

Adrift on the RIVER OF DREAM



A Tribe  Sourcebook



Dream Pod 9

Adrift on the RIVER OF DREAM

"In those days we were young and foolish, we thought we could learn all the River's secrets. But the River is vast and deep. No man may find all of its secrets, and the price was far higher than I wanted to pay. Follow this path and find the truth for yourself. You will see the whispering end of all things, the destiny of home, and the birth of what must be. You is the time of trouble, and now is the time of honor."

— Words of Thonar, The Knight of Storm

Adrift On the River of Dream is the core sourcebook of spirituality, magic and dream for Tribe 8. Inside is all the information necessary to run spiritual and mystical campaigns, along with new rules and information on Spiritism, Synchronicity, Dreaming, Technomagic, Ritual, Sorcery and the River of Dream. Also:

- A geography of the River of Dream, including the various Dubs and Bohars.
- Rules and guidelines for holding rituals, Dreaming and Sorcery as part of a cycle.
- New information on Guides, Heartstones, the Ethri and the Great Architecture.
- Many new groups and locations.
- Eight new Aspects, two new Technomagic Complexes, a dozen new rituals and three new Synchronicity Aspects.
- New spiritually-oriented Parties and Plays.

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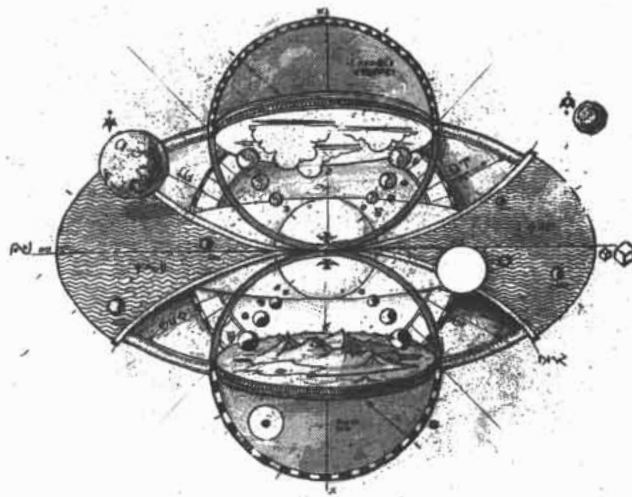
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Table of Contents

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Prelude: Stories in Skin 4
 A Prayer for the Dying 5
 Cast Out of the Water 5
 What the Flesh Can Tell 6
 Disrespect thy Elders 6
 Sit Right Back 7

Chapter One: Drift We to the Dark.... 8
 So It Began 9
 Initiation 10
 Secrets Between Covers 10
 Committed to the Scroll 12
 Meetings of Fortune and Chance 13
 From the Wet Earth 13
 Saplings' Roots 14
 The Beating Heart 15
 A Solemn Pact 16
 A Worried Heart 17
 A Teeming Brain 17
 A Burning Spirit 22
 In Us Dreams Do Live 23
 What Dreams May Come 24
 Dreamchasers 24
 Dreamcaught 25
 Witch Trial 27
 No Other Goddess Before Me 27
 I Know Not, Save I Was Commanded 28

Chapter Two: Wyrd, Unshriven 30
 Rite of Passage 31
 Denning the Mother 31
 House of Pain 32
 Epiphany 33
 The Blind Lead the Blind 34
 Tales of the Past 34
 Many are One 35
 The Wretched 36
 Regeneration 37
 Vision of Terror and Hope 38
 A Pact Resealed 38
 What Fallen Spirits Sing 39
 The Blood of Outcasts 39
 Dreams and Omens 40
 Division 41
 Song of War 42
 Unity 42
 Guides to the Lost 43

Chapter Three: Out of the Cradle.... 44
 Ghosts of Days Past 45
 Once More Into the Breach 46
 A Whisper from the Sea 46
 Come Closer 47
 Awakening 49
 On the Trail 49
 Omens 51
 Bloodhound 51
 Savages 52
 Honored Dead 52
 What's in My Pocket? 53
 Eternally Waiting 54
 Necromancy 54
 Through Me the Dead Speak 55
 Towards the Away 56

Chapter Four: The Dread Voyage 58
 You Take the High Road 59
 The Past in Shadows 59
 The Banging of a Gun 60
 Slave to the Grind 60
 How Like an Angel 60
 When Will You Learn? 61
 A Friend of a Friend 61
 On the Back of the Wind 62
 Friend, Hear Me 63
 The Stone that Speaks 63
 Dreams of the Land 64
 A Request 65
 Calling to Mountain 65
 The Mountain Speaks 66
 Stone's Price 67
 The Flying Dutchman 68
 The Call 68
 The Answer 68
 Into the Melting Realm 70
 The Second Beside Me 70
 The Guide 71

Chapter Five: Dreams of Fire 72
 The Wall 73
 For Thy Heart 73
 Voice of Reason 74
 Words of Warning 74
 Dark Walker 75
 Rage 76
 Divided We Fall 76

Speaking with the Devil 77
 Fear Not 78
 No Peace This Side of Heaven 78
 Ghost of a Chance 80
 Joining the Sundered 82
 Losing the War 82
 The Flight 83
 The Fold 83
 The Plight of Mountain's Daughter 84

Chapter Six: Starlight, Starbright 86
 Along the Moonlight Path 87
 The Sky is Full of Stars 88
 Musing on Muses 88
 The Spirits Pass Over 89
 I Heard the Owl Call My Name 90
 The Singing Star 91
 What the Sun Has Seen 92
 Bless, Curse Me Now 92

Chapter Seven: Around the Fire 94
 The Final Blow 95
 This Tale Told 96
 Take Up This Cross 96

Chapter Eight: The Substance of Spirit. 98
 Spirituality in a Broken Universe 99
 Playing with Spirituality 99
 Dualism 100
 Tribal Views 102
 Fallen Views 102
 The Guides 102
 The River of Dream 103
 Themes and Moods 103
 Cosmography of the River of Dream 104
 Dreaming 106
 Beyond the River of Dream 108
 Synthesis 110
 Themes and Moods 111
 Synthesis by Tribe and Outlook 111
 Playing with Synthesis 116
 Aspects 120
 New Tribal Aspects 120
 New Fallen Aspects 121
 Lost Aspects 122
 Technosmithing 122
 Learning Technosmithing 123
 Themes and Moods 123
 Syncretism 123

New Technosmithing Formulas 124
 Keeper Religion 125
 Sundering 126
 Sundering and the River of Dream 126
 Sundering and Spirits 126
 Humanity and Sundering 126
 Theme and Mood 127
 Heartstones 128
 New Aspects and Atmosphere rules 129
 Ritual 130
 Ritual Synthesis 131
 Minor Rituals 131
 Tribal Ritual 131
 Serf Ritual 132
 Squat Rituals 133
 Spirits 134
 Perspectives 134
 Numinology 134
 Themes and Moods 135
 Systems 136
 Attributes 137
 Skills 137
 Special Abilities 137
 Sample Spirits 138

Appendix 140
 Optional Perks and Flaws 140
 Aspects: Reprint 141

Index 144

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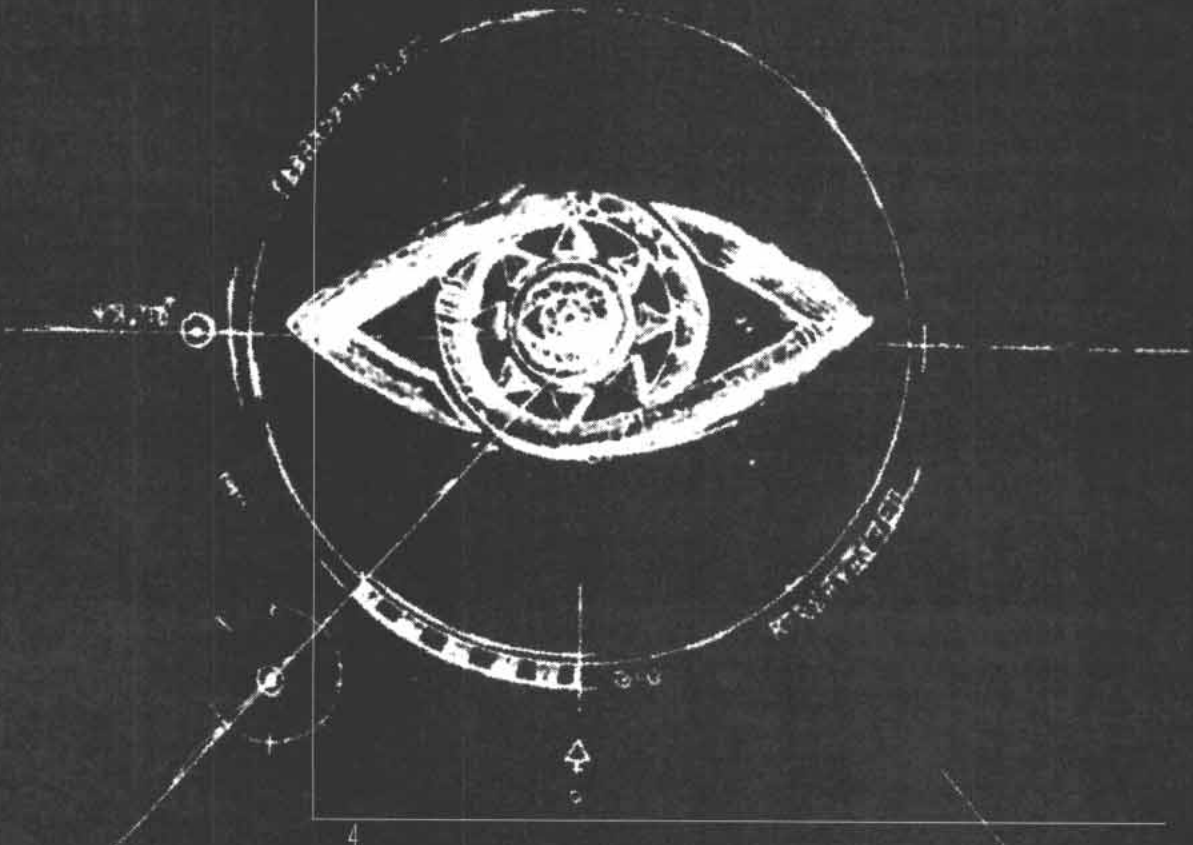
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S T O R I E S I N S K I N

Stories in Skin

Prelude: Stories in Skin

Flesh and Dream in one combine
Upon my skin as in my mind
To draw forth stories of things divine,
Of things infernal, and of the kind
Of tales that sink into the heart
And change forever the player's part.
- From the skin of Elias Wanderer



A Prayer for the Dying

The Words of Thomas, Knight of Stars:

Goodbye my friend. Your sacrifice will not be in vain. Even now I have seen your skin carried down the waters towards the world that we have left behind. I can feel the strain of its intent, the need to find a heart to touch with the stories that we have left upon your skin. Our faces we now turn to the stars, the sun and the moon, and we walk into light that knows no shade, into darkness that knows no illumination.

May the stories on your skin find a receptive ear; may the stories of your soul find a receptive heart. May your sacrifice be not in vain, but bring new knowledge and understanding to the world. By your blood and sacrifice may those we left behind learn more of the River of Dream — which is, in the end, learning more about themselves.

Cast Out of the Water

From the Stories of Janus, Jacker:

The River never gives you what you expect, though sometimes it gives you more than you wanted. While the dawn was still slowly creeping over the horizon to the east something set Fredrick's nose to twitching, some smell that made him pull us all out of bed and into the chill of early spring. With steel in our hands and angry hope in our hearts we followed his sense to the banks of the Great River where she washed around Hom's shores.

Fredrick is our great secret — he has a nose that can smell when things go wrong. In the year since he joined our cell he had sniffed out Z'bri no one else could find. So when he led us to the shore, we gripped our weapons tight with chills of anger and dread, hoping and fearing what we might find.

No ravaging Lord awaited us, though what we found changed our course in ways deeper than any Z'bri ever could. Snagged against a bare tree root that stood out into the current of the River was a skin. Fredrick fished it out with his spear, and spread it out on the ground. It was a whole human skin — the face and scalp, fingers, toes, and genitals still intact. Now a skin is not odd, as Yagans keep such skins as a matter of course. What was strange about this skin is that it had no marks, no signs of being cut or opened — it was whole and united in a single piece as though still on a human body. No mark of death, much less of skinning, touched the hide.

As the pale skin started to dry in the morning light, we looked over the numerous tattoos and markings that covered every inch. Those swirling pictograms, pictures, and fragments of words spoke of something rich and strange, something that made my stomach knot from mere proximity. None of us could read it, despite the sweaty-toothed feeling seeping into our bellies, so we took it to the old crone to read, to find what dread voyage had brought us this skin. To this day I wonder if it would not have been better to cast it back into the water.

Adrift on the River of Dream

Adrift on the River of Dream is the spiritual sourcebook for Tribe 8. Covering Synthesis, Dreaming, rituals, spirits, Sundering and Technosmithing in greater and more comprehensive detail than previous books, it shows how these forces work in the eyes of various factions of the Tribe 8 world. This book is everything needed to expand the role of Synthesis and spirituality in any Tribe 8 game, up to and including running entire campaigns in the River of Dream.

The book is split into two main sections. The first section is narrative which follows the epic quest of a group of powerful Dreamers searching for meaning in a confused and possibly broken world. This section illustrates spirituality and Dream as seen from the inside of the world of Tribe 8. The second section is a rules section which gives greater detail and new guidelines for using spirituality in game.



Alisha, Doomsayer

Alisha has been on Hom for as long as most Fallen can remember. Best known for her mastery of languages and symbols, it is widely said that no one has ever brought her any record that she could not translate and decipher. There have even been several attempts on her life by agents of various powers, all of whom fear her ability to find the truth of any story.

When Alisha is not translating or collecting stories and knowledge, she acts as one of the leading Fleshers among Fallen who want their skins, or the skins of their loved ones, preserved. Alisha charges inconsistent fees for these services, sometimes charging more than any Fallen could pay and sometimes doing it for no more than a song. Some say that she seeks to control the history of the Fallen by controlling what is and is not recorded. She laughs at the idea and says that she is old and will be dead too soon to control anything so vast.

Highlights: Knowing, sharp, mocking

Eminences: Fate, Mystery

Attributes: AGI -2, BLD -1, CRE +1, FIT -2, INF +1, KNO +3, PER +1, PSY +1, STR -1, HEA 0, STA 20, UID/AD 1

Skills: Craft (Tattooing, Fleshing) 2/+1, Dreaming 1/+1, Forgery (Tribal Tattoos) 1/+1, Human Perception 1/+1, Investigation 1/+1, Lore (Ciphers) 2/+3, Mythology 2/+3, Notice 2/+1, Read/Write (Farnzay, Gaelish, Keepspeak, Sheban, Yagan) 2/+3, Ritual 1/+3, Theatrics 1/+1, Synthesis 2 (Tradition)

What the Flesh Can Tell

From the Ramblings of Alisha, Doomsayer Hag:

Ah yes, I can tell you what this says, so I can. It is a story that you will not soon forget, that much I promise. You must be patient, however, for such things take time and this skin must be properly preserved, properly handled, so that it will not be lost to the grubbing of greedy fingers. Look here; you have already nearly ruined it where you poked it with your spear.

First I must lay out the fire. Be a dear and build up the logs for me, so that the smoke can seep its way in and drive the waters out of the flesh. While that is done the unguents and herbs must be most carefully applied, or else the spirit of the story will escape the skin and leave it nothing more than brittle leather without a soul. That, you see, is the great secret the Yagans would not have you know — that it is not the skin itself which is important, it is the part of the self, the story that is left in the flesh, that makes their skins so durable, so supple and so seemingly alive. They are alive, you know, so long as they keep their story.

Patience, young, one — patience. The spirits of fire and soul will not be rushed, no matter how hot your blood burns. If you wish to know the stories of things distant, things forgotten, then you must be willing to make some small sacrifices. In this case that sacrifice must be time, which is easily enough given, so that the story and its spirit will not be lost after a single telling. There is a force to tales, you see, which can drain a spirit dry if used incorrectly, or can set fire to a whole nation if spoken in too much haste.

Disrespect thy Elders

From the stories of Janus, Jacker:

While old Alisha worked her way into her Synthesis, preparing the skin (and I suspect, herself) with herbs and smoke, Wendel, youngest and newest of us, suddenly burst to his feet — tired of fetching and carrying wood, building fires, and then sitting idle at an old woman's whim.

With impatience in his voice he stormed, "Look, old woman, I do not doubt your powers or your words — but all this is meaningless. I am not one of your shadow-seeks, I do not live my life dying to find out mysteries that were not mine in the first place. I do not care about flames of spirit or droughts of story or any such nonsense. My fight is against the Z'bri, against the beasts which still prowl among us, taking our life and our light. It is all well and good to tell stories in their time, but it will all be for nothing if we sit and build fires for you and your muttering instead of confronting the foe that would happily kill us while we dream the day away."

I reached up a hand to pull the boy down before his mouth did more damage than Z'bri teeth, but it was already too late. Alisha's old eyes had come into sharp focus on his face, and her lips had pressed into a smile as old and dry as pressed flowers. That look, and the silence in the little smoky hut, was enough to take the wind out of Wendel's sails, and he finished his tirade with the lame, limping speech of a man who knows he has been a fool, but can not quite understand how.

 Sit Right Back

From the words of Alisha, Doomsayer:

Sit down, boy, and perhaps you will learn something. You complain of my muttering, of my searching for secrets, and wish to go fight your battles? Are you really so blind that you cannot see that *this* is your battle? The spirit of stories, the movements of the River of Dream, the searching after that which is lost and hidden — all these things are your war, as they are mine. Nothing exists without touching everything else, child, and the River of Dream is in all things and through all things. If you wish to fight the Z'bri you must know what they are and are not, you must know what spirits will aid you against them, and which will kill you just as sure as a Beast.

If you do not believe me now, then sit you down and I will tell you the tale on this skin that you found. You will hear of pride, of knowledge, of monstrosities and beasts, and of the fall of a great man. Listen to the story here recorded, and you will know why all our fights are the same fight, and why even the most practical of men must learn to feel the River. Listen now, to the story of Elias Wanderer, of his Fall, of his last hour of glory, and of what he sacrificed in order to send us a warning that, unheeded, could doom us all.



Chapter One: Drift We to the Dark

The road to the One is hard and fraught with perils,

The road to the Z'bri is easy and thorned with pleasures,

The road to Hom is tempting, and built with good intentions.

- Tribal Saying





So It Began

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

"Freedom cannot live without Justice. Justice cannot flourish without Law. Law cannot be used without Knowledge. Knowledge cannot be gained without Eyes." This quote, secreted on a fluttering scrap of vellum, fell from the top shelf while I researched today. I climbed a ladder to see what had knocked it down, but found nothing but a white feather atop a tome covered with a layer of dust like snowdrift. It is an owl feather, something that has no reason to be on the top shelves of the Library. The tome is a book of wisdom by Markus Dan'on, one of Tera Sheba's first Judges. The Lorekeepers nearly tore it out of my hands when I showed them, but I kept the quotation for myself. It is an omen, sent to me on owl wings to quiet my heart and show me the way through confusion.

