Judah is not alone in his attack upon Halos. Anna's preachings (even if she publicly retracted them in *Poisoned Future*) and the murders of the apprentices (while the Guides seemed to sit still and do nothing) have led to a great deal of suspicion and distrust among some of the groups of the Eighth Tribe. Judah has gained a very strong personal reputation as a man utterly (if unpleasantly) devoted to justice, and several Lightbringers and Jackers have formed into a loose cell around their distant and aloof leader. Now, with so much evidence and Judah's unshakable certainty that Halos was the killer, they are willing to follow him and do anything it takes to see justice done. The Lightbringer and Jacker archetypes can be used for Judah's followers, with Law 1 and Investigation 1 added.

Angus is the real killer. The devious little weasel used a Magdalite Aspect (see **Word of the Fates** p. 97) in order to make himself look so much like Halos that no one, not even those with Recognition, was able to tell that it was not the Guide himself. Acting on orders from his mistress he killed and raped the girl, then lodged her body into roots where it would be sure to be found. He then promptly vanished into Bazaar.

Halos is not surprised by the path Judah takes. In many ways Halos knows exactly who Judah is, for he sees a strong reflection of himself in the other man. He did not see the girl's murder coming in time to stop it, and that, combined with the guilt of doing nothing while his apprentices were murdered, has sapped his strength considerably. He looks very much the part of a guilty man whose sins have finally caught up with him. Though he is unafraid of Judah, he is afraid of what he will have to do and reveal if the man pushes too hard. The Guides do have many, many secrets and they know that they cannot afford to let most of them come to light yet. So for now Halos is biding his time, letting Judah have his way and hoping that the PCs can stop things before he is pushed too far.


 QUEST POINTS

As soon as he has gathered evidence against Halos, Judah will lead an armed contingent of men to find Halos and seize him to stand "trial." They will make no secret of what they are doing, and a crowd will gather to watch them — some of the crowd agitating towards stopping Judah and his veritable lynch mob. If the PCs are there and try to stand in the way Judah will tell them to step aside. Any protestations of Halos' innocence will be met with a stone face and the argument that if he is innocent then he has nothing to fear from standing trial before the Tribe. (If the PCs don't step forward at this point Judah may well try for some gallows justice and try to kill Halos then and there. At that point the PCs should interfere, if for no other reason than to avoid massive bloodshed.) So long as Judah agrees to hold a trial rather than dispense immediate "justice," Halos will step out and surrender himself before any serious violence can begin.

Den Hades will then approach the PCs, asking for their help. She assures them that Halos is innocent, but is going along with the trial in order to prevent bloodshed, and because he has hope that Judah can be brought to see how his own rage and guilt are twisting him. She tells the PCs in rather vague terms what she knows of Judah's history (unless the PCs have already discovered it for themselves). Her suggestion to them is that if they can make Judah accept his own guilt, and possibly his wife's innocence, it might save both he and Halos. She freely admits, however, that it might also kill Judah to be finally forced to realize the truth.

At this point the PCs are left to their own devices in figuring out a defense for Halos and a way to make Judah come to his senses. Possible paths include talking to Galen, who will be willing to help them only if he thinks that it will hurt Judah. Galen never recovered from Rebecca's death, and hates Judah nearly as much as Judah hates himself. It may also be possible to find Louis, who has been cast out as well. Louis, however, fears Judah and so never moved to Hom. He lives in the outpost on the south end of the South Tier Bridge, hiding in misery and filth — afraid that Judah or Galen will some day find him and figure out what he did. Getting him to confess is possible, if difficult. The one thing that does fall heavily in the PCs' favor is the scarf itself. As a Sheban artifact it can be used to force truth upon those who are wearing it (willingly or otherwise), and can be used to great effect in forcing characters to speak the truth. As well, though the PCs will have to work to figure this out, anyone holding the scarf and asked whether they saw Halos and the murdered girl together will answer no — to their own shock. The artifact is in this way even more potent than Angus' magic.