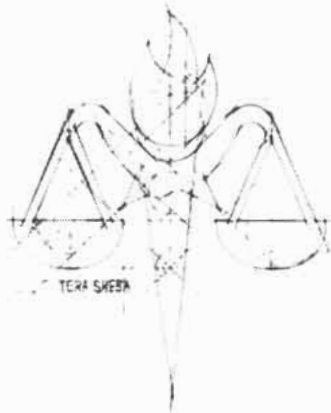
Throughout my years of study I have seen fleeting truths out of the corner of my eye. Buried in clauses and sub clauses, cloaked in jurisprudence, hiding from me behind rights and requirements, there seemed to me to be a structure underneath everything I was taught. I learned not to question my teachers about the secret truth; they denied it, told me to focus, and whipped me if I persisted. No matter how much I concentrated, it was always there, lurking beneath the words.

I told no one about the secrets I could half-see in our books, but the mystery warped my studies and distracted my mind. I know now that I dropped clues and leads in everything I said; that was how Gidea found me a week ago, when I objected to a Judge that an innocuous-seeming passage explained more than fishing rights. She cornered me later in the Nag's Head, the pit where Advocates hide from Judges, and demanded I explain what she had overheard. She intimated that she, too, had been haunted by the mystery and my reticence collapsed. I told her everything I had seen and half-seen, questions that would not let me rest, doubts that I feared were treasonous. She told me more.

There are secrets hidden in our books of wisdom. Some are truths that cannot be expressed except in metaphors and puzzles; others are tests designed to ferret out those like me who can find them, see them, solve them. To do so is to prove worthy of seeing more: truths that impart mystical understanding, secrets that lead to power. Gidea offered to show me, but warned me that with understanding and power come stewardship: to join the illumined few I must swear oaths to use the secrets I learn only for the good of the Nation, and for Tera Sheba. I must become Her eyes in the occult world of spirits and dream. My heart hammered in my chest, but my stomach sank with doubt. The world had been simpler an hour before, and I longed to cower in that safe familiarity. I did not know if I had the strength to enter this secret world.

The quotation from the Library makes me wonder if Markus Dan'on was among the first of this occult few. He seems to intimate that bringing peace and prosperity to the Nation requires ferocity beyond simple loyalty, a doctrine that Gidea's colleagues might affirm. That an owl brought me this message seems to me to be a sign to join them in affirmation. To those who can see, it is criminal to remain blind.





Initiation

Transcript from the Archives of the Blind Eyes:

Gidea Dan'on: Approach, Elias Japh'ton. Do you seek enlightenment?

Elias Japh'ton: I seek enlightenment in the wisdom of Tera Sheba and her Judges; I seek enlightenment in the ways of the Great Owl; I seek enlightenment in the flesh and in the spirit. I seek enlightenment in the River of Dream.

Gidea Dan'on: You may pass, Elias. A soul comes seeking enlightenment! Faces, show him the way!

First Mask: I am the first Face; I am called Blindness. Take this band and cover your eyes, for Truth is something unseen and Wisdom invisible.

Second Mask: I am the second Face; I am called Deafness. Take this wax and plug your ears, so that you will not be dissuaded by the pleas of the guilty or tempted by the bribes of the corrupt.

Third Mask: I am the third Face; I am called Mute. Take this gag and bind your mouth, so that you will not reveal the secrets of your Tribe or the craft of the Blind Eye.

Blindness: In darkness you will seek the light.

Deafness: In silence you will hear the truth.

Mute: In isolation you will know your soul.

The Faces, Together: You are made a Blind Eye, a servant of Tera Sheba. Step forward into the void and walk with your faith in the Wise One, that She may guide your steps.

Debora Thaim'on: Hold, friend, are you a pilgrim? You may nod to indicate assent. Good. I, too, am a pilgrim, and have walked this road many years. My name is Debora. We can walk the road together. I will show you the dangers and pitfalls I have already passed; your new eyes will spy things that I have missed. Will you walk with me, friend? You may nod. Good.

Secrets Between Covers

Debora Thaim'on to her new pupil:

I was glad to get you, Elias. There were four other Eyes waiting in the shadows of that room. If your blind steps had led you in their direction, you'd be in their chambers now, not mine. I'm sorry, you must be disoriented; initiation can have that effect on you. Have a seat; care for some wine? I will try to explain things in more concrete terms for you. I will be your mentor in the ways of the River of Dream; our relationship will be similar to a Judge and her Advocate. Your duties will focus primarily around research and assistance in rituals, but most importantly in learning the Laws of Dream.

Do not give me that wan smile. Do you think the Laws of Dream are simple things, like the laws that govern our everyday lives? You have been an Advocate for six years, Elias. You know that even the simple laws that bless Vimary with order can be complex and elusive. The Laws of Dream are that and more — they are live things, changing and writhing in your hands as you seek to grasp them. Compared to them, the laws of Tera Sheba are pale, simplistic and predictable. Now: do you know why? The Wise One modeled the laws she bestowed on us after the Laws of Dream, so that our actions here will mirror the motions of dream and spirit and the very stars themselves — Tera Sheba's laws may be diluted and weak, but they ape the very essence of the One Goddess' hope for humanity.

I can see it in your eyes — 'Surely these Laws are complex, but I have a nimble mind,' you tell yourself. The difference is not of degree, Elias, but of kind. Your study will not focus on precepts and exacting diction, but on spirits and souls. To learn the Laws of Dream is to learn the ways of **souls**. Everything has a soul, an anima that encapsulates all that a thing is. This book's soul, for instance: how simple can it be? The texture of the cover, the color, the strength of the binding. This ribbon attached to keep your place. And then the text itself — every word, every meaning, every interpretation and implication. The sum of this is the soul of the book — and that is a simple, inanimate object. How much more complex is your own soul, Elias? How well do you know it? Let me warn you — the study of Dream is the study of souls, and ultimately, your own soul. No dark corner, no hidden transgression will escape your own gaze. Do you think you can withstand to know yourself so well?

Let me show you something. Set your glass on the desk, here, a hand's breadth from mine. Now watch: I trace my finger around the edge of my glass, lightly, ever so lightly, and it begins to hum. If I continue. . . there, look at your own glass — it joins its voice in the song. I did not touch it, but you can see it vibrate as well. This is the principle of **sympathy** at work. These two glasses and their sisters were found in the depths of the Sunken City. Their forms are nearly identical, and this similarity creates a sympathetic link between them. When one sings, the other answers. With study, you will tease more sympathies from the River of Dream: you will write a word on a scrap of paper and find every book in the Library on that subject; you will make the unpoisoned well sing to you by holding a cup of pure water in your hand; you will discover a murderer by interrogating his accomplice.

Each soul possesses a resonance, and when those resonances are similar, a sympathetic bond is established. Now answer me this, Elias: what resonance will you make use of the most? Think before you answer.

At the full moon following your birth, Tera Sheba visited your household and Named you, opening you to the River of Dream. The **Name** She gave you molded your young soul, impressing on you the Eminences of Truth and Wisdom. Forever after your soul resonates with these qualities. This is how a Judge perceives lies; the Truth sings to a Sheban's soul.

Moon Circle: The Blind Eyes

Formed by Tera Sheba shortly after the Liberation and the creation of the Nation, the Blind Eyes are a secret priesthood dedicated to seeing what less occult-oriented Judges are blind to. Through the eddies and currents of the River of Dream, the Blind Eyes find evidence that is hidden, question spirits and spy directly on suspected criminals.

Their findings are delivered to presiding Judges indirectly, usually by a High Judge handing down information he 'just happened on.' This maintains the secrecy of the organization that is essential to its purpose: few outside of the High Judges and Tera Sheba know of the Blind Eyes' existence.

Parallel to and supporting their purpose as informants, the Blind Eyes maintain a body of occult knowledge centered on a continual quest for truth. The Blind Eyes zealously guard their secrets, and are reticent to surrender them even their own members: knowledge is only gained by earning it, usually through a great deal of hard work, extensive study, and the occasional political favor. The secret doctrines of the Blind Eyes developed out of Sheban legal practices, and still retain that flavor. Their practice of scrying for secrets is performed by two Eyes together and is called cross examination, summoning and interaction with spirits is referred to as appeals, their Aspect, used to uncover lost or forgotten evidence, is called Habeas Corpus.

The Blind Eyes are also structured much like Sheban law practice. A new initiate is called a Neophyte, and is assigned to a Mentor who tutors her in the ways of Dream and Synthesis. This apprenticeship usually lasts two to three years, after which the Neophyte is made a Journeyman, and can be called on to advise or investigate independently of her Mentor. All Blind Eyes can also refer to each other as 'pilgrims,' referring to their eternal journey towards truth.



Elias Japth'on

Coming from a family of confirmed stilt-walkers who eschewed the maelstrom of intrigue and politics in the tribe of judges, Elias fought a long battle to become educated and join the ranks of the Advocates. The fact that he saw the outline of secret doctrines within his studies did not make anything easier. He learned tact and discretion along with the established wisdom of the Shebans, and soon was made an Advocate, and was inducted into the heady world of Sheban politics on his own.

Young and impetuous, Elias now knows more than he has the wisdom to handle. Introduced to the mysteries of Synthesis and Dream through puzzles and riddles, Elias is apt to see the spiritual world and its machinations as a complex game to be won. 'Winning' is defined as finding as many secrets as possible, a goal which has led to his secret alliance with Maire and Thomas. The Blind Eyes' training and education only serves to make him better at deceiving not only his superiors but also himself as to how far over his head he really is.

Highlights: Inquisitive, Idealistic, Impulsive

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

Skills: Dreaming 2/-1, Investigation 2/0, Law 2/+2, Lore: River of Dream 2/+2, Notice 1/0, Read/Write (Sheban) 2/+2, Ritual 1/+2, Synthesis (Habeas Corpus) 2

Committed to the Scroll

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

Only a month into my new studies and already I know more than I thought possible! Everywhere I look I see form and name — even this quill can send me on dizzying spirals of contemplation. Made from the feather of a snow owl, its native harmonies sing to purity and knowledge, but its form focuses these resonances to the written word. It also sings to me, for I have discovered my hidden name, the name given to me by the Wise One herself. I am the Dreamquill, and it is my hope that this means I am destined to pen some great work on Dream. I keep such fantasies secret, however: only myself, Debora and Tera Sheba know my true name — and my mother, of course, who was there — and possession of a thing's name is a powerful thing. If I have learned nothing else I have learned the power of knowing names.

It does make me wonder, however, if knowing my name would be of much use to members of other tribes. Certainly their Synthesis is a gift of the One Goddess and cannot be discounted, but their practices are, as Debora says, slipshod and disorganized. Yet something bothers me about her casual dismissal. The Synthesis of the Joshuans and Joanites was enough to beat the Z'bri into submission — how can this be inferior to our own power? I know that other Tribes cannot possibly commit as much time and effort to study as I have — it is not in a Dahlian to pore through an old tome, let alone an Agnite Child! Without study, though, one can never know the secrets of Word and Form. If other Tribes possess powers of Synthesis as great as our own, they must be based off of some other practice or secret knowledge.

If each Tribe performs Synthesis in a different way, how can we be certain that we are all in fact doing the same thing? The simple answer is that the One Goddess and the Fatimas ensure that the Nation is unified, but I suspect there is a stronger rationale. There must be some foundation from which all Synthesis springs, that allows us to touch Dream and separates us from Fallen and Squats. Again, the simple answer is that the Fatimas open us to the River of Dream, and remove that resonance from Fallen. My only rebuttal to such a solution is that if each Fatima is doing the same thing, this still does not answer why each Tribe's Synthesis differs so greatly from the rest of the Nation.

There is something fundamental that I am missing, I fear, and it is no excuse that my superiors are missing it, too. Understanding the foundations of Synthesis would be an incredible asset to the Blind Eyes. Think of the power one could tap if he mastered the secrets of more than one Tribe! Such a Dreamer would know the River from multiple points along its bank, much like questioning more than one witness to a crime to gain a greater understanding of the whole situation. We could accomplish so much! I must turn my studies to this question immediately.

Meetings of Fortune and Chance

A letter from Circuit Judge Elias Japth'on to the Shaman Falling Water of Griffentowne:

My dearest Maire:

You have by now heard that Hugh Tav'on has been banished for his crimes. I cannot thank you enough for your assistance in the investigation, or for your support as I scrutinized such a grisly affair. I think Griffentowne will always hold a special place in my heart, not to mention its most hospitable Shaman and her Joanite beau. But it is not about these past affairs that I write to you now. Crimes and atrocities pass into time and are forgotten, but friendships endure. I call on your friendship and your confidence now, with the hope that together, you, Thomas and I can resolve some of the questions about Dream that we spoke of around your hearth last fall.

You are a Shaman of Eva, and Thomas a Templar of Joan. I myself am something more than the Judge I claimed myself to be. We have all been taught the mysteries and secrets of our Tribes, and each of us has one part of a far greater picture. I know your incomplete understanding concerns you, as mine does me. Between the three of us, we must know a great deal, but the strictures designed by our power-jealous superiors prevent us from sharing our knowledge. I think you will agree that such forced fragmentation is potentially dangerous — what facet of the River can none of us see because we cannot speak to one another? What threat can we not face or even know because we are kept in ignorance?

We three can piece together a tapestry of our Tribes' teachings, for we all know that Dream is both the most important asset and the most dangerous threat that confronts the Seven Tribes. How can we remain mute when together we may better serve and protect our Nation? The Festival of Liberation is less than a month away — come enjoy my hospitality in the Sunken City, and we can share what we each know. Let us be a bundle of rods, harder to break than three separate sticks. Let us be strong for the Nation and Fatima alike.

From the Wet Earth

From the letters of Maire Cov'on, Falling Water:

It was good to hear from you, my friend. Too many seasons have passed with no word from you. While I will not presume to speak for Thomas as well, I believe your idea is a good one, and will serve to foster greater understanding between the Tribes. I wonder that our Elders have not done so before.

There is much that we might learn from one another. When last we met at the Festival of Liberation you spoke of the learning that was required of you, all of the lore and law you studied. It struck me as odd, until I considered the Great River. The river and its tributaries are our lifeblood in this world — all of us are touched by it in some way. Its waters bathe us, water our fields, sate our thirst. We fish, we travel, we play, and yet if you ask seven different people, they will tell you seven different things about the river. It is a part of all of us, yet it is never the same to any two people.

Culling the Herd

As midwives to the Tribes, the Evans generally have the last word on whether or not a newborn child is viable. Children who are deformed or sickly are put to death, usually quickly and relatively mercifully through smothering or similar means. Often, as a kindness to the parents, the midwife will tell them the child was born stillborn, or died soon after birth. It is worth noting that this is the only time Eva takes precedence over Baba Yaga regarding Death.

This practice is familiar to the Evans who are most in tune with Eva's will, usually Shamans and other spiritually potent Evans. Occasionally rumors of the practice surface in the rest of the Tribes as well, lending a faint ominous cast to the already risky birthing process. Only Eva's Shamans, however, know the true reason for the practice of culling. Believing the Guides were in part responsible for Mary's death, the Fatimas fear the unknown and uncharted spiritual abilities the Guides possess. Therefore, any child born deformed (for all Guides bear some sort of physical deformity) is put to death, rather than risk one growing up and becoming a Guide. Most troubling of all to the Shamans of late is a steady increase in the number of children born deformed.

1. Drift We to the Dark

Falling Water

Maire Cov'on was called early to become one of Eva's Shamans, astounding her family as young as age four with her understanding of Life and her manipulation of it. Not long after, she began her training and was accepted as one of the Chosen at the early age of sixteen.

At the end of her final test, Maire had a vision. The spirit that came to her offered to let her die, warning her of a horrible fate. If she chose to live, she would learn the deepest mysteries of the Tribes, but she risked losing everything. Maire chose to live, and when she returned to Sanctuary, was given the name Falling Water to reflect the ease with which the River of Dream flowed through her.

When she accepted her position in Griffentowne, she had the opportunity to begin to get to know members of the other Tribes, away from the rather isolated Sanctuary. It was there she met the Joanite Templar, Thomas. The two began a long and stylized courtship and were close to marriage when Elias' offer came.

Highlights: Intelligent, curious, haunted

Attributes: APP +1, BLD +2, CRE +2, INF +1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL +1, STR +1, HEA +1, STA 35, LUD 6, AD 6

Skills: Agriculture 2/+1, Dreaming 2/+1, Etiquette 1/+1, Evan Lore 2/+1, Healing 2/+1, Herbalism 2/+1, Human Perception 1/+1, Mythology 1/+1, Read/Write (Tribal) 1/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Sneak 1/0, Survival 2/+2, Synthesis (Anima) 2

You Shebans build wondrous boats, and sail on the river in crafts of your own devising. The Evans prefer to swim in the waters as the fish do, studying their ways and movements. While both methods of travel can be quite difficult, having their own advantages and disadvantages, Evans and the Shebans both manage to travel quite well on the Great River.

So it is in the River of Dream. Your lore and your laws serve as your boats. Marvelous crafts they are, and doubtless beyond the comprehension of any raised outside of your Tribe. Our rituals, our connections to the things of Eva's natural world serve as our link to the spirits of growing and green and wild living things. We study them to emulate them, to become part of their spirit and swim with them as we swim with the Great River's fish. Both methods have their difficulties my friend, and yet we both travel the River of Dream.

Saplings' Roots

A Shaman's journey begins early, earlier than many believe. We begin watching our young ones, usually not long after they begin to walk and talk. We watch them in the fields; we watch them at rest. We listen to the questions they ask and the answers they accept. We look for those who are physically strong and healthy, for those children are the most Blessed of Eva. Physical deformity sympathizes with spiritual deformity, and those so marked are culled early from our clans, lest they grow to destroy us as they did Forgiveness.

We look for children who seek to mesh with nature, rather than struggling against it. Those who seek to swim rather than sail, if you will. These children begin their study as young as six summers, although many do not see the path they are on until they are older. No one is accepted into our teaching after their tenth summer — a younger sapling is flexible and will bend, but the older one will break first.

These Saplings face their first test during their eleventh summer. Here they demonstrate what they have learned of Synthesis — they show us that they have begun to swim. There are, unfortunately, those who do not have within them the strength of Dream necessary to let the River flow through them and carry them in its currents. It is best to discover this weakness early on, so that those children may find other paths to follow. Those who pass continue to learn. They are not committed to the path until their bodies begin to change.

Time of the Seed

The Time of the Seed is the time of the second test. It is a test that all of the Goddess' children face, but only our Saplings are guided through it. Unlike the rebirth ceremony all young women observe, the Time of the Seed is largely a spiritual test for all those with the potential to become Shamans, male and female, and is a recognition that they have begun to mature, spiritually as well as physically. When the Saplings' bodies begin to change from child to adult, they are taken apart from the Tribe into separate camps, boys and girls kept distant from each other. There they undergo the Rite of the Seed, which ripens them and readies them for the test to come.

The young girls begin to learn the secrets of the Mother, while the boys learn of their duties to the Mother. They remain separate from each other and the rest of the Tribe until the test is complete — a task which takes months. Drawn down by sacred rituals, part of the Seed enters each growing child and fights her spirit. A young woman must call upon the life force within her and expel the evil spirit. It is a battle that is often painful, but if she triumphs, her body releases the blood of struggle as well as what remains of the spirit. The Seed enters a boy but once that we know of, and the struggle is quite different. If he triumphs, his voice roughens and his body fills out to that of a man's.

The Seed is drawn to our life force, to the Gift of Eva within that allows us to create new life. For this reason, a woman's struggle begins when she is old enough to bear children, and will be ongoing for as long as she is fertile soil. This too, is why men face the Seed but once in this battle.

Path's End

The Saplings remain in the camp for no longer than three moons. If they have not faced the Seed by then, they have failed the test, and return home to find another path. They are not in disgrace, for they have learned much of Eva's ways. Those who have passed spend several more years learning our dearest secrets, the rituals we perform to honor Eva, to keep the Tribe safe, to ensure that our crops and children grow healthy and strong. They learn also of our past, the secrets we murmur only to one another, of plans and alliances the others would not understand.

The final test that remains to the Saplings takes place in their seventeenth summer. It is a test of both skill and devotion. Many do not survive, and of those who return, some have been driven mad by their ordeal. Each of them must go into the wilderness of Sunblessed for a winter moon, and live apart from all humankind. They take only their clothing and a knife. They must survive, but they must also fast and search for a sign from Eva that they have been accepted. Once they return, if their sign is judged acceptable, they are welcomed within our ranks and become one of Eva's Chosen. At this time they are given a new name, one that reflects their inner nature within the River of Dream.

The Beating Heart

From the letters of Thomas, Joanite Templar:

I hope you both can forgive me, I do not have the skill in writing that the two of you possess. When I read your letters on Synthesis it makes my eyes open to worlds I had never considered, and I do not think I can do the same for you. I will try, nonetheless, because being short of talent or strength is never an excuse.

In fact, I think that the idea of having no excuses and never giving up is a good place to start speaking of how my people interact with the River of Dream. From the time we are able to understand words, we are told that a Joanite never gives up when she has sworn herself. There are no excuses and there is no give. When one devotes oneself it must be complete and without reservation, one's oaths must be held to above all. It is this, above all else, that determines who is chosen as a Templar. We do watch our

I. Drift We to the Dark



Thomas, Joanite Templar

Born to Clan Uhan'on, Thomas was always a large boy with strength and speed to spare. His family and his physical prowess assured him of a place among the Templars. The only thing that ever worried his family was the fact that Thomas often seemed distracted and distant, his attention everywhere but on the present and the fight at hand. His older brothers did their best to beat that trait out of him, until one of the elders of the clan took Thomas under his wing. He saw that distraction for what it was — an unusually tight bond with the River of Dream that made Thomas aware of things that others were not.

By the age of twenty-four Thomas was a Templar and a veteran. His skill as a Dreamer was becoming legendary, as was his single-minded ferocity in battle. Despite the honors that he was given and the important position that he held, Thomas never grew arrogant or proud. He still thinks of himself as a distracted boy, and simply wants to do his best to serve Joan and those that he loves. It is that love that holds danger for Thomas, for his chief devotion is not to Joan, but to his Evan betrothed, Maire.

Highlights: Quiet, Devoted

Attributes: AGI +1, APP +1, BLD +2, FIT +2, PER +1, WIL +1, STR +2, HEA +1, STA 40, UD/AD 9

Skills: Archery 1/+1, Ambush 1/0, Athletics 1/+2, Camouflage 1/0, Combat Sense 2/+1, Dodge 2/+1, Dreaming 1/0, Hand-to-Hand 2/+1, Intimidate 1/+2, Lore (Z'bri) 1/0, Melee 2/+1, Notice 1/+1, Ritual 1/0, Sneak 1/+1, Tactics 1/0, Throwing 1/+1, Synthesis (Battle, Devotion) 2



young, as Maire said the Evans do, but we do not watch for those with the most talent, we watch for those with the most piety, the most steel.

This leads to a different vision than either of yours. Both of your Tribes seem much concerned with seeing the world, with knowing everything about the past or becoming one with the whole world. It is not so with a Joanite. We are taught that our place is to hold where we stand, to be devoted to our given word, and to let the rest pass us by. I do not mean to say that we are taught to be ignorant, or not to care about the world, that is not it at all. We are taught that when we touch upon the River we must do so in a way which lets us stand fast, which lets us complete the task that we have been given here and now. A Templar channeling her Devotion does not worry about what may come in the future, or what may be across Vimary; she worries about what is standing before her at that moment. It is the same with Fury, for when we let loose our anger we do not rage against the entire world, we rage against that which is before us, that which can be changed.

Maire spoke of boats, and fish, and other things in her letters. I do not know how Joanite Synthesis fits into that model, it seems to me that it is a blade, a sword or a spear. We are a people that deal with practical threats, practical problems, and so do not try to see the whole of the world. We do not swim or row — we stand and act as the blade which protects, which slays the problem before us.

A Solemn Pact

From the Memories of Thomas, Templar:

After comparing the ways we were trained, Maire and Elias began to believe that there was more to the River than any of our priesthoods saw. Why else would we all understand the River so differently? Why was it fire and stillness to me, and water and germination to the one I loved? We knew not, but we did know there were things in the River of Dream that hid in the dark shadows. I had felt it, and I am not a deep man. Elias and Maire felt it even more keenly than I — a wrongness, a sense of incompleteness. We had to know what it was, and the only way to find it was to learn everything we could. Others did not understand, would not listen.

We came together in Bazaar, in a small room above an Emporium. In the flickering light of my torch candles we gathered about a small table, and we linked our left hands — the hand of the heart — across the table, while we used our right hands — the hand of the head — to circle the table. Elias spoke the words, which we all repeated. It was fitting that he speak them first, that he make the pact that would bind us all.

He spoke, and his voice moved in the air with the flicker of the candles. "We come together to swear ourselves to a cause. We come together to seek, to find, to know, and to learn the deepest secrets, the highest arts, and to find the whole of that which hides its face from us. I swear that I will learn all that I might of the River of Dream, else the land open and swallow me. I swear that I shall stand by you, my fellows in this Pact of the Ferryman, else the Great River drown the life from my lungs. I swear that I shall not speak of what we do, else the sky fall upon my head and end my soul. The One witness my words, and seal them in me."

We all swore the great oath of water, land, and sky — the greatest oath that can be sworn without swearing upon a Fatima — and so we all entered the path which leads to darkness.

A Worried Heart

From the frightened thoughts of Falling Water, Evan Shaman:

When I touch the River I feel a tearing sensation, like a baby coming from the womb feet first. It rends my mind and my spirit, leaving me aching and afraid. I was called to perform the Rite of the Seed upon the newest Saplings in the camp, but I could not. The girls watched me, waiting for me to call the rite that would ready them to be opened, but as the River washed over my spirit I was filled with such agony that I closed myself off. I have not touched the River since. I do not know what is causing this pain, but I am afraid.

Storm Cry and the others tell me not to worry, that I am too young and too inexperienced to fully understand the forces at work. They tell me that what I feel is because of my own weakness, not because of any fouling of the River. I do not believe them; I cannot. None of them know the River as I do, for all of my youth.

If those of my own Tribe will not help me, then perhaps Elias and Thomas will. Even if they do not sense the wrongness I can feel, they will surely believe me. I cannot face this alone, and I cannot trust myself to touch the River until I understand what is happening. Blessed Mother, forgive me. Understand what it is I must do.

A Teeming Brain

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

We meet every new moon and share what we have learned, bringing together the knowledge we gain by various means. The results have been astounding: I never knew the River had such breadth! At first I had assumed that what one Tribe knew by one face, another Tribe knew by another, making Synthesis a relatively simple phenomena complicated only by misunderstandings and ignorance. While this is certainly true in some cases, it amazes me how much more often a Tribe touches a completely different part of the River from their cousins.

Not only is Dream a far more complex thing that I had first imagined, but with each new realm and sphere of understanding we uncover, I can draw ten more parallels between them all. The 'trance of seeming death' of the Yagans, the 'moment before orgasm' of the Magdalites and the 'sunny summer afternoon' of the Agnites might seem diverse, but at root they are the same, a state of mind seemingly distracted but in reality concentrated on the River of Dream. All three of us identified something familiar in the descriptions, leading me to suspect a unified approach to Synthesis.

Our knowledge grows faster each day; surely some great revelation is at hand.

Morticians Craft: Yagans

Elias displays his prize to Maire:

Her name is Maurelle Kell'on, a Mordred; she killed three Agnites. I pardoned her in exchange for an extant copy of the Ashen Tale. Yes, I have it right here, the entire document, including the parts the Yagans do not release to the other Tribes. Hm? The Agnites? They deserved it, the little fools were sneaking through Mortuary. A few others loudly proclaimed they were only playing hide and seek, but they were only hiding from the Mordred and they were seeking something entirely different, something Maurelle was defending and, that we now have: Yagan secrets. Look at her stride away; I do feel for her. In the end she betrayed her duty to save her own life. Such weak wills should not be charged with protecting knowledge.

Yes, the book will help us. I have already skimmed it over, to make sure we have it all — seventy-eight bone plates inked with a chapter each. It tells the story of Baba Yaga coming across the Fold to save humanity. Think of that! A first-hand

1. Drift We to the Dark

account of crossing the Fold! The book documents a panoply of spirits and records their travels to secondary orbs. Parts of the book are also used as an instruction tool for neophyte Dreamers, laying out the basics of Yagan dreamcraft. This, I think, will be the most useful portion of all.

The basis of their Synthesis is Death, but that is hardly the whole of it. Their province extends far further than dying; I am beginning to think that their purview is the greatest of all the Tribes. Here, on this plate, see the relation of all the elements? The skull at the center is, of course, Death, but when inverted it becomes the Hand of Fate. We are all fated to die, and by studying Fate they seek to know when and why, and what comes after. Fate pulls the strings of more than just people, as well: ideas, movements, even tribes live and die by Fate's dictum.

Yes, I am positive that the Yagans can scry into the future, and see, here is the hourglass for Time, as well. If every grain of sand is fated to fall someplace, sometime, the Yagans know how and when. Now see how the hand of Fate can hold the sands of Time and sift them through its fingers? Now, see Fate as a glove with a Yagan's hand within it, directing the flow and fall of happenstance.

And here, wings — what do wings have to do with the Yagans? Yes, certainly, they may be the Wings of Time, but look at the symbol's relation to Death — see the correlation? These are the Wings of spirit that take the Dead across the Fold. Now if these spirit wings can cross the Fold, where else can they go? Anywhere. Through the River of Dream, into your own dreams, into the dreaming minds of animals. Perhaps into the dreams of the Nation.

Later, the book speaks of an Aspect called Dream Travel. Reading that portion made my blood run cold, Maire. Every Tribal knows about the Curse of Dream, but this one they do not speak of to outsiders. They can be anywhere, even here right now, unseen and unheard, watching us and everything we do. We must investigate some sort of countermeasures, if only for our own safety.



The Call to Dance: Dahlians

Falling Water shares with her pact mates:

There is a Dahlian Caravan that travels the Great River on wagons that can be converted into strings of flat barges. Thomas knows them as well; they regularly pass through Griffentowne on their route between Westholm and Bazaar. The sight of their broad-sailed crafts in the distance sets many Evan stomachs a-quiver, often for reasons that have little to do with trade. Along with food and beautiful trinkets, the Dahlians bring us another vital commodity: news. As far from the center of Vimary as we are, the Caravan of the Sail is essential to Griffentowne, and most of the settlement is on good terms with the Caravan's leader, a roguish man named Laran.



The last time they passed this way, I managed to capture the Little Trickster's attention and interest for a time, and got him to talk to me about how the Dahlians view the River. "We are Puppets in Dahlia's Dance," he told me. Laran went on to tell me that the Dahlians see themselves as an extension of Dahlia's will, as much a part of Her as Her Masks. That, he claims, is why Dahlian performances are so artful, because those onstage are acting in concert, each acutely aware of those around them. Their much-vaunted freedom comes of a direct surrendering of will to their Fatima. Knowing that Dahlia protects them, they have the freedom to wander where they will and do as they please, knowing She will not let them come to harm.

He would tell me little about their rituals, and I was leery of pressing him too hard. Naturally, I was eager to learn more than what he would tell me. It was an easy thing the next night to hide in the woods near their camp, willing the life of my body to blend into the life surrounding me, and it was there I was able to witness a Dahlian ritual.

There were seven dancers in a circle of firelight. Each had silks and ribbons bound to their feet and ankles in long streamers whose purpose I did not understand at first. When the music began, the streamers floated up to the sky, creating the cunning illusion of puppet strings. The seven dancers whirled madly, each pantomiming being controlled by their strings. All of the figures were masked, but one of them wore bone rattles, while another carried a sword. Yet another wore a soft cloak, and so on, until I realized that each dancer represented one of the Fatimas. As the music reached a climax, one of the dancers, who wore a pure white mask, appeared to snap free of her strings, and danced wildly around her sisters. One by one, Dahlia set her sisters free until they all moved with abandon around the fire. While I felt the mist of Dream in the air during the dance, I was not able to fathom the source or the destination.

I crept away as the rite ended, turning it over in my mind. That the Dahlians see their own Fatima as superior to the others is no surprise, for each Tribe feels that way. It is part of who we are. Still. . . the idea of the Trickster setting Her Sisters free is an intriguing one. Free from what, I wonder?

A Trickster Laughs

From the amused letters of Laran, Little Trickster, Caravan of the Sail:

Oh, she was easy enough to bed, with promises to share Dahlia's secrets with her. I think she thought she was seducing me. Scratch any Mother and you'll find a Whore, I always say. She was a sharp one though, when all was done and we lay talking on the wagon bed. She knew the right questions to ask about the River and how we interact with it. I was surprised; I didn't think most Shamans looked up from grubbing in the dirt long enough to learn anything.



1. Drift We to the Dark

Child, the first rule to remember when someone is snooping about is to misdirect and lie your tongue out. Keep that rule in mind, and you'll do well. Puppets, indeed. As if Dahlia would care for spiritless, blind followers such as the other Fatimas desire! The Evan was our puppet that night, drawn by her strings to a special rite put on for her eyes alone. I wonder what she made of it?

What is a River, of Dream or of water, but a road? And who knows the roads of Vimary better than a Dahlian? The River of Dream is no different, and we follow after it with an intent and an ease that no other Tribe can equal. It is as much a part of us as our Caravans, flowing with the ease of our very breath. Let the Tera Shebans and Joanites ride the waters of Dream as if it were a static, frozen thing. Dahlia's children know better.

I wonder though, who the highest bidder would be for information that certain priests are prying where they are not wanted...



Children's Dreams: Agnites

From the stories of Liria, Agnite Favorite:

Wow, my own sword! None of the others have a sword like this. They all have toy weapons and stuff that they make of old cans and sticks, but none of them have a real sword like this one! They'll all be so sca. . . What? Oh yeah, I almost forgot. I really shouldn't tell you this stuff, you have to promise not to tell! Agnes would be real mad if She found out!

Okay, so long as you promise. We all learn about the River from Agnes Herself, you know, and so we know it better than anyone else! It isn't like you Joanites who always go about so sad and serious and never have time to play and run. For us the Dream is all around, every place we go. Anyplace that there's a game, anyplace that there's a laugh or a tear, there you can find the River. That's what Agnes teaches us, that things aren't all far away and serious. Everyone else acts like it's all special, like you have to be oh so serious and grown up to use Synthesis. That's poop!

I learned about Synthesis for the first time when I was still a Little. Me and my friend had gone out looking for some Children who were in the Emporiums, and we got lost in one of the stinky tunnels. We walked and walked till we couldn't walk any more, and then we slept and got up and walked more. I was so hungry, and it hurt in my belly like my backbone was rubbing on my belly button. I thought I was gonna die, it was like the world was spinning round and round and round. I fell down. My hands got cut on the ground, and all sudden, I knew what to do. I closed my eyes and just walked without trying to be all serious, without trying so hard to go exactly where I wanted. I lost my friend, and we never did find her, but I came out of the tunnels right under the Crèche. All I had to do was think like I was asleep, and play games in my head.

Agnes was so proud of me! She knew what I'd done, just as soon as She looked at me. She took me to Her rooms that night, and we became best friends. I was really small, but I became a Favorite anyway! Agnes taught me then, taught me games and tricks. I know games that you wouldn't believe. One time Agnes and me tricked a man into giving us all his food for free! That's how we learn, by games and tricks. Agnes even taught me some of the secret games — like how to make a bunch of trash walk around like a person. It really isn't hard, you know. I could teach you, cause it's just a trick you have to learn in your head. It's only hard cause you have to make your brain believe the trick, like the way you can believe things while you're asleep. Once you make your head think it's real, then it becomes real. I could maybe teach you, but Agnes says adults are too silly to learn. You think you know what is real and what isn't, so your head doesn't listen to you.

Oh crap! That's Anastasia. I gotta go. Come back next week and I'll teach you that trick — if you aren't too dumb.

Body and Soul: Magdalites

Falling Water shares with her pact mates:

Xstasis was exactly as I'd imagined it would be, with the exception of one thing: it can be astoundingly, peacefully quiet. Yes, there are cries that sometimes rend the air, cries of passion or pain, but there is a peace among Xstasis' gardens that I had not anticipated. For all of my own exploration of the connection between flesh and spirit, I too had been misled into believing that Xstasis was little more than a brothel.

Not so, as I discovered during my last visit there. A Concubine welcomed me. She was a lovely pale woman with dark eyes. As she murmured soft words, showing me through the garden, two Diplomats passed, a man and a woman. The man bowed low before me. If I have ever seen such a perfect specimen of male beauty, I do not recall it. No matter what you have heard, I believe Magdalen saves Her most compelling children to serve as Her Diplomats, not as Her Concubines. The way his pale blue eyes lingered on my body left me fighting a shiver and wondering if what I felt came from the power of Dream.

"Welcome to our home," the woman purred. She was as lovely as her companion, a perfect feminine counterpoint to his masculinity. I have little doubt that they made an effective pair. "I hope your stay will be most... enjoyable." She gave my escort a small, knowing smile, then the pair moved on their way.

Once I was ensconced behind closed doors with my companion and her assistants, I asked question after curious question about herbs, about the drugs they used. From the answers she gave, it seems that Magdalite travel within the River is dependent on sensory extremes. By opening themselves achingly wide to the experiences of the Flesh, by taking in every minute detail, they are able to transcend it. Their potions are designed to sensitize the user to such extremes not simply, as most believe, for pure physical pleasure, but rather to drive their own rituals further into the Dream. All else is merely a pleasant side effect, and one the Magdalites use well to their advantage with their visitors.