How the PCs finally confront Judah is similarly up to them. In the wild chaos and gamesmanship of a rant-style trial, they could turn the proceedings from a trial of Halos to a trial of Judah. If they can break Judah's will and force him to confront his own guilt, then they can also make him see that his evidence against Halos is not really that strong, and could have been faked by clever use of illusion. The PCs could also confront Judah privately, putting him on trial before he can bring Halos to the Cage. This way would be less publicly dramatic, but would allow Judah to save some face. They can also try to simply beat Judah in a "fair" trial, but doing so would be very difficult. Judah's reputation for justice is spotless among the Fallen, and his skill at oratory and ability to demolish defense cases was legendary even among Shebans. The best the PCs could do in a fair fight is to stir the mob at the Cage up enough to cause a riot, which is not a lasting solution.


 POISONED LOVE

Colette's desperation to reunite with Demitri has been growing rapidly, fed by an intuitive worry that the boy will do something stupid and get himself killed, and by the words Angus has been whispering into her ear. The crafty Magdalite has been slowly working himself into Colette's confidence, convincing her that he is really a friend to both her and Demitri, and only wants what is best for them. His frequent trips to Colette's father's house only reinforce the idea that he is working to keep communications open. Of course he is working very hard to do just that, but not with Demitri. He is actually working with Jessamin, who has been under Aucausin's direction for some years now. Angus was content to simply use Colette, but Jessamin was quite insistent that her sister not be used and cast aside — she should be used and then disposed of.

Angus has thus convinced Colette that Demitri is on the verge of suicide, and that unless she acts soon the love of her life will die alone. The one thing keeping the two apart, Colette has been led to believe, is Joan's jealousy — made manifest in Marcus. The angry uncle is going to protect his boy to death. For some time now Angus has been telling Colette that there is a way to convince Marcus to let Demitri go. If the old man could be given something that was more valuable to his Fatima than another warrior, and if he was given it from Colette's hand, he might be willing to believe that she honestly loved Demitri and was not an enemy to his Tribe. Of course there is little that a Fallen girl could give to the leader of a Joanite troop — save perhaps a heartstone.

While the Guides were debating about what to do about the murders and trials of their apprentices they did not watch their homes as carefully as they might have. Colette found young Zachari, who was in terror and pain over the sudden attacks against his friends and masters, and comforted him in the way that only she could. She led Zachari to believe that she loved him, and that the two of them could be happy together far away from the Guides and all the pain and confusion of Hom. She convinced him to take T'iphal's heartstone (to protect them in the wild world) and flee with her from Hom. Colette intends to get the stone from the boy and send him back to Hom, shamed perhaps but still alive. Angus and the others have other plans, however, and they told Marcus that Colette was coming to take Demitri, carrying a powerful artifact that would allow her to control the boy's mind and bind him to her forever. Enraged, Marcus will ride out to the spot where Colette thought she was going to meet Demitri, with blood on his mind. Jessamin is delighted, and in her glee does not quite keep her wits, speaking too loudly where Demitri can hear. Frantic to stop Colette's murder, Demitri rides out after his uncle.

## THE CAST

Colette is on the edge of hysteria by the time the adventure begins. She is absolutely convinced that Demitri is going to die, and soon, unless she can stop it. A very deliberate part of her has closed her eyes to the pain she is going to put Zachari through, convincing herself that he will get over it with time. She will do anything to be with Demitri, and that includes betraying a boy who loves her. So far she has not realized that she has become what Marcus accused her of being — a witch who uses lust and deception to get what she wants.

Zachari is in love for the first time in his life. In Colette's arms he found all the comfort and warmth that he had never been given before in his short and painful life. Even the lure of the Guide's wisdom and power was as nothing before the lure of actual human affection. He is terribly nervous over the issue of the heartstone, however, feeling that it was a mistake to bring it. He is afraid of the stone and afraid of Den Hades' anger, but he is more afraid of losing Colette.

Marcus and Demitri are both men gone mad. Marcus' mingled jealousy, protectiveness, and family temper have driven him to the point of irrationality. He has murder on his mind and stopping him from that goal would be a Herculean task. Demitri is in much the same state of mind and is worked up enough that he may well go battle mad, in which case he would become an indiscriminate killing machine.

## QUEST POINTS

Soon after Zachari steals the stone and runs into the night with Colette, the Player Characters will realize that something is terribly wrong. This could be from a sudden premonition, a message from the Guides, or when Colette misses a meeting that she would normally have kept with them. The Guides, if questioned, can tell the PCs that Zachari and a heartstone are gone, and will let them know that the loss of the heartstone is not acceptable. (The fact that the Guides were willing to let some of their apprentices die for the sake of fate but are not willing to lose the stone should strike the characters as significant.) The PCs must then put two and two together, and go after Colette and Zachari.

If the PCs know Colette's background well enough they may suspect the place she went to meet Demitri and Marcus — the same place where she was supposed to meet Demitri the night she fled from her home. This secluded spot is just southwest of Bazaar and is relatively sheltered from any passing eyes. If the PCs do not know of the spot then tracking skills and Eminences such as Fate, Wisdom, Mystery, and Recognition will be very useful in catching up with the fugitives.

When they arrive a storm breaks out, turning the night into a chaos of thunder and rain. At the same time that they get to the scene Demitri and Marcus arrive as well, both with their swords out. Angus is also there, adding to the confusion with illusions and bad advice to anyone that listens. A running battle breaks out, and the Characters will have to do everything in their power to keep the two Joanites from slaughtering them, each other, Colette and Zachari. During the confusion Angus knifes Zachari and tries to escape with the heartstone.

In the aftermath of the battle the PCs will have to figure out — and convince any surviving NPCs — that they were tricked, and that the whole reason for all this pain was so that Angus could get his hands on the heartstone. Colette and Demitri, if they live, will want to help the PCs make things right. Marcus' reaction will depend entirely on how persuasive the PCs are, and whether or not Demitri is alive. Any of the three can suggest to the PCs that they start the hunt for the missing heartstone at Colette's father's house. The PCs will have to be very careful, however, as both Angus and Jessamin (as well as several of their friends) will probably be there and ready to kill any characters who prove too persistent in tracking them. Even once those threats are dealt with, the PCs will still have to navigate the maze of Magdalite loyalties and half-truths that fill the whorehouse. If they are very clever and persistent they can learn that the stone was taken by a middle-aged Evan woman who was headed towards Yagan lands. The woman was Lishan, who was taking the stone to a meeting with her priestly sisters.


 POISONED HOPE

The best laid plans of mice and men oft do go awry. Of all the Seeds only Alexei avoided doing what the Circle wanted him to — mostly due to the influence of his wife's ghost. He did, however, fall into the trap that T'iphal had so carefully prepared for him. To rise again into the world T'iphal's heartstone has to be at the center of a slaughter, and so the old Lord has wormed and wriggled his way into setting Alexei up to lead that slaughter. While the PCs have been busy dealing with the attacks upon the Guides and their followers, Alexei has been equally busy planning his final bloody revenge upon those he thinks killed his mother and wife. Working with the cell that he has built up over his year in Hom, he has carefully planned out a strike into his aunt's home which will leave only blood and carnage in its wake. In his anger Alexei has decided that an eye for an eye is not enough; for the memory of his mother and wife he will have the eyes of all who were once his clan.

What Alexei could not know is that his aunt is a crony of Nidagresa's, and that she will be acting as host to the Circle of the Sower's first attempt to use the stone — the same night Alexei's dreams have led him to believe is the best night to take his revenge. Now Alexei, his men, and his clan are walking towards a trap that, once sprung, will allow a demon to be reborn from their blood.


 THE CAST

Alexei's cell is a mixed group of nearly a dozen Herites and Jackers. All of them are skilled in the arts of stealth and blade work, and several have considerable skill with poison as well. To one they are grim, silent, and obsessed with death in one way or another. Most paint their faces white and the hollows of their eyes black. The Jacker or Herite archetypes can be used, but all have Sneak and Melee 2/+1, and four have Herbalism and Lore (Poison) at 2 as well.

Alexei's former clan is a mixed group, ranging from children to aged elders. They are Yagans, and thus slightly unnerving to outsiders, but are still just normal people. Most of them are completely innocent of any wrongdoing and just want to live out their lives in peace. A few of them have some weapons skills, and most know at least a few kinds of poison. The Pellis Artisan archetype can be used, with BLD and KNO modified to reflect the different ages and levels of experience.

T'iphal, if he is successful in rising from his stone, is a very powerful Z'bri lord with the atmospheres of both Koleris and Sangis. Even weakened from his birth he is probably more powerful than any Z'bri the Player Characters will ever have faced alone.