As I was slowly drawn into my companion's world, I opened my own senses as well, sending them out to learn what they could. I drew everyone in the impromptu rite together with a careful use of Empathy, and then reached beyond them, letting fingers of consciousness trail through the rest of Xstasis. Emotion, sensation, both washed over me, threatening to pull me beneath their waves.

As I sorted through a myriad of images and impressions, I felt the thoughts of the two from the garden as they continued their walk. Theirs was a light bantering tone, with the expected undercurrent of physical desire — and yet there was something else there too. As they exchanged pleasantries (which I, of course, could not hear directly) with those around them, I saw the subtle shifts of assertion and arrogance between them, dominance flowing from one side to the other like water in a tilting pan. Theirs was a relationship of continual underlying struggle, each side striving for a greater range of influence than the other.

Not far from the garden I sensed a young man — a Sheban, from the feel of it — and his first lover twined together in the maze that makes up so much of Xstasis. There was a sense of yielding in him, of giving over the sense of absolute control with which he had no doubt been raised. His lover, experienced and a bit older, carried a sense of triumph over the other boy's inhibitions, as well as the bliss the two shared. I sensed the same ebb and flow of influence and dominance and submission and yielding all around me in the Concubine's chambers — even within myself.

It was a startling discovery. While much of Magdalite Synthesis and ritual depends on physical pleasure, its true root lies in power. The giving and taking of power over an individual or situation formed the base of every ritual and act I felt that day. Beyond the games of servitude and slavery, there is a profound power in giving another pleasure, just as there is a conscious surrendering of that power in yielding to another being. It can be argued that by setting Her Tribe free to feel pleasure again after the inhuman degradation of the Camps, Magdalen granted them the greatest power of all: the power over themselves. While others have puzzled over the seeming dichotomy between Magdalite sensuality and Magdalite politics, it seems that they share the same root in the continual ebb and flow of power. Who has it, who is giving it up, who is taking it... all of these are at the very core of a Magdalite's experience within the River.

A Burning Spirit

From the Letters of Thomas, Templar:

I will leave the issues of deep and intangible things and the nature of souls to you and Elias, dear heart. You are more capable than I ever will be. I will focus on what I am best at, giving detail to the things that I have seen and felt. I, like the Agnite girl, can remember the first time I used Synthesis.

I was young, no more than sixteen summers, and facing my first real battle. I was following my father into a skirmish against heavily armed Squats. I can still remember how clear and sharp everything looked as we ran towards the battle. I could see individual squats, count their spears and note their armor, I could smell blood and urine as sharp, separate smells in the air. Then we were in the center of the melee, and everything dissolved. Everything blurred together, became more impressions than images. I did not see the first squat I struck, nor did I see the spear that stabbed me. I only saw whirling images: screaming, weapons and blood. I felt like I was drowning and I wanted to run.

Just before I broke to flee one image came to my mind, sharp and clear — my father's face in pain. I stopped, I breathed, and I found my heart in the still center of me, just as I had so many times in prayer. All the months of training, of practice, came to center. In that instant the battle changed, and I felt the River move through me. Everything was still a wash of images, but now it no longer mattered. I had no fear; I had no hesitation. What was real was my spirit, my will, and my flesh was yoked to it. I tore a barbed spear out of my side without pain, and strode through the battle to my father's side — untouched and untouchable. In that moment the shining of my heart, the steel of my soul, was more real than the weakness of flesh. So real was that shining that the weapons of the Squats could not pierce my skin, but broke as though my body was Joan's Herself.

I still did not see individual details, but I felt the battle like a pulse. I knew where a sword was going to be before it was there. The faces of the warriors around me blurred into meaningless unreality. All I saw was the moment of attack lashing out at me. Each of those I saw clear and true, as though they were all that existed. I only saw that which was necessary to the battle — the signals of my leaders, the weapons which came against me, the balance of the enemy's body, the weak spots at which I struck. All other images did not matter, and faded from my mind, became nothing. That focus let me cut through enemies while they tried desperately to see through the confusion. I became the center of the whirlwind, and my heart howled like a storm.

That is what my Synthesis has always tasted like — a moment when the spirit rules the body, and the world melts to allow the beating Devotion of my heart to become a truer flesh than what I was born with.

A Snuffed Candle

There is another side to Synthesis, however. It can carry your soul so far into a moment of beauty that it never returns. I have felt this, though by Joan's grace not often. In a skirmish the clarity that Battle normally brings suddenly reversed itself. In a moment I felt my heart slip free, I lost the ability to hold soul and body together as a united front. Suddenly I was in the middle of pain and chaos. I could not see the swords that were striking me, all I could see were things that did not matter — the yellow teeth of the Z'bri that bit at my arm, the diamond pattern of blood drops on the ground. If it were not for my sister in arms I would have died there, lost to the world in a haze of dreams and images.

That, however, was a minor fate compared to other things I have seen. I knew a man, whose name I will not speak, who was a great warrior and priest. Being near him in battle was to feel like a little leaf in a great wind, so powerful were the currents of Dream about him. He was diamond and steel, but in the end that did not save him. The forces he called up overwhelmed him and while I watched his body fell limp to the ground, his soul ripped out of him. I can remember his vacant eyes, the rank smell of the feces that his body would not hold. We got him back to the Towers, tried to find and bring back his soul. He was gone, though, and his body withered away to not much more than a skeleton before it died.

There is nothing I have ever felt, not even Maire's love, that is the equal of Devotion or Fury or Battle in those moments where the whole world blurs and your soul stands forth untamable, fierce and proud. But there is little that I fear more than knowing it could be my body on that slab, wasting away to nothing while my soul is torn apart by the winds and waves of a storm I cannot even see.

It frightens me, that image. Worse yet is that I cannot let it enter my mind often. Doubting oneself in the middle of Synthesis is inviting disaster. When you are shaping Dream a moment of distraction, an image of an old man on a slab, will leave you wandering and lost. To think of failure is to invite failure.

In Us Dreams Do Live


From a diary transcribed to flesh:

Our cabal has finally amassed enough lore that we can begin to piece together a general framework of Synthesis and, more generally, Dream. A good deal of it we knew already in one form or another, but did not understand its relation to the rest; other aspects are completely new revelations. The most daunting of these revelations is that Synthesis does not come from the Fatimas themselves. As a Judge of Tera Sheba, I know these words to be treasonous, but as a researcher I also know them to be true. I continue writing to support this postulate as well as reconcile it with the dogma of the Nation.

Where Flesh and Spirit meet, Dream is created as the borderline between the two. Synthesis is the ability to bring the power and possibility of Dream into the Material Orb. As such, the power of Synthesis derives from the River of Dream, and ultimately from the interaction of Flesh and Spirit. The Fatimal gift of Synthesis granted soon after the birth of a Tribal allows the new Dreamer to serve as a conduit between the Material Orb and the River and tap this available power. The Fatimas' relation to this schema is therefore not as the source of power, but as the facilitators to this power. It is still correct to say that the Seven Mothers granted us Synthesis; the meaning of this statement is simply not as straightforward as we had previously understood.

Because only Fatimas are capable of opening a Dreamer to the River of Dream, the Synthesis they grant is molded into their image. A daughter of Joan possesses the Eminences of Fury and Devotion because these elements of the River are the province of the Warrior. I do not believe that the Fatimas are unable to touch the other currents of the River of Dream; rather, these are the facets that the Fatima feels most important to instill in Her children. Likewise, the lifestyle practiced by the Tribe reinforces the emphasis on the Eminences; what Sheban can go through one day without encountering and struggling with Truth and Wisdom?

We are challenged with our own Eminences every day, honing our understanding of Fatimal love and the world of Dream, bringing us closer to the One Goddess and further away from the World Before. While I am sure that this is the wisdom of the Sisters, I wonder if this continual reinforcement has other repercussions: might it be that the power of Synthesis derives equally from how we live our lives as much as by the Fatima who Named us? Certainly those who dedicate themselves fully to their Fatima's path — High Judges, Templars, Old Ones — become the most powerful among us. What of the Stilt-walkers or Eva's Barge Mistresses? Further from their Fatimas and the blessed way of life, does their power wane or grow distorted? I shall have to look into this.



What Dreams May Come

Recollections of Thomas, Templar:

We should have seen the day coming. There is only so much you can trick, beg, borrow and steal from the closed mouthed sisterhoods before your sources start to run dry. Liria never came back to see me after that first day, and I am not sure I want to know how Elias pried some of his information from the Yagans. In any case, we came to a point where we found ourselves stuck, unable to proceed farther.

It was Maire who decided that we should turn to the spirits. As a Shaman she had more experience with that realm than either Elias or I. I knew how to fight in the River, but little more than that. Elias, however, had a great deal of knowledge about the different types of spirits. He explained to us that there are many levels and classes of spirits, as well as the souls of the dead, that we could contact.

If I remember what Elias told us correctly, then the greatest spirits are those which embody something in their very being. I did not understand everything Elias said about them, but I know that he included the Totems among their number. Winter Wolf, for example, has something of the power of all Wolves in her heart, and so is greater than the soul of a single wolf, or even a free wolf spirit. Do not be mistaken - the Totems are not always the most powerful spirits; they are just the ones we know the best, the ones that choose to help the Fatimas and us as a Nation. There are others, however, that are distant, unknown, or uncaring that are every bit as powerful as our own familiar Totems.

After the great spirits there are any number of lesser spirits. Some are little more than shadows in the River of Dream, intangible and short lived. Others are the souls of animals or the minds of sleeping plants, and they remain. In fact Maire warned us to be wary when dealing with the souls of plants or plant spirits, because they are old and their roots go deep into darker places than we can imagine. In addition to those kinds of spirits there are also ghosts, and phantasms, and reflections, and spirits of ideas, and spirits born of dreams, and. . . the list is too long to speak. Maire said that there is a spirit for everything that exists, and what little I have seen confirms her words.

We decided that if there were so many spirits, with such great power and so much knowledge, then there must be a way for us to make pacts with them to gain the information we needed. Elias spoke of binding spirits and trying to force knowledge from them, but neither Maire nor I felt that was safe. How can a man bind a spirit? It is like a child trying to wrestle a moose. We decided that we would gather together on specific nights of the month, when the moon was full and again when it vanished from the sky, and we would take turns going into the River, searching for a spirit to give us the aid we needed.



Dreamchasers

From the memory of Falling Water, Evan Shaman:

The moon was dark in the sky the night Elias went into the River alone. Our first meeting, two weeks before when the moon was full, had been a startling success. Thomas and I went into the River that night, and we found the spirit of Stag. His power hung in the air, a tangible thing that spoke of old forests and violent death.

"Greetings, wise Grandfather," I said, stepping forward. I knew from listening to the others at the Lodge that Stag is one of the oldest and powerful of the nature spirits, but also one of the most impatient.

The spirit's massive, antlered head turned towards me, but said nothing, pawing at the ground dismissively. It was Thomas who caught and held his attention. Thomas looked at me, and I nodded. "We are seekers of knowledge," Thomas began, ill at ease but determined to carry on with our purpose. "We have come to learn what we can from wise spirits, about the River, spirits, our souls..."

"It is said that you are among the wisest," I murmured respectfully.

"Think a soul is a soul is a soul, do you? All identical, all the same?" Stag snorted, addressing Thomas. He did not acknowledge me at all, save to study me with ancient, heated eyes, eyes that held the power of everything primal and masculine. In a moment those eyes sized me up as both prey and plaything, a combination of hunger and lust that left me feeling weak and wanting to hide, to find shelter behind Thomas and his strength. "Perhaps they were, once, long ago. Before. When the world falls apart, nothing is left untouched."

Thomas and I had suspected as much. It was a discussion that had kept us awake talking many, many nights. The spirit's next words, however, surprised me.

"Those who are complete, their souls strong and whole, stand proud and free. They have a destiny beyond imagining. The others are weak, shadowed things, hollow and empty, with no understanding of their purpose," Stag explained.

"Perhaps that explains the presence of so many Squats," I murmured to Thomas. "Perhaps that is the true tragedy of the Fallen: they are incomplete, their souls missing some essential piece."

Stag gave a great impatient snort, fixing me with eyes full of contempt. "You misjudge, and see the world through the eyes of those who lead you. Those you call 'Fallen' are whole, and there is nothing I can teach those who are assured of their own wisdom." With that, he turned and stalked away from Thomas and I.

Dreamcatchers

When Thomas and I returned, we shared what we had learned, and agreed to meet again at the dark of the moon, this time for Elias to journey forth. Our ritual that night had a slower start, a darker feel to it. It seemed fitting, to match the darkness in the sky. I used a drum carved of the enormous skull of some long-dead animal from the World Before. Thomas chanted beside me, his slow, warm voice picking up the rhythm of the ancient bones. Our music drifted through the air, twisting around the smoke of Elias' incense to combine into a new substance, rich and strange.

I watched as Elias swallowed a concoction of Sheban design. I hadn't yet been able to duplicate the recipe, but I'd learned most of the ingredients from Elias, all familiar plants and herbs in a dangerous combination I'd not had the courage to consider before. So mixed and so consumed, it opened Sheban Judges more fully to the River.

We settled in our circle, the drumming and chanting taking on a more urgent feel, raising heartbeats, speeding Elias' potion through his veins to hasten his journey to the River. Thomas and I watched as Elias' eyes turned toward to that space within the soul, drifting towards the River's currents. As his trance grew ever deeper, Thomas and I remained within the River's shallows, half-floating, half moored to our bodies, watching over Elias' body and soul without wading in all the way, prepared to give whatever assistance he might need.

Dreamcaught

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

The River of Dream is a place like none other, a dizzying combination of flesh and spirit, where both dance with inscrutable steps. Each time I enter the River, I marvel at its complexity and how much of it we still do not understand. How foolish we are to think we know it, to try and use it like a tool. The River is no quill or sword; it is nothing that can be manipulated or held by human hands. To Dream is to let the River take hold of you. What little changes even the most powerful Dreamer can affect are still nothing more than ephemera, insignificant squibs of no consequence. The River is a place of fear and awe; to approach it in any other way is to court disaster. I did not know these things, but that day I would have the honor of the River's harsh lessons.

1. Drift We to the Dark



Debora Thaikin Thaim'on

Born into a powerful and affluent family and clan, Debora could have had any position in the Nation she desired. To the surprise of her family, she took up a minor role as Judge of a small settlement outside of Bazaar. The position was without power or prestige, but it did provide Debora with the things she did need: time and easy access to Bazaar. From this vantage point she was able to participate in and later lead many of the Blind Eyes' efforts, and she quickly ascended through their occult ranks.

Debora has served as Mentor to six Neophytes, and continues to use them as pawns in the politics of the Blind Eyes and the Tribe of Tera Sheba as a whole, making her a resourceful if not blatantly powerful woman. Quite content with her position of ease and ever-increasing power and understanding, she is ruthless to any who threaten it.

Highlights: Blunt, Decisive, Pragmatic

Attributes: APP+1, INF+2, FIT+1, KNO+1, WIL+1

skills: Dreaming 3/0, Etiquette 1/+2 Intimidate 1/0, Interrogation 2/0, Investigation 2/0, Law 2/+1, Lore (Blind Eye) 3/+1, Read/Write (Gaelish, Sheban), 2/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Speak (Blind Eye Code Language) 2/+1, Teaching 2/0, Synthesis (Tradition, Habeas Corpus) 3

Perception in the River is a variable thing, changing from heartbeat to heartbeat. The transition from our ritual space to a place both natural and primal was gradual, almost imperceptible. I could still hear Maire and Thomas chanting as I looked out over the rolling plain that spread out before me. This was how Vimary looked before Mankind had built the great cities of the World Before: green and verdant, with a brisk tang of snow in the air. But then the picture wavered, and crumbling ruins faded into view before restoring themselves to their World Before perfection. In a moment, a strong wind swept past me, and the buildings blew away like smoke, replaced with a darkening sky and a landscape similar to, but not the same as, its predecessor. I dreamt myself a walking stick and started hiking.

In a culvert at the base of a great hill I found a line of decayed vegetation rotting into the soil. Holding my nose against the stench, I bent down to examine the drooping foliage and caught the faintest sound, a sussurant scrape like stone against dirt. "A bone spirit," I said aloud, knowing that Maire and Thomas would hear me, the words perhaps a bit slurred. Thomas' voice came back, distorted from beyond the barrier of Dream, encouraging me to follow it. A bone spirit would know Yagan secrets, the sweetest secrets of all. How tempting. I hurried down the trail, calling up memories of my father's death.

The world bent to my thoughts, turning the meadow into bouquets of flowers, the trees to somber, faceless mourners. I turned around to find my father's pyre, built high with summer-dried wood, his tattooed skin hanging behind it as a banner to his life. Beyond, the pit of coals over which his skin had been tanned opened like the maw of death itself. As expected, the bone spirit curled up within it, drawn to the familiar environment of the dream realm I had created. I took a step towards the pit, lips curled in victory. Within my dream, the spirit was within my power; its secrets were mine.

A hand fell on my shoulder, and I turned involuntarily. A cloaked mourner, face replaced with a blank shadow, had detached itself from the row of its fellows. My blood turned to ice. This was not supposed to happen. More faceless figures stepped with liquid grace from the shadows and corners of my dream, ringing around me. I stepped back, feeling the unyielding wood of my father's pyre behind me. Hands shot out from my assailants, lifting me into the air and slamming me down on top of the carefully constructed stack. Hoods filled with night surrounded me, and I screamed.

The bone spirit shambled up from the pit, its chuckle rasping like bones scraping across each other. "You are an intruder," it hissed, joining the ring of figures around me. "Come to steal secrets from those who have earned them. Come to bind and torture the spirits allied to others. What would you have done to me if I was as I appeared? Capture me and drag me away from those who give me honor, replacing respect and awe with pain and crass manipulation? Little Judge, you are in the hands of the Dream Harrowers now. These crimes will be visited upon you a hundred-fold."

The pain of Flesh is one thing; the Dream of pain is quite another. Pray you never live to experience the latter.

Witch Trial

From the mind of Debora Thaim'on:

The Flesher woman led us to where the three traitors were hiding and working their intrigues against the Tribes. It was a simple matter to surround and overpower them while they were still stupid with drugs; Elias was curled in a ball and had to be carried back to Solitude. We shackled them to the wall and waited for them to recover enough to understand what was happening to them.

"You have been found guilty with conspiring against the Nation," I said with a voice of steel. "Conspiring against your separate sisterhoods; conspiring against the sisterhoods of your fellow Tribes; breaking oaths you have given to your superiors; supplying children with dangerous weapons — the Agnite girl killed another Child; corrupting other priests through drugs, blackmail and manipulating them with your very bodies."

They groaned from their shackles; Elias was still too dazed to even mount a retort. "Your crimes have destabilized the very foundation of the Nation, endangering the quality of life of every woman and man under the grace of the Fatimas. Your crimes and the repercussions of your crimes demand capital punishment. Therefore you are sentenced to—"

No Other Goddess Before Me

From the Memories of Thomas, Fallen:

Just as Debora began pronouncing our sentence there came a sudden thunder from the back of the room. I was bound so securely I could not turn to see what caused the noise, but I saw Debora's face change. When she knelt and touched her head to the floor I knew. Tera Sheba had come, and Her footsteps seemed to rage in my ears. Behind Her, half hidden by Her cloak, came Eva and Joan as well. Joan looked at me once, and then turned Her face from me.

I cried then, the tears that did not come from the threat of death forcing themselves from me. Death I could accept, but if my Fatima was here it meant that simple death would not be the end of our punishment. I did not want my soul to be damned. I could not look at Maire, but the look on Elias' face was horribly painful to see. I think he had some hope, however, for his face looked mad with conflict — fear and hope chasing each other across his eyes. Then Tera Sheba spoke, and hope died.

"You have done well, Judge Debora. But the crimes these three have committed go beyond even your ability to appreciate or punish. The damage they have caused reaches into places where only My eyes, and the eyes of My Sisters can see. Death is not enough punishment, and would not be just to us. We must live with the sorrows they have caused, and so must they."

Her ax fell, and Elias screamed. The ax rose and fell twice more. At the second fall Maire screamed. At the third fall I screamed as well. When the blade struck the ground beside me I felt a pain such as cannot be described. I once saw a great tree that had grown around a fence made of barbed wire until the fence was as much a part of the tree as its own pith. I felt the part of that tree, having the wire ripped out by uncaring hands.

When my voice finally failed and I was able to scream no more I heard that cold, hard voice speak again. "They are cast out, death in life shall be their lot, and never will they know peace. Take their clothes, their weapons and the books for which they have sold their souls, and cast them naked into the night."

Know Not, Save I Was Commanded

Debora Thaim'on carries out Tera Sheba's verdict:

You have one last reason to be thankful to Tera Sheba, Elias. As if all the reasons that came before were not enough to compel your respect and obedience — but we have seen the strength of your loyalty. I would have killed you outright to seal your lips, but the Wise One has Her own ways, and power far beyond mine; a vow spoken in Her presence is sacrosanct. She has left the details of your sentence to me, however, and while I cannot contradict Her — nor would I want to — I can certainly embellish.

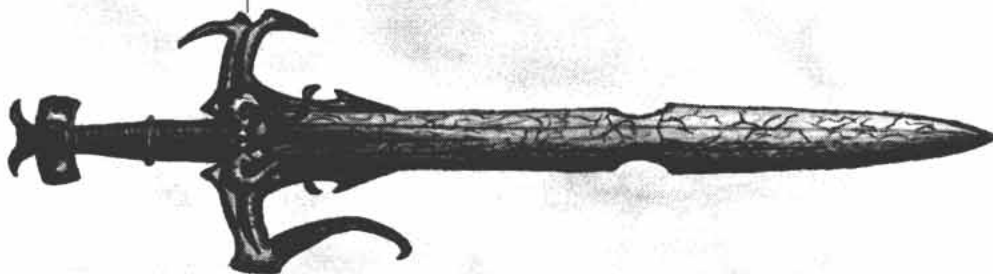
Your crime was in knowing more than you ought; worse, in seeking to know more than mortal man is allowed. It is a crime of the heart, of an imbalance between your own desires and the needs and requirements of the Nation. You sought to know the secrets of others, the divine mysteries held in trust between the Fatimas and their priesthoods. In scrying the thoughts of the Fatimas, you sought to be as them. You sought to be the Wise One Herself. Tera Sheba tells us to let the punishment fit the crime. Therefore we will help you in your quest. You seek to be as the Wise One Herself; we will make you three into fractured and unworthy mirrors of Her glory.

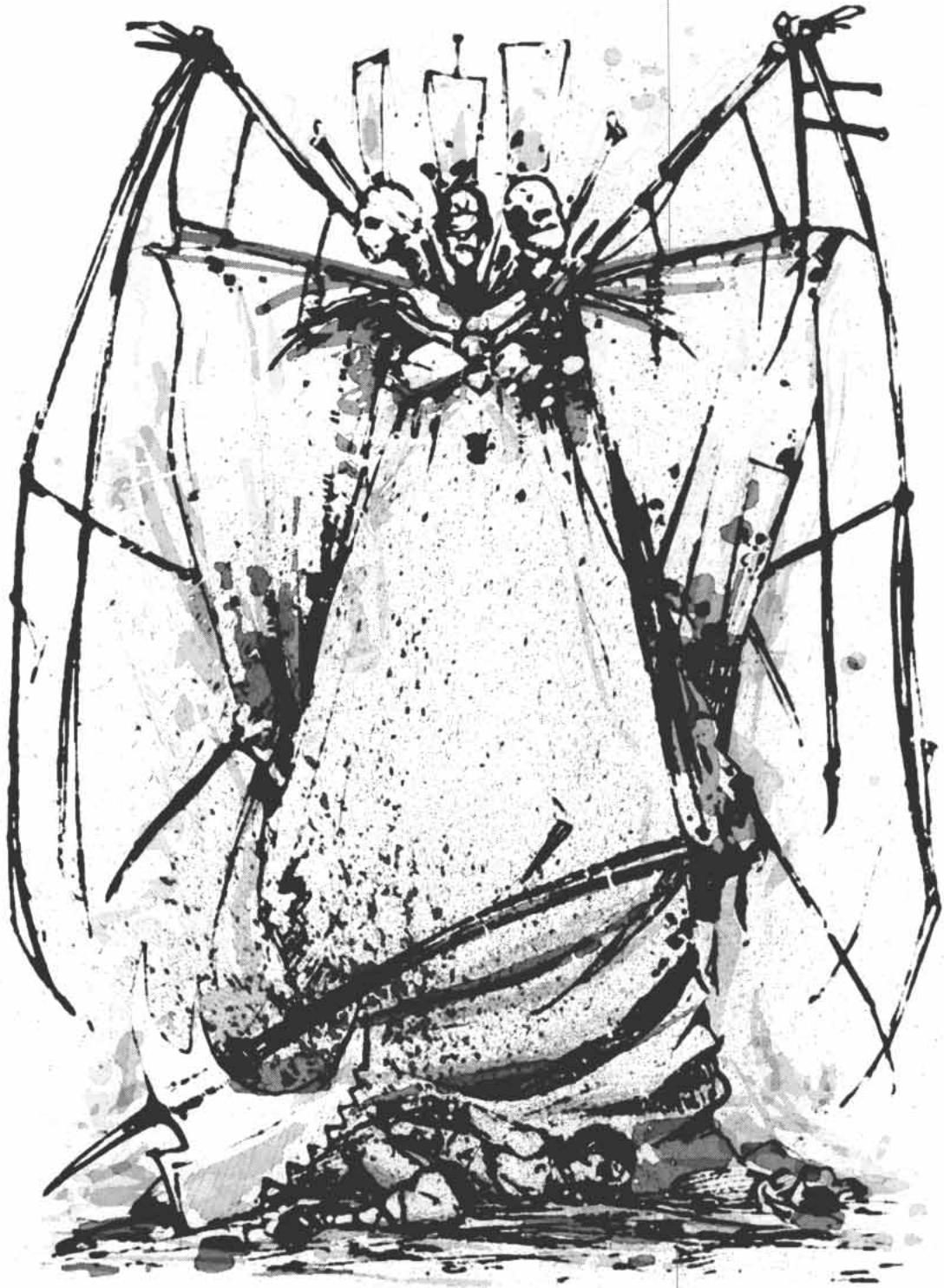
Let us begin with you, Elias. In your initiation you swore to never reveal the secrets you had been given. You were gagged with a strip of cloth from the Wise One's cloak, and still you did not learn. If we cannot bind your mouth figuratively, we will have to do so literally. Guards, cut out his tongue.

You, Falling Water, blanché at the sight of blood? Did not the Lodge of Shamans teach you the ways and powers of blood and the life force it contains? Do you pale before the things you were taught, the lessons you were entrusted with? This is only a continuation of your crime; you turn your back on what is given you and only seek for more. Do you dislike seeing your accomplice in pain? Then you will see nothing at all. Guards, put out her eyes.

I never thought I would see so many tears fall from one of Joan's brood. If my words distress you, consider what your own punishment will be. Come now, you are an intelligent man, despite the impression you give. Intelligent enough to steal secrets from the priesthoods of all the Tribes, listening in on their rituals, eavesdropping on their confidences. Yes, I can see understanding dawning on you. His tongue cut out, the woman blinded; what is left for you? Guards, prepare a jar of wax and heat it to boiling, then call in a few strong men of the Watch. They will be needed to hold him down while we pour the wax into his ears.

Now while the three of you can still hear, let us proceed to your sentence. You are found guilty of treason and betrayal of your respective Tribes and of the Nation as a whole. By the wisdom of Tera Sheba, you are sentenced to exile. You have turned your backs on your Fatimas and now They must reply in kind, removing their love and blessing from your souls. The secrets you have stolen will be of no use to you when you cannot touch the River at all. You will be disconnected from Tribe and Nation as well as Dream and Spirit. Your family will no longer recognize you; the spirits will not know your names. The Fatimas themselves will draw you out of their hearts and cast you to the mercies of the Sea of the Lost. You are made worthless; you are forgotten; you are Fallen.





Chapter Two: Myrd, Unshriven

Through mystery and wonder,
With pain and sorrow above and under,
Out of the past and darkness Falling,
Friendless, Hopeless, Myrd, Unshriven,
We walk together to the dark.

— Elias' Cant



Rite of Passage

Maire Grey, newly Fallen, dreaming:

My pulse pounded in my head like Liberation drums, beating and throbbing until it forced my eyes open. The white-gray light, cold with the promise of a heavy snowfall outside the cave, told me it was perhaps an hour past dawn. Today was the end, my last day. For a full cycle of the moon I had lived alone in this cave. I left my home with only a knife and the clothes on my back, knowing that I would have to survive alone until the full moon shone again over Sanctuary. It was a delicate thing. To go back too soon would risk disgrace; to go back too late might mean being given up for dead and cast out. Today was the day. I had survived. I had survived, but I had failed.

Survival was only part of the journey. Loneliness was my most dangerous predator for the first two weeks, no voices raised in laughter or song or shouting nearby, no scent of human bodies, no warmth. I cried after the first week, and nearly went home. I missed my mother and sisters. Only my fear of their disappointment kept me in my makeshift shelter, alone and fasting. Survival is secondary to what dreams come to a soul alone and cleansed — those dreams were what I was to seek during the final test. There had been no dreams. Perhaps my fear hid them from me. The only time I touched the River during that month was when I stretched and strained for it on my own, rather than feeling it flow through me and carry me away.

Denning the Mother

As I tied the last bundle of the few belongings I'd gathered, I imagined the expressions of disappointment on the faces of my mother and all those who had tried so hard to train me. Why did I not dream? As I began the long walk back to Sanctuary, I considered my failings, and tried to determine which of my faults had kept me from my vision.

The snarling of a bear, too early-awakened and winter-starved, woke me from my reverie. My mind stalled in terror and I felt a warm trickle down the inside of my thigh as my body did the same. I was pulled in two directions as I tried to think what to do. My mind and vision both wavered and my knees turned to icy water.

"Child," came the voice above me. "Do you search for a dream and then seek to flee when it arrives?" The bear dropped to all fours and circled me, its black eyes glimmering bright. "Ah little one," it — no, she — growled, "you have come farther than you think, but there is much that lies ahead of you."

My head swam in the River, threatening to leave the rest of my body behind. My voice, when I found it, was as weak as a child's. "O Spirit, please help one of Eva's Saplings to find the path."

The bear circled and circled, still examining me from every angle. I grew dizzy with watching her. "You have two paths before you, little Sapling."





Dreams of Change

A vision filled my eyes as she spoke. I saw myself, saw the clearing I was standing in when my dream found me. With a roar, the bear fell upon me. Teeth closed about my throat. I tried to close my eyes but the vision remained, the ripping, tearing claws and teeth rending me to nothing but empty, torn flesh. I screamed and fell to the ground, hands pressed to my head to push out the vision.


It ended as soon as it began, and I trembled in the bear's circle, quivering and crying. "Please. Please show me the other path! Surely I am not to die!"

A second vision came to me. A fire burned on the horizon, burning white hot, so hot that its heat seared my skin from hundreds of clicks away. I felt it more than saw it, for there was a shadow over my eyes. Hands clasped my own, on either side of me, although I could not see my companions. We began to walk towards the fire, fighting through pain and fear. I knew, in that knowing that exists only in dreams, that I was lost. For all my knowledge, I was lost beyond all reckoning. I tried to understand as the vision ended.

Two paths. The choice seemed so obvious. What price could be worse than death? I began to say as much, but then I considered the second vision, the horror and fear of the fire. I realized there is a price to be paid for all knowledge, and the greater the opportunity to learn, the higher the price.

I closed my eyes then, perhaps to try and get a glimpse of the mysterious knowledge to come. I saw only the stars behind my eyelids. "... I don't want to die," I said weakly. So much knowledge waiting for me out there. No price seemed too great to me. All of the sorrow and loss in the world seemed to be no match for exclusive knowledge — things no one else had seen. I was afraid, but I swallowed my fear. My voice was strong this time. "I want to live. I don't want to die."

There was something like approval in the bear's black eyes as she stopped circling. "Then live, Sapling. Live and become a strong oak. You will learn the things that can only be found when you are lost and drifting. You will see the things that cannot be seen with your eyes open. In return, you will lose your home and family. You will lose your world."



House of Pain

From the waking thoughts of Maire Grey, blinded Herite:

The dream of the bear again. It comes day after day, no matter how hard I punish and am punished at night. It is never enough. Nothing brings sleep deep enough to escape my dreams. The bear lied. I have lost my world and gained nothing in return. Had I known, I would have taken the other path. Death is preferable to this.

I have lost Elias and Thomas. We crossed the bridge to Hom together, clinging to one another. How could we communicate? I could not see my beloved Thomas, and he could not hear me. The voices all seemed so loud — everything too loud and not loud enough at the same time. Try as I might, my ears could not give me the information I needed, and the noises I could not see only confused me. Rough hands and loud voices separated us once we crossed the bridge. I could hear Elias' wordless cries, I could hear Thomas calling my name, then the hands descended hard upon me and I could hear no more.

The voices used me and hurt me until I knew nothing else. I thought I would die. I wanted to die, but the voices would not let me. The voices carried me here and left me in this room, in this pit. They would have let me go, but after a time I found that I did not want to leave. After a time, I wanted to be chained, to be used, to hurt and be hurt. This is the world I know. Who knows what waits for me beyond Ile Perdue's walls? There is pain here, but it is a pain that I know, a pain that soothes. Night after night they come to me. I beg them to whip me harder, cut me deeper — and yet deep down I hope that one night one of them will kill me and set me free.

May the Goddess damn that Beast-spawned bitch Tera Sheba. Why did She show mercy to the three of us, exiling us instead of killing us? Mercy. There is no mercy, not at the hands of the she-demons who rule the Tribes. Had She let the Blades execute us, we would have been free, Thomas and Elias and I. Our souls would have escaped. Now we are trapped, trapped in these bodies as we are trapped on this island, never to know true peace or freedom again. I felt something once, something beyond pain. There was a time when I was no victim, when I was respected and loved. The work we did, the three of us, surely we were not the only ones to understand its importance.

Epiphany

As the days and nights passed, I realized that we had been fools. Fools hard on the heels of something so important, so vitally important, that the Fatimas did not want us to learn it. We were so tied to our Fatimas. They were the sole focus of our lives, of our beliefs. We never thought to consider anything beyond them. Questions stirred within me, questions that I never would have dared ask before. What is it we could have learned together that we would never see alone? Is it possible that by working together and sharing our secrets, we would grow to learn that we never needed the Fatimas in the first place? What could be more dangerous to them?

The agony of losing Eva's love when I fell was the worst pain I have ever known, worse even than when the Sheban whore took my eyes. A wounding of that magnitude, spiritual or physical, should leave scars. I have none. There is no sign within my soul of that loss. I feel as if nothing is missing. I still Dream. I still remember the warmth of the River. That goes against everything I was taught about the Fallen. If I am cut off from the River, why do I still Dream? I wonder how much of what the Fallen are comes from what the Tribes taught us. Here we live no better than Squats — but is that because that is all we are, or because that is all we believe we can be? Even those who believe we are better off without the Fatimas, who hate them the most, seem to accept their lot on Horn.

No, that is wrong. Not all. The boy with the soft voice — the one who came to me so often until a few months ago — spoke of a different world, one where the Fallen were a united, strong people. We are more than the Fatimas want us to believe. I remember speaking to Stag, his tale of whole human souls and souls that are incomplete. I could not see it then, for Eva had me blindfolded. It was the Fallen he was speaking of - the Eighth Tribe who are whole! Our souls are stronger than those of the Nation would have us believe. We do not need them! We do not need Eva to bless our births. We do not need Baba Yaga to carry us over the Fold. Our souls are our own.

That is what Tera Sheba was afraid we would learn. For if our souls have grown too great to need the Fatimas, what will become of them when we cast aside their shackles and stand free? By the Goddess, if they fear us, then we shall give them reason to fear us. Our work must continue or all of this pain and suffering is for naught. My vision of the bear — the price for knowledge is always high. We have begun to pay that price. Now we must seek the rest of the prize.



Maire Grey

Maire spent the first several months of after her Fall in the bowels of Ile Perdue, losing herself in endless hours of pain and sensuality. Convinced of her own worthlessness, she hoped for nothing more than death, until the recurring dreams of her rite of passage as a Shaman finally woke her from her lethargy.

Recognizing that the Fallen are something more than the Fatimas want Tribal and Fallen alike to believe, she seeks to reunite with Elias and Thomas in order to continue the work the three of them began while still in the Tribes.

Highlights: Intelligent, curious, angry

Eminences: Life and Recognition

Attributes: APP +1, BLD +2, CRE +2, KNO +1, PER -2, PSY +2, WIL +1, STR +1, HEA +1, STA 35, LD 6, AD 6

Skills: Agriculture 2/+1, Dreaming 2/+2, Etiquette 1/0, Evan Lore 2/+1, Healing 2/+1, Herbalism 2/+1, Human Perception 1/+2, Mythology 1/+1, Read/Write (Tribal) 1/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Seduction 1/+1, Survival 2/+2, Synthesis (Anima) 3

The Blind Lead the Blind

From the journal of Bartholomew the Child, Lightbringer:

I remembered her when she and her lover came to me. I remembered the sightless eyes, the wild dark hair with its streaks of gray, the full, rounded body scabbed and newly-scarred with cuts and lashes as if, during her first months on Hom, she were trying to cut away the part of her that had once belonged to the Tribes. I was trying, as I have been for years, to leave my eternal childhood behind — in a way a part of me was being cut away as well. Night after night we performed the same impromptu rituals, excising bits of flesh and soul. When I left Ile Perdue for good, I expected to never see her again.