 QUEST POINTS

The PCs will most likely meet Alexei as they go into Mortuary on Lishan's trail after the events in *Poisoned Love*. If they missed the events in that story for any reason they can be put back on track by giving them a vision of the horror of T'iphal's rebirth, or by being approached by Alexei to go with him into Mortuary.

If they meet Alexei and his men on the road (especially likely if they had ever sneaked into Mortuary with Alexei's help before — see the Quest Seeds section) they may well be relieved to find other Fallen who seem ready and willing to help them along. Alexei will not dissuade them from thinking this, and will welcome their presence in the group. After all, they can be used as a distraction if nothing else. If any of the PCs pay close attention to the party they have found themselves with, however, they will realize that this is not meant to be a surgical strike or an attempt to recover the stone. It is a raid of slaughter. Any character with Wisdom, Recognition, or any other suitable Eminence may realize at this point that something is very wrong, and that the raid's timing, so close to the other murders, cannot be accidental. Of course even without any sort of warning it is possible they will want to dissuade Alexei from taking such a bloody vengeance.

Alexei will not be easy to convince. He has dreamed of blood for a year now, and the PCs will have to be very persuasive to turn him from his chosen path. Their best hope is to appeal to his wife's ghost, and hope that she will help the man see some reason. If nothing else works then a PC could have a vision of T'iphal's rebirth and convince Alexei that his anger is really just serving a Z'bri's will. If they can convince Alexei that taking the stone is the most important thing at the moment then he will agree to help, though even with the best of convincing he will waver on the line between vengeance and justice.

With Alexei's help the Player Characters will have little difficulty sneaking into Mortuary. Once there, however, things become more difficult. All three of the Sisters have several guards with them, and they are far more alert than Alexei's former clan would have been. The group can try to sneak in, but in all likelihood a battle will break out. At that point Alexei (and the berserking Demitri and Marcus, if they are with the party) will slip into blood-madness and a slaughter will begin. The Circle, hearing the battle, will all attempt to seize the stone for themselves, thinking that the others have betrayed them. The Yagan clan will wake, and innocents will flood into the fighting.

If none of the PCs has had a vision of T'iphal rising before this point, one of them will have it now. They will see that unless they stop the slaughter then the demon will rise again, and the results could well be disastrous. The stone has to be taken from the Circle, but at the same time the fighting has to be stopped before it can shed enough blood to free the Z'bri lord. How the PCs manage this is up to them, but it will not be easy. Killing the leaders of both sides (possibly including Alexei, if he cannot be stopped) may allow the Characters to bring the fight to a halt before it reaches critical mass. Refusing to fight or martyring themselves may also counter the carnage with enough pure emotion to stop the rebirth, but the cost of such actions will be terribly high.

If the PCs come up with a suitable plan the Weaver should let it work, but should not go easy on them. Now is a time of sacrifice, and stopping the battle should not be easy or painless. Alexei, Colette, and one or more of the PCs may end up dead or crippled for life, and even then they may not be successful. If T'iphal does rise then the PCs will have an enemy that will take them a great deal of time to defeat. Such an enemy could turn into the seed for a whole new storyline.

## THE SHADOW CAST

Three powerful priestesses of the Fates, one from each of the three Tribes, and their most trusted followers make up the shadow cast Circle of the Harvest. All three of the priestesses are powerful, both in influence and in Synthesis. All three are endlessly patient, and all three have become utterly corrupt. Their lust to steal T'iphal's heartstone from the Guides has allowed the Z'bri's subtle but lingering influence to corrupt their hearts and turn them against each other.

Now the Circle is held together solely by lust for the stone and hate for the Guides and the Fallen. It would take very little to split the circle at the seams and send all of the priestesses to each other's throats.



## LISHAN

Nearly twelve years ago a young priestess of Eva was brought into the deepest ranks of the Shamans. There she learned of the Evan belief that the Guides had killed Mary. The young woman was outraged, and her anger led her to see a way to get even with the murderers: take that which was precious to them, and sow destruction along the path they wished to walk. There she came under T'iphal's subtle influence.