Then she and her lover found me and told me their story. I'd been drawn to her then and I was still drawn to her, now that we'd both left the darkness of Ile Perdue behind us. Communication was difficult, but she and the deaf man she called Thomas managed to tell me of the pact they had made with a third man before their fall. All three had been potent priests of the Tribes and had learned illicit secrets only to Fall and be separated at the Bridge. Something stirred in me as they spoke. These three had once been powerful in their respective Tribes, and although separate in their ideals and goals they had been united in purpose and in spirit. They were all the vast potential of the Eighth Tribe in small. Now, cast out and nearly broken by their Tribes, they sought to reunite and continue on the quest they had begun.

I looked between the two of them, blind woman and deaf man, and I knew I could help them. I knew I had to help them, or else all my fine words and ideals about uniting the Eighth Tribe would come to naught. I knew I could find this third, this Elias, through tracing the Unity the three of them had once shared. Even more than that, I knew I could help them communicate. These three who had once been of one mind could be again. Before we set out to find Elias, I set new runes into my skin, runes that would trace the link between the four of us, allowing Thomas to understand without hearing, Maire to see through another's eyes, and Elias, when we found him, to speak from the soul rather than the lips.

Tales of the Past

From the Recollections of Thomas, Jacker:

It was strange, and hard, seeing Maire again after so long. She had changed more than I had, yet from the moment I saw her the steel in my heart sounded true, and I knew that I loved her still. In days to come we would learn to communicate between just the two of us again, but in that first meeting I was glad Bartholomew was there. It was not just that he let me speak with Maire, for the Synthesis he worked upon us did more than that. His workings allowed me to feel her mind upon mine, to know not just what she said, but what she meant.

As we walked she looked for words to fill the gap between us. "What have you been doing Thomas? Since our Fall?" Her mouth moved. I could see the words, but could not hear them. Then, a moment delayed, the feeling of joining came between us, and what I could not hear with my ears my mind listened to all the more attentively.



"Learning. Healing." She smiled when I spoke, and I knew that in her ears my words sounded strong and sure. "I hid for a time, after I lost you at the Fallen Bridge. It took me time to realize that I was not broken, and that the time for fighting was not over — it was just beginning. When I realized that I came for you, that which I would fight for the hardest."

"What else have you learned?" Her hand found mine, fingers wrapping around my wrist.

I walked in silence for a time, organizing my thoughts. I felt that by the time I started speaking she had already seen much of what I was about to say, so close was the bond between us. It felt as though I was a heart speaking to the soul of the same body.

"Mostly that life did not end when we Fell. I've made friends here, several of them, who have been ready to teach me. Not in the way that the Templars taught me, though. This is different. The priests in the Tribes, they always taught me that this was right and that was wrong. In their eyes there was only one way to approach the River, and that way must be followed exactly. I think that is one of the reasons why what we did shocked them so — we did not think that their limitations were the whole. Here, it is different. Here those that weave Synthesis, that walk in dreams, know that the things the Tribes teach are not the whole of the River. People here are willing to experiment, even at danger to themselves, to find out the ways in which their dreams really work. It lends a purity, a spark of vision — but a great deal of confusion."

Bravery's Call

"I am a Jacker now, though what I mean by that word and what another Jacker means by it may be very different things. We both know that we have similar interests, but by and large we allow that our interests do not have to be identical. All Jackers are fighters in one way or another: I've yet to meet one who couldn't use a weapon, but even that is not the most important aspect of what we are. The sense of vengeance, of bravery in the face of adversity, the idea that we must be willing to fight for what we have lost — that is what binds us together.

"A lot of things the Jackers say remind me of things the Joanites said. Even more things they say remind me of the old books and songs I read about the Joshuans. It is as though they took the rage and vengeance of those two Tribes and mixed them together, took out what bits suited them and tossed the rest away. What remains the same is that we know that there is a fight coming, and rather than wait for it we have decided to strike first. Joshua is not gone, for he lives on in our hearts. It is a mess, in many ways, but it is a mess I like. For the first time I feel free. My rage, my devotion, my heart and soul — they are my own and not my Tribe or clan's. Now I am free to see how much we have lost, how much has been taken from us. Now I am ready to take it back, in blood."

Many are One

The bitter observations of Bartholomew the Child:

I followed behind, half-listening to Thomas as he spoke of devotion and rage to Maire, a sour taste growing in my mouth. The two of them were linked in a way I could scarcely comprehend, let alone be a part of, even with Unity working between us.

2. Wyrđ, Unshriven



Thomas, Jacker

Of the three members of the Ferryman, Thomas was the least shocked by their fall and exile. In a certain sense he had been expecting it, and had followed along with the others because of his love for them. What he was not prepared for was being mutilated and crippled. All his life Thomas had been physically perfect, and had never even been seriously ill. Having his hearing taken from him was as devastating a blow as losing Joan's love. After crossing the bridge Thomas fled from his companions and hid from the world, terrified that he no longer would be able to stand up to life's trials.

It was the help of other Jackers, many of whom had been mutilated by Tribals or Z'bri, that allowed Thomas to face his new world. Once he felt himself a man again, Thomas went looking for Maire, and watched over her from a distance while she found her own way back to life.

Highlights: Hardened, Devoted, Deaf

Eminences: Devotion and Bravery

Attributes: AGI +1, APP -1, BLD +2, FIT +2, PER +1, WIL +2, STR +2, HEA +1, STA 40, UD/AD 10

Skills: Archery 1/+1, Ambush 2/0, Athletics 1/+2, Camouflage 1/0, Combat Sense 2/+1, Dodge 2/+1, Dreaming 2/0, Hand-to-Hand 3/+1, Intimidate 2/+2, Lore (Z'bri) 2/0, Melee 3/+1, Notice 1/+1, Ritual 1/0, Sneak 1/+1, Tactics 1/0, Throwing 1/+1, Synthesis (Battle) 3



Bartholomew the Child

It was only after Bart came to Hom from Playground that he first found friends, people who shared not only his intelligence but his ideals for what the Eighth Tribe could be. He took immediately to the Lightbringers, who took to him in kind. It is no secret that he idolizes Altara Ven, admiring the way she seems to have put her Agnite past behind her in a way that he cannot.

Until he was approached by Maire and Thomas, Bartholomew spent much of his time on the outskirts of the Lightbringer circle, looking for a cause. When not trying desperately to become part of the political inner circle, he tried to escape his boyish face and voice, eager to lose his identification as The Child. It was that desire that led him ultimately to Ile Perdue, where a strict regimen of tattoos, piercings, and older women erased some of the child within him.

Highlights: Intelligent, eager, troubled

Eminences: Inspiration and Unity

Attributes: AGI +2, BLD -1, CRE +2, FIT +1, PER +1, PSY +1

Skills: Athletics 2/+1, Combat Sense 1/+1, Craft (Body Runes) 2/+2, Dodge 1/+2, Dreaming 2/+1, Etiquette 1/0, Forgery 2/+2, Hand-to-Hand 1/+2, Human Perception 1/+1, Mythology 1/0, Notice 1/+1, Ritual 1/0, Sneak 1/+2, Streetwise 2/0, Synthesis 2

Finally I could remain silent no more, and stepped up beside them as we walked. "What the Jackers seem to forget is that they are not the only members of the Eighth Tribe, and that rage and vengeance are not all there is to life."

Thomas did not even deign to acknowledge me at first, so caught up in Maire's voice within his mind — the voice I was allowing him to hear. Distracted, both of them turned to look at me, drawn out of their shared space. I continued, "If we are to fulfill Joshua's Prophecy, we need to stand united, as one people with one purpose. You are correct, Thomas. It is a mess — a mess that has the potential to destroy us."

"How are we to stand against the Fatimas when we cannot come to an agreement on what they are? How can we unite against the Tribes when some of us argue that we must save them, while others say they are no better than the Serfs: blind, soulless things that deserve only death for following the Fatimas? Diversity is one of our strengths, that I will not argue, but too much diversity and we are a scattered pile of twigs, easy enough to pick up and break, one by one. That is precisely what will happen to us, either by the Z'bri or the Tribes, if we do not learn to unite, become as a bundle of twigs, bound together into an unbreakable harmony of purpose."

Maire interrupted gently, "As the Tribes are bound, Bartholomew? Will we then begin to cast out those who disagree with our purpose? Unity cannot be forced. We are a young people. Whatever collective beliefs the Eighth Tribe will come to hold must come through time, a gradual unification, if one comes at all. Otherwise, we are doomed to become that which we hate. In a way, it is not the Fatimas that bind the Tribes, but rather the Tribes' own refusal to accept any belief outside of their Fatima's realm."

"Oh, I suppose you forgive Tera Sheba, then," I said bitterly. "For really, how is Sheba responsible for what happened to you and to Thomas? For that matter, how can the Sheban who blinded you be blamed for simply following her beliefs?"

I felt a sting of shame at the way Maire's face tightened at my words, but before she could reply, Thomas interrupted. "Look. There is Elias, in the shadow of that cart."

The Wretched

From the testimony of Elias Scribner:

When I saw them coming my first thought was that they were here to kill me — just revenge for having their lives destroyed and their bodies mangled. I abandoned my tray, grabbing what papers and pens I could, and scrambled away in a flurry of loose pages. My ankle was still twisted from abuse I had incurred from angry Lightbringers the day before, but I limped away, wincing at but trying to ignore the pain.

The North Shore is a shanty town, a sprawling mess of boxes and improvised lean-tos, homes slapped together out of refuse found on the banks of the Great River. I knew it as well as anyone could: living amidst the garbage, human and otherwise, one eventually comes to understand the pattern of desolation. Clutching my precious pens to my chest, I ran down twists and turns, trailing tears. I knew I would not get away.

At the back of my mind I was aware of a subtle thrumming, a struck chord connecting me to Maire and Thomas, pulling me back and drawing them forward, making every place I hid obvious to their eyes. On the run, I had no chance to make myself a Mystery as I had learned since being cast out onto this island; all I could do was stagger further into the town of happenstance.

It was my ankle that made me stop, red and swollen and so painful I could not think well enough to run. I collapsed into a corner, huddled up against a decaying wall and boards lashed together against the wind. Blank pages slipped from my grasp and spun on the air, and for a moment I prayed they might fall and cover me in a blanket of nonentity, but my fear made trance impossible. Besides, I remember thinking, I deserved to die at their hands, just as all of their dreams had died at mine.

Regeneration

From the memory of Maire Grey, Herite:

I saw him through Thomas's eyes — how unsettling that was! To see through another's eyes, to have my point of view shift from Bartholomew to Thomas and back again; it kept me constantly off-balance and dizzy, seeing the world from a greater height, from the body of one whose movements were nothing like mine. I thought I knew Thomas as well as I knew my own soul — until I was forced to look through his eyes.

Elias was huddled over a small tray filled with pens and scraps of paper. It made my heart sore to see him, one of the most learned men in Vimary, reduced to writing the words of others just to survive. As soon as we spotted him he looked up, spying us as well. He ran from us. There was terror in his eyes as he fled. Perhaps that shouldn't have surprised me as it did. Hom was full of stories of old friends turned to bitter enemies once they passed the Bridge. Following him was child's play for Bartholomew, and it wasn't long before we caught up to him, huddled and shivering in the corner of a battered shanty. He opened his eyes and looked up at us, resignation writ large across his familiar face.

I crouched beside him, the way one would crouch near a hurting child. He flinched away as I reached my hand out to touch his face. "I'm not going to hurt you, Elias. You're hurting. Let me help you." No sooner had I spoke than I felt that part of my soul, the part that had lain dormant since crossing the Bridge, waking and stretching out towards the River. Although I knew the Fallen wielded Synthesis, I'd never tried, afraid of failing, afraid of the taint within the River that had driven me to join with Elias and Thomas in the first place. The taint was still there, but the pain of it was not as strong now, or perhaps I was growing accustomed to it. I felt Life coursing through my veins, filling me as it passed over to Elias, and it was like coming home. Even as I tried to ease some of his pain, Elias tried to pull away from me.

Thomas spoke from behind me, "Elias. There is still much for us to do here. Our war has not ended just because the armies have moved." Bartholomew, too, stepped forward, pressing close behind me as I felt. . . a shift, as if a voice had been added to a chorus that rang unheard above our heads.

2. Wyrd, Unshriven



Elias Scribner

Elias' exile shattered his confidence and forced him to examine the damages he had caused in his reckless quest for knowledge. The Elias who appeared on Hom was confused, uncertain and fearful; for some time he lacked the will to keep himself fed and healthy, content to allow himself to waste away to nothing.

Support and friendship with a cell of Doomsayers piqued his curiosity, however, and in time Elias began to take better care of himself, scraping together a living by working as a scribe to illiterate Fallen. His reunification with Maire and Thomas and the formation of their cell has given Elias the thing he needs most — a cause.

Highlights: Guilt-wracked, Cautious, Easily Frightened

Eminences: Mystery & Wisdom

Attributes: BLD -2, CRE +1, KNO +3, PSY +1, WIL -2


Skills: Dreaming 2/+1, Investigation 2/0, Lore (River of Dream) 2/+3, Lore (Joshuan) 1/+3, Read/Write (Gaelish, Farnzay, Sheban) 2/+3, Research 2/0, Ritual 2/+3, Synthesis (Habeas Corpus) 3

2. W y r d , U n s h r i v e n

How can you not hate me? Elias asked, and I sat back on my heels in surprise. I doubt he realized that we understood him, for he still made no sound. *Thomas, how can you look at what's become of Maire and not hate me for what I caused?* I could hear the tinge of physical pain leaving his mind somewhat as the ache in his wounded ankle lessened, only to be replaced with a deeper pain, one I could not reach.

"We have all changed," Thomas rumbled. "Those changes are not your fault. You did not hold the iron that burned out Maire's eyes."

Elias grunted in surprise at Thomas' response. I began to focus on the deeper pain behind Elias' thoughts, remembering well the pain that had driven me to Ile Perdue and kept me there for so long. "Elias, there are still some things I can see. We are. . . more now than we were before. We are free. You are free." As I struggled for the right words, I felt the River open within me again, following a new path, one that I had never followed before. "You are not defeated. You are not finished. You are free of the chains that held you bound to Tera Sheba's will. You are free to grow. . . to become. . ." Once more my words faltered, but I knew from the distance within Elias' eyes that he was seeing the same truths about himself that I was.



Vision of Terror and Hope

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

Darkness reflected on water stretched out before me, highlighted with dark red fragments of the fires along the banks on either side of me. Was this the Sunken City? No — although perhaps it was a moment before I asked the question. On the banks beasts and men danced silhouetted against the smoldering fires, their howls and screams echoing through the night. The quality of their screams was all pain and terror, and anger born of both, a noxious mix about to boil over. Buildings collapsed around them, tumbling and sliding into the water around me, and still my slow, silent progress continued.

The river beneath me quickened, the lapping waters slapping and then rushing against the hull. Beneath the roar of the rapids crept a voice, a low rumble that was not quite yet words, taunting me forward. I did not row the boat but it turned to follow, and before me, striding across the waters, came a figure of light and shadow, his face burning with power. His body was composed of stars and darkness, and as he approached I had to turn away wincing. I closed my eyes and the vision faded around me, but not before I heard the voice, low and harsh in my ear, whispering, "I am the Wanderer; find me and find the way."



A Pact Resealed

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

I blinked Dream from my eyes and looked on my friends once more, seeing for the first time not loathing but hope, and perhaps love. Swallowing, I reached out my arms to them and clasped their hands as if I was a man drowning and being pulled to shore. Amazement made me forget my lost tongue and I tried to speak. The incoherent, idiot sound usually shamed me, but Maire and Thomas smiled as if they understood my apology. I wrapped my arms around them, not knowing whether to laugh or cry and doing both in the end.

Maire introduced me to Bartholomew and gave me her proposal: that we join together again to explore the River, knowing now that Fatimas and their priesthoods lie, even to themselves; to discover the truth independent of the Nation's propaganda and myth; that we remain united in purpose no matter what forces try to pull us apart. Wiping my eyes, I fumbled for a pen and scrawled out: 'I will help you find your truth; you help me find mine.' My thoughts were all focused on the Wanderer, hoping for what strength he would find in me if I could only find him. Hastily I added: 'Perhaps we will find something greater: our truth.'

The Lightbringer thoroughly approved, and joined our hands together. With better phrasing than I could compose in a week, he wove Maire's proposal into a pact, and as the three of us nodded I could feel the bonds between us tighten. Maire's eyes blazed as she spoke: "This pact is more than words: we are bound together, a bundle of rods stronger than separate sticks."

With the cloying power of Dream still on my lips, I nodded, saying, *We shall speak the words of ghosts and ride the River of Dream. We will find the Wanderer and know him; we will skirt the edge of the Fold and have council with stars.* Thomas served as witness, saying nothing and reserving judgment. My life began again that day.

What Fallen Spirits Sing

A page from the ledger of Elias Scribner:

I need some extensive tattoos. I heard you have a deft hand, and your details can be minuscule. I have a great deal to say, and I need it all somewhere safe. If you tattoo my cosmography into my flesh, they will have to skin me to take it away. They will have to kill me to stop what I know. You learn that when you know too much: the knowledge you have is tied up with you, with your own identity, and to change one is to change the other. I am Fallen, now. My understanding of Dream must Fall, as well.

To Fall is to discover that all the truths you depended on were lies, and all the lessons you ignored and shunned were the truth. Everything you knew to be true for whatever reason is still true, but for different reasons; a world supported by darker, more disturbing underpinnings is revealed. You can see what is wrong, plain and simple in front of your face, but you cannot see the extent of the collapse, of the slow entropy that works at the framework of your world. The Fallen can sense this wrongness; it is this more than anything else that drives us mad. Is it this knowledge which makes us so powerful in Dream, or is it the corruption itself? Is Mankind meant to wield such power, or is it only because the world is falling apart that we can so easily manipulate the pieces?

The Blood of Outcasts

A tattoo between Elias Scribner's shoulder blades, the first of many:

The bones of Fallen spirituality are the entire body of Tribal belief. The Eighth Tribe puts muscle and skin on top of this skeleton, populating it with a heart and a mind and perhaps a soul. Certainly the old lessons I learned on form and resonance still hold true, but on this side of the Fallen Bridge, these sympathetic links are *your* life. Tribals are given their spirituality; Fallen live theirs. Once I speculated that Synthesis derived from lifestyle as much as the Fatima who granted it; faced with Fallen Synthesis, I find this argument even stronger. Not only does the Eighth Tribe exercise the power of Dream away from the Fatimas and outside of their love, but we have also developed new Eminences which mirror our ways of life. We have not abandoned and cannot seem to wholly escape the legacy of the Fatimas — each Fallen retains one Eminence of her Tribe, an influence still tinting our connection to the River of Dream. We add to this a new affinity, one grown out of our new lives, complicating and developing what we were given before.



2. Wyrd, Unshriven

The legacy Eminence is not untouched; the trauma of exile as well as the new lifestyle on Hom twists and distorts it, transforming even this into something new. Consider my own Fall as an example. By dismissing Truth and admitting Mystery, the self-satisfaction and arrogance of my former life fell away; Wisdom, in turn, took on a cast of the inscrutable and enigmatic, becoming something similar but not identical to the Wisdom practiced and sought by the Tera Shebans. I no longer depend on the simplistic axioms and moralizing 'truths' preached on Vimary, but instead realize that Wisdom is something uncertain and costly, a thing that must be bought with suffering and blood.

If anything can be considered a common factor in Fallen Synthesis, it is this: the 'blood and sacrifice' prophesied by Joshua. Similarly, a common factor in Fallen life is pain and suffering; most members of the Eighth Tribe actively strive to keep Joshua's refrain in the center of their lives. As Synthesis derives from the lives we lead, our constant martyrdom becomes a recurring theme in our relation with Dream. Many Fallen rituals center around pain, blood and self-mutilation. This reliance on pain can be disconcerting at first, and some nights I wonder if this emphasis on suffering makes the Eighth Tribe stronger or weaker. Whatever its effect, I do not think these elements can ever be extricated from the Eighth Tribe: we are founded on blood, and our destiny is sacrifice.

Before our exile we met on the new moon; now on Hom we see each other almost daily. We reserve the nights of the new and full moons for rituals and long discussions, intent on learning what others have tried to deny us. Bartholomew's Unity is a great help, as under its influence Thomas can hear the words I write, and Maire can see through our eyes as we sketch and draw diagrams and relationships. The boy has also proved himself a talented Dreamer, and I have no doubt he would have become something great if he was born to any other Tribe. The Ferryman are greater with his addition, and bound together by him we will uncover what the Fatimas hide and will not look at. We will discover the truth.



Dreams and Omens

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

There are, at my last count, three dozen different wordings for the Prophecy of Joshua, from niggling preposition shifts to completely different formats, such as the Joshuan Refrain. There are also the Sermons of Den-Hades, miscellaneous sayings of Veruka the Wraith, hidden prophecies, secret visions and a thousand others. Some even study the Omens of Mary, but the last words of Joshua are the most puissant, and it is this prophecy which forms the kernel around which the Doomsayers are formed. We Doomsayers are a curious lot, covering the entire range from the introspective and brooding scholar who prefers isolation to company, to the man shouting from his makeshift pulpit in the streets of Hom, cajoling passers-by to listen and coaxing strangers to participate in readings and rituals. There are telltale, common signs, though, by which you can pick out a Doomsayer: the haunted eyes, the grave and worried visage, the palpable weight we seem to carry in our hearts. We have seen too much, things that humanity was not meant to see, but things that we must see if things will ever be put right again.

What we have seen is only enough to know that we must uncover and understand more, that our journey has only barely begun. We seek to know more through vision quests and study, by uncovering lost artifacts and records and by puzzling out the meanings of what we already have. There is little coordination to the Doomsayer inquiry, and we often work at cross-purposes or needlessly duplicate others' efforts. More than once we have spilled each other's blood over an interpretation or argument, but still we proceed forward in hackneyed, staggering fashion, shuddering with every step and every further look into the decaying skeleton of the universe.

With every dark secret we discover we realize a little more, and we use these secrets to pry out more tricks and idiosyncrasies of the Great Architecture, and these things form the basis of our Synthesis. We know the current and flow of Mysteries, know how they live and breathe, and with this knowledge we track and hunt and trap more, collecting a damnable treasure of tidbits and minutia, hoarding them in our souls and always greedy for another. As we drift ever closer to the dark, we come to understand that, to know how motives and secrets thread together in the world of Shadows, and find that we can lurk and scavenge not only in Dream, but in Nightmare. We know these things; we are these things. When next you come across a Doomsayer and he looks through you or pushes past you with an irritable curse, understand that

he carries in his soul too many dark things, that his mind is overburdened with terrible truths. Know that he carries them so that you do not have to, so that he might articulate the path the Eighth Tribe must take, and you might go there unburdened.

Division

From the observations of Maire Grey, Herite:

The Tribes, and even most of the Fallen, see the Herites as an angry mob, ready to howl for the blood of the Fatimas and most things Tribal. It is easy to believe that Tribal mothers tell their children as many frightening tales about the blood-thirsty Herites as they do about the Z'bri or even the raging Jackers. I tell you this: perhaps they are right to fear us, but not for the reasons they believe. Ask four Herites what it means to be a Herite, and you will get five different answers. That is our weakness as well as our strength. We define ourselves by what we are not, rather than what we are, so much so that as a group we have no real identity. However, one must spend a great deal of time exploring ideas and beliefs, even if only to be able to discard them.

We are the ones who think beyond what is immediately obvious. We are the rebels of the Eighth Tribe in deed, spirit and mind. This shows itself in our rituals, in our dreaming. We do not follow the established paths; we do not keep to that which is safe. The price is high but worth the knowledge we gain. Present a Herite with an idea, and she'll try to knock it down. Give her a solid dogma, and she'll find the holes in it. Present her with any fact, and she'll find a hundred ways to disprove it. The paths we follow are as varied as we ourselves. The ideas that the Lightbringers present as the core of the Eighth Tribe had their start as Herite rebellion. The anger that the Jackers carry at their heart springs from Herite hatred. The spiritual paths that the Doomsayers follow have their roots in Herite heresy.

Different Paths

There are those among the Herites who focus only on their hatred for the Fatimas. They are perhaps the most public face of the Herites, the ones the Tribes fear the most. Allied closely with the Jackers, they fuel anger wherever they can, driving the Eighth Tribe with the fury of a dispossessed people, hungry to take back what is rightfully theirs. The intellectual rebels among us fight against the ideas that others accept as truth. They do not blindly swallow everything we are told, but question everything, examining each statement for flaws, for cracks in the logic behind it. These Herites are often found among the Lightbringers, challenging them, questioning the paths down which the Lightbringers would lead the Eighth Tribe.

Among the Doomsayers you will find the last major Herite faction. We are those who question the nature of our very spirit, who examine the reality of the Great Architecture for the truth that lies beyond the lies of the Tribes. Here, the most radical of ideas are found. There are some who believe that Synthesis is merely an act of human will, with no touch of any Goddess upon it. There are others who believe, in fact, that there is no Goddess at all, but that humanity stands alone, rulers of our own destiny. In short, the Herites can be anywhere, within any faction at any time. It is ironic that so many link us together as one group, when in fact there is little that binds us, save for a rebellious, angry spirit. The Herites leave Unity for the Lightbringers. We bicker and argue and hate, often becoming our own worst enemies as we each work to find the true route to freedom.



Song of War

The Words of Thomas, Jacker:

I see your words, my friends, I see them and I see their power. But I also see their flaw. You all look for a way, a single truth that can guide all of our steps to something higher than what we now know. This is your one and only fault — that you think that there is a path that we can walk in the world that we live in. There is not. There is no truth that we can find, because it has been stolen from us. Everyone thinks they know what we lost in the Camps. We lost our lives and our blood, we lost our hope and our direction, we all too often lost our souls. That, however, is not all that we lost — it is not even the most important loss. We lost the Truth, we lost the way. It was taken from us, and we cannot just find it again — we have to take it back.

When the Z'bri destroyed the world, they destroyed the paths and the ways. Look at us now, fighting and mewling over the scraps that are left. They crushed our spirits so badly that we have lost the ability to directly connect to the One Goddess, we have lost the ability to directly feel her love. They have tainted us; they have stolen our secrets; they have distorted and destroyed the true nature of the River. As they took the individual spirits of our ancestors and bound them into their twisted sculptures of flesh, they have bound our spirits to this world. While they exist, while their shadow looms over us there can be no understanding. While the spirits of our ancestors scream to us from their tortured prisons there can be no peace. We cannot find our way while they live. There is only one path open to us, only one path that will let us finally come to the answers you seek — and that is the path of war.

This is what we Jackers know, this is what we have seen in our hearts. The only way to freedom, to knowledge, to unity, is over the broken bodies and shattered spirits of the Beasts. Our path is blood and sacrifice, our way in the screams of war and dying. In the stench of corpse fires and the pain of wounds taken in defense of our lives, our liberties, and our loves we will free the world from their taint. We will pull the sky down around their ears, and then we will be free. Our ancestors will be put to rest; the abominations will be cast down. Then, in the pits and holes where they have hidden the truth from us, we will find the way. Your day, my friends, is coming — but it will not come until after the Jackers have had theirs.

Unity

Bartholomew the Child considers all that he has heard:

I do not have the training or the knowledge that each of you has. When I was a child among the Agnites, Synthesis was another toy given to us by Agnes. We never stopped to question how things worked or why they were the way they were. Those who did question quickly vanished. It wasn't until I came to Hom that I began to look at the world around me with open eyes. The first thing I realized was how disjointed we are here. Like the Herites, the Fallen as a whole have no sense of identity. What makes a Tribe a Tribe? They have their Fatimas, their priestesses, to give them rituals, beliefs, meaning to bind them into one unified people. We have no one to guide us, and if what Maire believes is true, we have no need of any to guide us. We must find our own meaning.

That is what the Lightbringers seek for the Eighth Tribe. In working with each of the other groups, we seek to provide an identity for the Fallen, something that we as a people can stand behind and accept as our own. That is the true reason for the rites and rants at the Cage. That is the true reason for the Goddess of Mercy Mission, for Deus' poetic scribbles all over the walls of Hom. In a way, Thomas, you are correct, but in a way you are wrong as well. The Tribes, through the Fatimas, have lost the ability to directly access the One Goddess, but how can you say that the Fallen are also lost? Do we not use Synthesis, do we not touch the River with no help from any Fatima or intermediary? As a people, we have regained that bit of truth back from what we once were.

There is One Truth out there, and we are on the path to recovering it. With the coming of the Z'bri and the closing of the Fold, the Truth shattered, shards of it falling among the Tribes, yes, but also among the Keepers and even the Squats.

There are fragments of it remaining in the world all around us, fragments that we have recovered and use in our rituals, in our dreams. It is only by exploring many different ideas, as Maire said the Herites do, that we can find the one unifying Whole that remains out there, waiting for us to discover it. We will only discover it by taking all of the different ideas, all of the views that we as a people bring together, and fitting them together into something coherent. Unlike the Herites, we do not seek out new ideas in order that we may tear them down, but in order that we may build them up and add them to the Whole that we, as a Tribe, must work together to create. Our strength may come from diversity, but it is not in diversity that we stand, but in Unity. We must all learn to stand together as one, to let our ideals meld into a new strength. From all the separate points of color we may make a tapestry that will be more beautiful than any single thread.

Guides to the Lost

From the musings of Halos, Guide:

Now and then the Fallen surprise me. Few have surprised me more than this new group, The Ferrymen. I watched them come across the Bridge, and did not think much of their chances. They were too attached to the tit of their Fatimas to make anything of themselves, and I had no time to help them. I was busy with those I felt were more important, more vital to the world that must be. Now, however, I have been proven wrong. Those three have dragged themselves to their feet, and are continuing the quest that had them cast out of the Tribes.

It worries me, their stubbornness, as much as it gives me hope for all Fallen. On one hand it shows how much strength of spirit there is on Hom, and how purpose can bloom out of hopelessness. On the other hand, their strength in the River and in Dreaming worries me. Dreaming is not like hunting or sailing, where greater power and knowledge brings greater safety; it is quite the opposite. Only someone with a good deal of power in Dream can really damn themselves and those around them. Most Dreamers, especially among the Fallen, are like children playing with swords. These Ferrymen are like children the size of bears playing with flails — while blindfolded.

Still, perhaps this strength, this ardor will not go without issue. The price of growth is always pain, and the Fallen have much to learn. These four are damned, but perhaps they will use their strength to blaze a trail that others will be able to follow. They know so much more than they realize, and understand so much less than they think. I would wish them all the best, for they remind me of the man in the mirror. If they had the teachers that I had it might have been different. We must all walk our own paths, however, and I fear their spirits may soon join my haunting.



Chapter Three: Out of the Cradle

Wake, children, and Dream.

The road stretches on before,

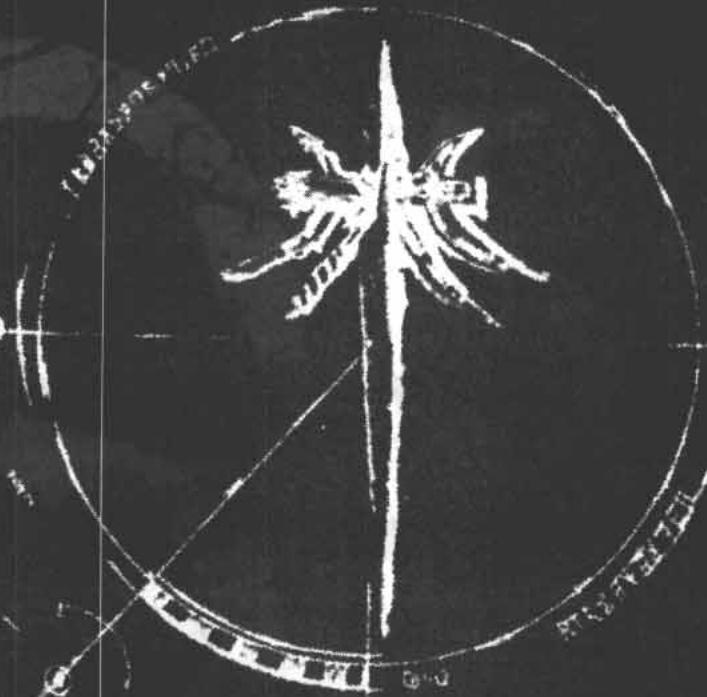
And the blind shall lead the dumb.

Let the branches break,

And stride towards the burning light

Of an unreal future.

- Poem of Deus



Ghosts of Days Past

From the night-thoughts of Maire Grey:

"Maire?" Thomas's voice is fuzzy, edged with sleep as I hear him start to turn over towards me.

"Shh. I'm fine. Go back to sleep, Thomas." I lie back down and curl against his warm back as much to gain reassurance as to give it. The dream that is something more than a dream came back again tonight. A harsh voice whispers all around me, fingers trail across my face, along my hair. Then voice goes silent, driven away by the wailing screams that wake me again and again, the scent of smoke, burning flesh and bone filling my nostrils. I wake before I can feel the fire consuming my own skin, its heat closing in, caressing my hair as the whispering voice did. The fire terrifies me, as it did so long ago when the bear gave me my vision. There is something so wrong there. If I could only see it, I might be able to give it a name and a cause. I have heard it said that some who are physically imperfect in some way lose that imperfection in the spiritual realm. Men who cannot walk stand tall and strong within the River. Women who cannot see have bright eyes full of wonder and fear.

I am not one of those lucky few. My senses in the River are as they are here. My eyes remain dark. Perhaps one day I will see in the River again, for I have also heard that the River is inconsistent, always shifting with little rhyme or reason. I believe I am spiritually blind for a reason. Once I have revenge on those who tried to destroy us, once I am able to put the night they took my eyes behind me, I will be able to heal. Until then, I feel the sense of loss in the whispering voice, always so low that I can never make out the words. I am so frightened by the menace of the fire. It carries with it the same wrongness as that which troubled me before Elias came to us. If only I could see it! Perhaps if I were closer to the spirit than to the flesh I would be able to see in the River — but Storm Cry always said that the flesh was my weakness.

This is beyond my knowledge. Whatever is disturbing the River, it does not affect only me. Perhaps the voice belongs to a restless spirit; perhaps the others will be able to see what I cannot. Perhaps this whispering voice, this image of the fire, will mean something to them that I cannot fathom. We have tarried on Hom too long. There is a greater task that awaits us out beyond this island.



3. Out of the Cradle

**Lashim, Keeper Ghost**

Lashim was born amid howling and rage just beyond the barricades in Sub Terra that kept his family safe.

He grew up as his mother's miracle and as a young man, he learned to tinker and fix the machines that broke down in the dampness of the access tunnels where he lived. He read much, became well liked, and generally kept to himself. One day Lashim and a dozen others took an unfortunate sojourn into the world above in search of sunlight and fresh air. They made short work for the chained monstrosities that hunted them down.

For a long time thereafter, the spirits of Lashim and the others were tied to the place of their deaths, but the pull of the tides of time pulled them one by one down the current of the River and towards the Sea of the Lost. Now Maire, the brightest form that he can sense in the River, is his only chance at salvation.

Highlights: Angry, Frightened, Fading

Attributes: CRE +1, INF 0, KNO +3, PER -1, PSY -1, WIL +1, STR +1, HEA 0, STA 25, UD 5.

Skills: Combat Sense 1/-1, Dodge 1/+1, Hand to Hand 1/+1, Investigation 2/+1, Notice 2/-1, Read/Write (Keepspeak) 2/+3, Sneak 1/+1, Techlore (Mechanics) 2/+3, Techlore (Computer, Electronics, Physical Science) 3/+3

Special: Possession — Lashim may "ride" someone who connects to him with Life, and speak through their mouth.

Once More Into the Breach**From a diary transcribed to flesh:**

The four of us, sitting tight in a circle, stared at each other without speaking for quite some time. It would be the first time since our banishment that we entered the River together. Thomas had quite reasonably volunteered, as the expert in combative Dream, to be the one to confront this potentially hostile spirit that haunted Maire's dreams, and I must admit that I was glad I would not be the one to go. The old warrior, for his part, had already steeled himself to the inevitable, and radiated an aura of outward calm and composure. Maire and I knew better, although I am sure Bart, still new to us, picked up some subtle cues himself. At the center of our little circle was a pot balanced over an impromptu fire: Maire had come prepared with mushrooms.

When Maire announced the tea ready, the cup was slowly passed around the circle. Warm, bitter, the tea made my nose curl but each time I passed it to Bart I prayed there was still enough to go around the circle and come back to me again. When the last dregs were gone I picked up my chinks and moved towards the wall. Maire helped Thomas out of his clothes and began scrubbing him down with hot — probably boiling — water, leaving his skin glowing bright red. Tendrils of smoke curled into my nose as Bart circled the room, lighting incense at the corners, the cardinal points, and along the wide chalk circle already on the floor. I began to write on Thomas's flesh, first an invocation to the One Goddess, next an appeal to Farstrider, the only totem I could remember who protected travelers. I quite carefully did not look down at Thomas's face, even when Maire began drumming and I knew the ritual had begun.

A Whisper from the Sea**As remembered by Thomas, Jacker:**

The scents of spice and other, less recognizable, smells drift through me. I feel my body grow light, the heavy sack of mud and blood slipping down and away from the truth of myself, that deeper body which hides within the flesh. For a time I fight against it, dimly aware of the slow dying of the light from outside the window. I hold out against the hypnotism of the drums, the scratching sound of Elias' pen as it pulls runes of ink along my skin. I wait until I know the time when Maire normally sleeps comes close, and then I drift. My eyes, of flesh and spirit — my eyes of Dream, close. I am free.