Lishan was always careful, and willing to take a long-term view of things. She slowly began to plot, thinking of ways to hurt the Guides. Her first move was to arrange for Judah's fall. As part of her manipulation of the old Sheban she met Aucausin, whose aid she needed to move Galen into place. Through Aucausin she met Nidagresa, and after several years the three turned their friendship into a silent circle intending to harm the Guides and gain the heartstone for their Fatimas.

In her deepest heart Lishan knows that things have changed. She no longer has any intention of bringing a heartstone to Eva; she wants it for her own. She is no longer trying to get justice for Mary's death; rather, she is trying to hurt the Guides out of hate and envy. She has yet to admit this to herself, though, as of the entire shadow cast Circle Lishan still has the purest heart and the greatest chance to break the heartstone's hold over her. She will not, however, ever back down from disgracing and harming the Guides, as she feels her hate for them is fully justified.

**Highlights:** Patient, intuitive, and corrupted.

**Attributes:** CRE +2, INF +1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY +3, WIL +2

**Skills:** Agriculture 2/+1, Animal Care 2/+1, Animal Handling 1/+2, Cooking 2/+2, Dreaming 2/+3, Etiquette 1/+1, Healing 2/+1, Herbalism 2/+1, Human Perception 2/+3, Grooming 1/0, Leadership 2/+1, Mythology 1/+1, Notice 2/+1, Ritual 3/+1, Teaching 2/+2, Synthesis 3

**Aspects:** Anima

**Equipment:** Sickle AD+3



### AUCAUSIN

There is too much in life that is ugly, and not enough that is beautiful. From her youngest days Aucausin could not accept that anything ugly could be good, for beauty is the mark of Magdalen's grace. These beliefs grew into a philosophy of the correspondence of soul and body, and Aucausin mistrusted Den Hades from the day she first saw the malformed woman. She knew that something so distorted could only be warped in spirit in some way.

When Aucausin met with Lishan she was only too willing to help her break up the obviously ill-suited marriage between Judah and Rebecca. She did not, however, buy Lishan's initial explanations for the destruction that followed, and used her considerable wiles to seduce the Evan and find out her secrets. When she learned of the Guides' evil from her lover's lips she was only too happy to help her against them. After all destroying something that ugly could only be for everyone's good.

In time Aucausin and Lishan's affair, which had been more a matter of hormones than anything else, faded and died. Aucausin slowly found a new lust — possessing one of the stones that the Guides held. She could feel the passion in that stone, feel the burning of it in her belly. She knew that she had to have that stone, and it had to be hers alone. The fact that Lishan had gotten over Aucausin — which no one should ever do — only added to the woman's desire to strip the stone from her sister and leave her barren.

**Attributes:** APP +2, CRE +1, FIT +1, INF +2, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY -1, WIL +1

**Skills:** Athletics 1/+1, Combat Sense 1/+1, Craft (Drugs) 2/+1, Dance 2/0, Dodge 2/0, Dreaming 2/-1, Etiquette 2/+2, Grooming 2/+2, Herbalism 2/+1, Human Perception 2/-1, Music 2/+1, Mythology 1/+1, Notice 2/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Seduction 3/+2, Theatrics 2/+2, Synthesis 3

**Aspects:** Passion, Treason

**Equipment:** Dagger AD+3, several doses of libs, dose of poison.



### NIDAGRESA

Old and cold in heart and mind, Nidagresa lost any sense of passion long ago. Time and tide burned her clean of emotion till only one thing mattered to her — the thrill of the game. Politics and conspiracy were her one passion, and winning was all that mattered to her. For years she set up factions and problems within her Tribe and others, playing people against each other simply to see how well she could make them dance. Several times particularly bright victims would discover that she was behind the misery in their lives and would do everything in their power to destroy her or rob her of power. Those were the times when she was happiest, for the game is always best when played against a strong and determined opponent.

Even these games were starting to pale for her when she was approached by Aucausin, who knew her passions well, with a proposal for a new and even more dangerous game. To play a match of betrayal and death with beings powerful enough to bring about the death of a Fatima was as great a thrill as Nidagresa could imagine. She eagerly agreed, needing this test to keep herself interested in life. As the years rolled on she gave the vague plans that Lishan and Aucausin had formed a real focus and sensible nature, and a new thought occurred to her — even better than defeating the Guides was defeating the Guides and her supposed allies at once. Nidagresa never turned down a challenge, so now she has to prove to herself that not even her sisters and the Guides together are her equals.

**Highlights:** Cold, brilliant, driven

**Attributes:** AGI -1, APP -1, CRE +2, FIT -2, KNO +3, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL +2, STR -1

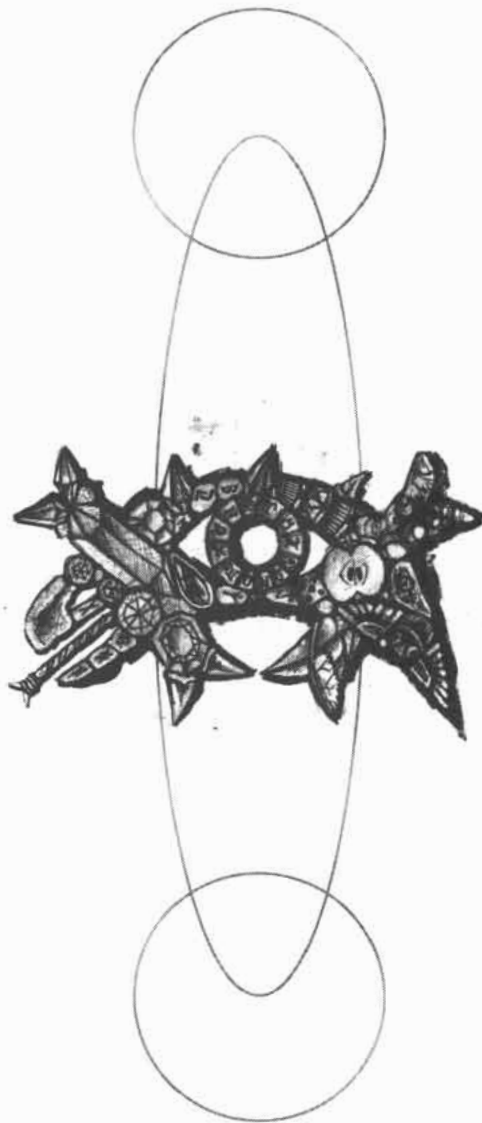
**Skills:** Craft (Fleshing) 2/+2, Mythology 2/+3, Dreaming 1/+1, Notice 2/+1, Human Perception 2/+1, Read/Write 2/+3, Interrogation 2/+2, Ritual 2/+3, Intimidate 1/0, Tactics 4/+2, Investigation 2/+1, Theatrics 1/0, Leadership 1/0, Synthesis 3

**Aspects:** Curse of Dream, Dream Walk

**Equipment:** Flesher Knife (AD+3)

## THE SEEDS

As with many Tribe 8 stories, **Harvest of Thorns** is about fate, freedom, and individual choices. The four main characters of the stories in this book are symbols of what the Eighth Tribe is, and may become. All of them have suffered, have been conspired against, and have been betrayed. At the same time all of them have chosen their fate: though they were set up to fall it was their own actions that cast them over the edge. When they deal with the four main NPCs the PCs should see reflections of themselves and of the Eighth Tribe as a whole. The easiest way to do this is to emphasize the similarities in any situations that the PCs have experienced that the four NPCs are now going through. For example, a PC who has lost a love in the Tribes is a perfect mirror for Colette. The PC could well see something of herself and her own pain in the hopeful and desperate young woman.



## JUDAH

When Judah killed his wife he killed his own heart. From that moment on the old former Sheban has been unable to have faith in anyone or anything. Nothing fills his heart anymore save suspicion and a dull anger that life could be so unjust. There is, however, still something left of the force of personality and will that made Judah such a powerful judge, and that has allowed Judah to rise to a position of prominence among the Fallen.

Unfortunately it is not a position that has brought any unity or peace to the growing Eighth Tribe. Judah sees sin everywhere, and he and his cadre have made it their mission to make sure that those for whom banishment was not sufficient punishment receive every last jot of the punishment that is due to them. Over the years many newly Fallen have found themselves beaten, harassed, and occasionally killed by Judah's men. Several of the powers that be on Hom have tried to stop these attacks, but Judah's strength of mind and personality has always allowed him to call down the approval of the mob and kept him from having to face punishment.

Though Judah is a hard man and a brutal one, the deepest truth is that he is hiding. In his heart of hearts Judah wonders if he has not killed an innocent and become the murderer and traitor that he sees in the faces of everyone around him. If he were to ever find evidence that his wife really had not betrayed him, and that he had murdered her while she was 'pure,' then he would break. Whether or not he would ever recover depends upon how he is treated during his fall.

**Highlights:** Bitter, judgmental.

**Attributes:** AGI -1, BLD +1, FIT -1, INF +2, KNO +2, PER +1, PSY -1, WIL +2, STR 0, HEA 0, STA 25, UD 3, AD 3

**Skills:** Hand-to-Hand 1/-1, Investigation 2/+1, Law 3/+2, Leadership 2/+2, Lore (Hom) 2/+2, Notice 2/+1, Teaching 1/+2, Theatrics 2/+2, Streetwise 1/+2, Synthesis 2

**Eminences:** Truth, Vengeance

**Aspects:** Truthsaying

**Equipment:** Staff (AD+7).



ALEXEI

Known as "the Silent," Alexei was always a grim man who kept his own council even when surrounded by friends and family. Now that he lives among the Fallen that reticence has reached a new level. Alexei rarely speaks to anyone except when he has to, and he never confides anything of his past or the pain that shows so clearly in his eyes. Morbid and dark, he seems to many to be little more than a ghost himself, and many curious tales about his banishment circulate among the gossips of Horn.

Though it surprised even him, Alexei's pain and rage, as well as his nihilism, brought him a group of associates. Calling them friends would be a mistake, but they are willing to listen on those rare occasions where Alexei speaks. Some of them have even seen him speaking with his wife's ghost (or what appears to be his wife's ghost), and wonder at what could so haunt a man that his only love was one in the grave. Though he has not yet asked for their aid, all of them would be willing to help vent their rage by helping Alexei strike at his former family.

The irony of Alexei's character is that he is not a violent man. He is, in his heart, a watcher and a learner, a man of peace and contemplation. There is nothing that would suit him better than to gather the lore of Joshua, of dead people and lost places. Unless something changes his path it will never happen, as for now all Alexei sees is blood — one imagined bloody reprisal after another, each more vicious and inhuman than the last. It is only a matter of time till his imagination spills free, and blood pours over the bones of Mortuary.

**Highlights:** Silent, dark, romantic.

**Attributes:** AGI +1, APP -1, CRE +1, PER +2, WIL +1, STR 0, HEA 0, STA 25, UD 5, AD 6

**Skills:** Athletics 1/+1, Combat Sense 2/+2, Dodge 2/+1, Hand-to-Hand 2/+1, Investigation 1/+2, Leadership 1/0, Lore (Ghosts) 3/0, Lore (Yagan) 2/0, Melee 3/+1, Sneak 3/+1, Theatrics 1/0, Throwing 1/+1, Synthesis 1

**Eminences:** Death, Recognition

**Equipment:** Short Sword (AD + 8), Flesher Dagger (AD + 4), poison



ANNA

The most painful lessons are those that are learned too late to make a difference. To know just too late the pain and distress that one has caused with their actions, and to not be able to do anything to change it is a kind of damnation. It is a damnation that Anna fears every moment of her life. She has seen her clan led into bitterness and spite, seen her beloved daughter driven from home, and has lost her Goddess and hope for her people.

Anna, however, has been offered a way out, a single chance to make sure that not all the pain and suffering is in vain. Though her vision was a lie forced upon her by Nidagresa's arts, she clings to it with the blind and rabid need of a drowning woman. She has seen the Fallen as her own family, seen the kind of pain they suffer and will suffer in the future, and she has come to love them. She has, however, seen the Guides as being the source of all the pain the Eighth Tribe suffers. She has seen Halos and Den Hades as her own ungrateful daughters, and sees them leading the Fallen away from the One Goddess the way she fears her daughters will lead her clan away from Eva.

There is nothing Anna will not do to stop this. The whole hysterical, wild power of a mother whose children are threatened fills her with the power of vision, and gives her a sense of dynamism and destiny that draws the empty feeling children of the Eighth Tribe to her. Now she has one last chance to make right all her wrongs, and nothing will stand in her way.

**Highlights:** Fanatical, regretful

**Attributes:** AGI -1, BLD +1, FIT -1, INF +1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL +1

**Skills:** Agriculture 2/+1, Dreaming 1/+1, Healing 2/+1, Herbalism 1/+1, Human Perception 1/+1, Leadership 2/+1, Lore (Eva) 2/+1, Notice 1/+1, Survival 1/0, Teaching 1/0, Trade 2/+1, Synthesis 2

**Eminences:** Mystery, Life

**Aspects:** Smothering

**Equipment:** Staff (AD+7).





## COLETTE

A relatively new face in Hom, Colette seeks to bring other Fallen around to her vision: love is the key to overthrowing the Fatimas and to freeing the Tribes. Her unusually optimistic air has earned her the name 'the Hopeful,' although most use it derisively and see the seventeen year-old as naive. Few see and recognize the driven nature at the core of her personality that will not rest until she frees at least Demitri from the Fatimas' chains.

Despite Demitri's cowardly betrayal at her trial, Colette still believes she loves him passionately, and holds his family and hers responsible for their separation. The situation holds the melodrama and agony that only comes from thwarted adolescent passion, and if allowed to come to a head will spell disaster for the Fallen.

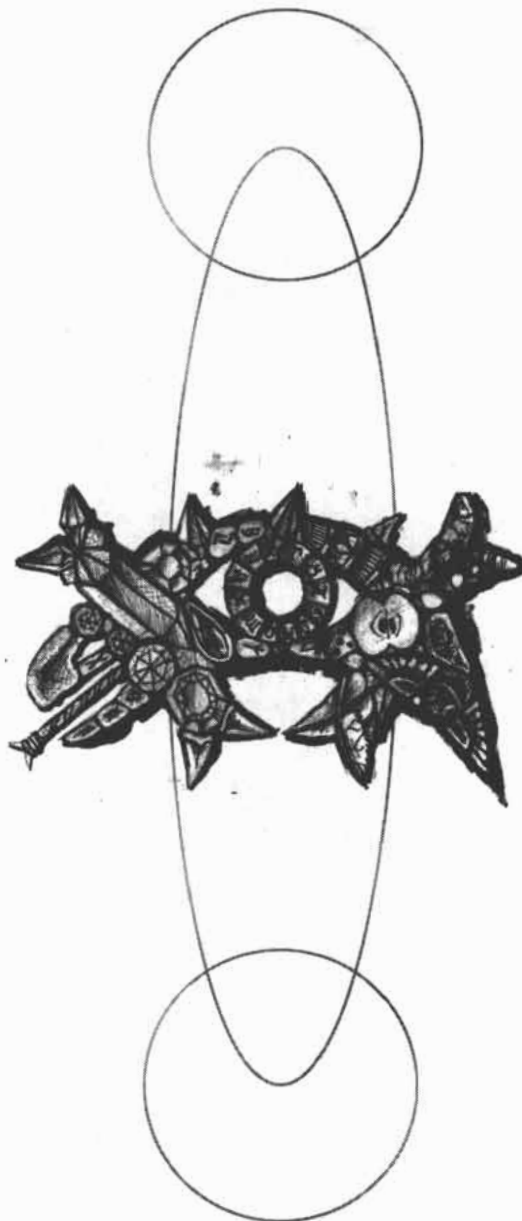
**Highlights:** Optimistic, beautiful, driven

**Attributes:** AGI +1, APP +2, BLD -1, INF +1, KNO -1, PSY +1, WIL +1, STR 0, HEA 1, STA 25, UD 3, AD 2

**Skills:** Dance 2/+1, Human Perception (specialization: Body Language) 2/+1, Dreaming 1/+1, Etiquette 1/+1, Music 3/0, Grooming 2/+2, Seduction 3/+2, Hand-to-Hand 1/+1, Theatrics 1/+1, Synthesis 1

**Eminences:** Sensuality, Unity

**Equipment:** Cosmetics, dancing costume



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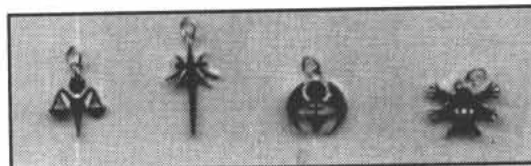
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