Opening my eyes again, I find myself in the River. About me the world wavers and shifts, an uncertain thing that seems as though it may decide to change at any moment. Nothing is still or motionless here, for everything lives. About me there is a ring of stones, bones of rock and wood that stick out of the earth like teeth. That little bit of memory is all that remains of the room I sleep in — the works of men's hands leave little imprint on the

vastness of Dream. I am not alone. In the break in the rocks that would be a doorway, there is an image, a suggestion of the form of a man. There is no actual substance there, only the fading memory of a body that once was but has now long passed into dust. As I force myself to become more real, my white mail of chain forming over my body, I hear a tremor on the air and realize that the ghost is trying to speak. Though I listen intently, I cannot hear. The ghost knows it, and I can feel, more than see, its head droop in surrender.

Realizing that there is no time, that the ghost will soon be lost like a heat ripple in summer air, I move even as I remember. My mentors used to tell me that you could bring a weak spirit into your own Dreamscape, into the seat of your own soul, and hold it there. Of course if you were not stronger than the spirit, then it would be free to wreak havoc in your heart and you would be undefended. I feel it worth the chance, and so I wrap my arms about the ghost and fall backwards. The River ripples about us, the edges of vision wrapping in like the sides of a bubble. The bones of the room, the land and the sky, vanish into nothingness. I feel a weak beating in my arms, the ghost struggling against me. It has no strength though, and my might in the River is great, and so I hold him as I form my own dream about us.

My Grandfather's Eyes

It takes only a few moments, and then I am standing under the shadows of the Seven Fingers — not the Fingers as they are now, but the Fingers as they were twelve years ago. Onto the ghost I force the image, the shape, the smell of my old grandfather. I watch as his gray hair appears, as the vague face becomes solid. Even the scar across his throat, the one that made him unable to speak above a whisper, forms under my will.

Only then do I release him, the ghost given solidity by the mask of my grandfather's face. "Peace, you are safe here — and you can speak here. I am Thomas, lover of Maire, and I have come to speak with you. What would you have of us?" I knew that I would be able to hear his answer. Despite the damage to my flesh ears, in this realm I could still hear as sharply as ever. I felt a stab of pity for Maire, blind in both worlds, then focused my attention back on the task at hand. The ghost slowly ran old, strong fingers over my grandfather's old, strong face. After a moment it tried to speak, but only a croak came out.

"I have given you my grandfather's face, to make you stable, so that you do not fade. His throat was cut when he was young. Just whisper what you would say — I will hear."

Come Closer

Lashim, Keeper Ghost, speaks to Thomas:

"Bend your ear this way boy — it's hard enough remembering the movement of my tongue. Your granddaddy may have been used to talking down this ripped-up throat, but I'm not. It's just good enough to speak, for it feels an age since I've last been heard. You should have heard me in my day; and I used to have a voice that was sweet



3. Out of the Cradle

and low and sly. I could talk a good game in my swaggering through the spine of the Network. The tunnels were dim, dank and cold under the heart of the monsters' house. Few of us dared to leave our haven for light lest we surrender everything we'd safeguarded, lest we lose our very lives to the misappropriation of Science that the Melanis called experiments.

"Lest we share the fate of your great-grandfathers, we stayed below, away from the ongoing plague that had been foretold in the old books, of the locusts that would come bearing the faces of men and the claws of beasts. We scavenged and stockpiled provisions to survive, but because the air was heavy and hard in the bunkers, men would go mad with darkness and fear. To air the mildew of our minds, we stole sunlight and time in the world above, keeping forever low, forever out of sight. There, we saw a great many things that your ancestors never knew, but the beasts could smell our flesh in the open, and more than one of us, more than just me, became the dinner of the plagues. In the pain and blood of my rending body, I saw what had also been foretold, the water of the river of life. As its light, bright as crystal, washed over me, I could see that it flowed, has always flowed through the streets of this city that had once been great, and I knew my time had come.

"Years could have been minutes that could have been millennia in my newfound sense of time. From my watching, I knew it was only for a generation that I was tied to the sepulcher of concrete that bore the stains of my death. Like broken glass worn smooth in ocean tide, the ebb of the River softened me. It pulled me from sight and sound out into a spiraling darkness where there is no peace, no silence. The whispering, lost and sad, grope always in the dark for comfort. There, the confessions of the damned are spilled into the tide. There, I hear the secrets and longings of all lost men, and in that tumult of wasted nostalgia and sinking regret I too will be forfeit.

"Please, help me. The one you travel with, she has the power of my salvation. Her Life is strong and bright and blinding to me — the star that led me to you. She can stop my damnation. She can bring me home or set me free. Please — you can't leave me to this madness without end, this eternity of suffering. The dead have much to offer. There is wisdom and power in the whispered words that I have heard. Save me now, and I shall tell you where you can find..."





Awaking

The Words of Thomas, Jacker:

The ghost's words stunned me. I could hardly think for several minutes, and the Dreamscape shifted and rocked slightly as my concentration wavered. Finally I forced myself to nod, "I will speak to the others. I think we will help you; I do not know how we can refuse. Return tomorrow night and I will have your answer."

He looked weary, and for answer only nodded. I let the Dreamscape fade, and pressed upwards against the sky, pressing against my eyelids with my eyes at the same time. I blinked from the pressure, and the Dream vanished. I blinked again and the world of the Flesh returned to me. I sat up slowly, yawning and stretching my back to bring my focus fully back into my body. I rubbed smoke out of my eyes, and looked at my cellmates crowding around me. My voice trembled when first I spoke, but quickly grew stronger.

"He is the ghost of a Keeper, an old and wise one. He is dying once more, being pulled ever towards the Sea of the Lost and his damnation there. He needs our help, else he will be utterly damned and destroyed. He came to Maire because of her strength in Life. He needs her help, our help."

Maire was silent for a moment, her face turned towards me, sightless eyes watching my chest. "I could help. . . I think. I would need his remains, however, something physical, something that was his in life. Without it he is too fully in the realm of Death for me to aid."

"Then we must go into the Keeper lands and find his body." I answered.

Elias responded next, and in my mind the image-words of his voice sliced sharper than ever as he scrawled across his parchment. *What did he tell you Thomas, that has you willing to risk so much to save the spirit of a heathen?*

I turned my face to Elias. "If we save him he has promised to guide us, promised to lead us to a Nomad." Their faces were stunned. The Nomads were the last of the great ones that came before the Z'bri, the beings so powerful that they had been able to close the Fold. Finding a Nomad — learning his secrets, the hidden truths of the worlds of Flesh and of Dream — would be the culmination of our work, the greatest reward we could hope for. I knew, looking at them, what answer I would be giving the ghost.



On the Trail

From the memory of Maire Grey, Herite:

It does not take us long to prepare for our journey. If what Thomas believes is true, we will find the ghost's body just north of the Rust Wastes, on the edge of Keeper Lands. I do not know if I will be able to help the ghost — I do not know how I will do what I am considering, but I have to try, and to try, I must have something that was the ghost's in life. We travel in the cool of the morning and evening, leaving the midday and the dark of night for resting. As we walk along, our talk turns to the things we have seen, and to the things we now seek.

"Deus says that the Nomads were Z'bri that did not go mad upon entering this world," Bartholomew offers. "He says when they saw how their brothers, the Takers, were intent on destroying and enslaving humanity, the Nomads tried to teach humanity how to resist, how to fight back. They took students from the camps and inflamed the minds of men so that they were ready to fight once the Fatimas arrived to lead them."

3. Out of the Cradle

Thomas snorts softly, "We seek no Z'bri, boy. Nothing of their kind has ever meant anything more than death and damnation to all of our people."

Elias pauses to write out his comment, and I hear the words in my mind before he finishes his quick note, *I, too, have heard those tales. I have heard other Doomsayers speak of how most of the Nomads died to close the Fold and trap the Takers for an eternity in the flesh they had stolen.*

"And what of the strangers that came to the Camps before the Fatimas were born? Those who heralded the coming of the Age of Camps?" I ask. "From all that I have read and heard, it would make sense to say that they were the Nomads reborn — or those precious few who had survived the Closing."

"If they were," Thomas mutters, irritation growing in his voice, "there is your proof that the Nomads were not connected to the Z'bri. What have the Z'bri to do with the Fatimas?"

Bartholomew laughs, a dangerous thing to do, with Thomas in an ill humor. "More than you might think, to hear some of the talk around Hom."

I step towards Thomas and take his hand. "Some even say that the Nomads — whatever they were — trained the Guides and sent them into Hom to look after the Fallen and teach us the paths we must follow."

So many stories, Elias writes, and so little truth.



Omens

"Whatever the truth may be," I offer after a time, "it is clear that these events are vital to us all. They say that before the Nomads came to humanity, and before the Fold closed, that stars fell from the sky and many were given dreams and powerful visions."

Elias' pen scratched at his parchment. *True, and before the Fatimas' births, they fell once again, and the souls of prophets were reborn as children who spoke beyond the wisdom of their years.*

"What of the Falling Plagues?" Bartholomew asks.

My lips press together tightly. "They presaged the death of Mary. Some say the second Falling Plague is what killed Her. Others, particularly the Shamans, say that the Guides were responsible, that they are the source of all corruption in Vimary, second only to the Z'bri."

"Better to ask what the Forgive could not Forgive," Thomas says, echoing my own thought.

"I believe that all these things are connected," Bartholomew murmurs, "in ways that we cannot yet see. Perhaps that is what we are destined to learn."

For myself, I am left with dreams of fire and an echoing of Elias' words in my mind: *So many stories, and so little truth.*

Bloodhound

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

I find it odd that Habeas Corpus, the Aspect I learned while still among the Tribes, still works for me, and works so well. I cannot touch Truth as I used to, but I can still douse the location of important objects — and certainly that falls under the province of Truth. When I called on the Aspect, I was surprised at the power that greeted me. Through half-lidded eyes I saw my cellmates stiffen with certainty as my senses expanded even to them, and as one we picked up our traveling packs and doused the campfire. I was useless that day, leaving dodging the shadows among the decrepit buildings to Thomas and Bartholomew. Maire cared for me, and more than once wiped drool from my lip.

I had never been in the Rust Wastes before, but I had heard of its danger and its labyrinthine layout from Lorekeepers and a few Fallen. None of these concerned us as we strode into that place of decay; the River pulled us towards the body, and I am not sure if we could have denied that call if we had wished. The crimson sun, pregnant with wind-tossed rust, was sitting fat on the horizon when we found a square amid the walls of the ancient city, filled with drifts of rust. Thomas handed out the shovels, and we set to digging, the others with a calm determination and I with a frenetic energy resembling obsession. I had to find that body, had to unearth the remains, had to look this Keeper ghost in the face, if he still had one. We shoveled a lake of rust away, then dug down into the soil. We found other bodies, piled haphazardly into a mass grave. Thomas muttered about the damned Z'bri and how many they had killed; I tore bodies and parts of bodies out of my way and continued digging.

The corpse surfaced like a cork in water, and I marveled at the halo of light around his decrepit head. I laughed and screamed, dragging the skeleton from the tangle of limbs and unseeing faces, out into the rust. I wiped dirt off his face with my fingers, careful not to disturb what remnants of skin were left, and gazed into his sunken eyes. "I have found you," I hissed to the dead man. "I have found you. I have found you." Slowly his crown of light faded, and I set the body down, my fanaticism resolved and dulling by the second. I looked around me, at the limbs and bodies tossed haphazardly across the sea of rust, and at my cellmates, spattered with black dirt and caked with rust, determination fading from their eyes, replaced with a dawning revulsion. "We found him," I mouthed weakly.

Savages

The report of Gascon, Keeper Patrol:

We were down around the bend of Rooke Street when we spotted them, about a klick over from Olympus. They should have seen us coming but their eyes were rolling up in their head — those that had eyes to speak of. Looked like they were in some kind of trance as they clawed at the rust and dirt with their bare hands. We couldn't figure what they were doing at first, but then they started pulling up old bones — bones that have laid in peace for generations — our bones. There they were, grunting and groaning over the skeletons of our forefathers, rending the bodies apart, tossing them this way and that with no care or regard for our history. I tell you, it's typical. They call us relics, they disregard us as remnants of a lost world and claim we have no sense of spirituality and meanwhile they're out digging up our sacred ground. I don't care what any of our pacifists say about making good with them because we were once a common people. The Z'bri turned them wrong in those camps. They're nothing but twisted savages trying to destroy our past.

I would have killed them right then and there; I was going to show them what graves are meant for. I spit down on the cop top of my mini — it's been testy since I put the new barrel in. When the sparks started coming off it I knew I was in business, but Doug caught up my arm and said we should catch them. He said they'd be easy pickings and because we ain't ever seen any of the savages doing anything like that before we should find out if their Trash Goddesses had told 'em to come. He said it was important to find out why. I let my mini burst anyway over their heads just as Doug and Bert and Jannie got down the hill and on them. I wanted to scare their wits back into them so they'd know what the beating was for. Anyway, we got them down in the holding bay now. Can we kill them?

Honored Dead

From the annals of Kircher Cross, Keeper of Knowledge:

Gascon came to me this morning, shuddering in the rapture of the predator. After watching him pace for a half an hour or more I told him to seat himself. Once he'd reassembled his gun for the fourth time I told him to get gone. Too many of the new generation have no patience for research these days. I fear that they'll leave my books to rot when I meet the great machinating gears of my death. They call themselves Keepers but they keep little knowledge; indeed, they hardly seem able to keep themselves in control. I can understand his fury; too many of the trash-worshippers, with their disregard of all things before, have made their mangling way through enough of our sacred sites. They use our tomes and records for kindling, our edifices and halls for hovels, and now it seems they are after our very bones. It itches under my beard, too, but I have not survived all the years of my life acting out in fury. I have consulted the old books to find the means to deal with the savages. Their pages lay open in guidance all over my tables; their knowledge blooms in yellow leaves like flowers in the great ordered cycle of the year.

These pages bear the fingerprints of all my questions; the prophets who set their words to paper have been my light in darkness. Often their meanings are clouded to me because so very much has been lost. In this case, the great prophet Molecular Ecology wrote; "Scavengers release the low-density energy of detritus in order that high-density energy can be built into the elemental biomass of the entire Life system." I did not understand what the tomes were telling me, but I persevered. When the words of the ancients inveigle me, and I have tried past trying to understand, I do what I have just done. I press my right hand — the hand of Intelligence — and my left hand — the hand of Wisdom — against the cool blank face of Kognos. With as much clarity as I can muster I tell it all that I have learned since our last communication and ask for guidance.

It is difficult to know what information Kognos will see as worthy in exchange for its aid. Sometimes its screen remains dim and dark and sullen under the outline of my hands, but today the screen illuminated, and my face was washed in its green glow. Within moments, my own voice began to speak in measured words not my own. "Your seekers bring to you the banks they have salvaged from the ruins of the World Before. You in turn, attach those banks to Kognos to expand it into

a more complex system and increase the capacity of its wisdom. So too, organic scavengers seek the ruins and relics of organic components: animal, vegetable and mineral. Unlike you, they do not compile, but decompile, and in breaking these objects down, create raw elemental matter. This is the substance The Engine of Life binds together to make new animal, vegetable and mineral components — including man. The more elemental matter produced, the more complex the new organic system will become. They are entropy in action — a part of the Natural Order." My young friend will not like what I have to tell him. The savages must be set free.

What's in My Pocket?

From the tired, frustrated thoughts of Maire Grey:

Dear Mother, we were so close. We had the Keeper's body in our hands! It was in our hands and they took it away from us. We are lucky to be alive. I've seen what the Keepers' loud weapons can do to living flesh. Of course, it wasn't enough for them to leave us bruised and battered; they dragged us the last few clicks behind their choking, noisy wagons. I should see to healing the others, to finding food and getting some rest for now. Time enough to find the path again tomorrow.

Thomas mutters a curse. "We were so close! Now all of our work has come to naught. Who knows what will become of the ghost now? Who else will be able to guide us?"

I try to find the words to comfort him, but I cannot. I can only reach out to him, but he moves away, and I hear him sit down, earning another curse. "What is... Maire, come here."

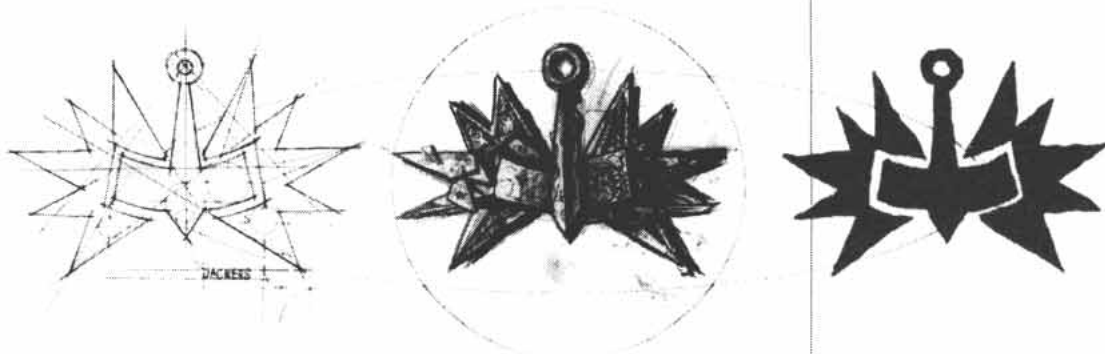
Stepping closer, an object is pressed into my hands, the shape of it tantalizingly familiar, a U-shape with regular indentations and grooves along the top and sides. "Thomas, what. . . ?"

"I do not know. It was in my pocket just now." Thomas pauses. "I did not put it there."

Then the pieces fall into position and I realize that I am holding a human jawbone. Running my fingers over it, I have a sense of an older man, one intelligent and frustrated and. . . lost. I have heard his voice in my dreams, in Thomas's dreams. Dream washes over and through me as the final pieces of the puzzle fall into place. "Thomas. Thomas, it's his. It's the ghost's. His name is Lashim."

That draws Elias and Bartholomew's attention over as well. "Where did it come from?" Bartholomew asks.

"Lashim wanted us to have it." For the first time in days, I smile. "I think I know how to keep his spirit from the Sea. I. . . think." The idea that had been so vague throughout our journey began to solidify in my mind. "If I can use Life to. . . to bind him somehow to this bit of his old flesh. . . yes, it might work." I left the three of them behind so I could best consider how to do this thing, something that no one I knew of had attempted before, ignoring Thomas's worried questioning.



Eternally Waiting

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

We discussed the nature of ghosts while Maire prepared to save one from the Sea of the Lost. Our ideas were so different from each other, yet united by the events we had so far encountered together. Thomas believed that they were noble things, spirits of those who were possessed, in life, with souls burning with love of their world and their families. In death they could not leave those they loved and by the strength of their will remained in the world to protect their loved ones. Bartholomew worried that ghosts were not what they claimed, a lie that walked and haunted. They were not the lingering spirits of women and men once dead, but something else, either some sliver of the dead combined with some other animating power or perhaps something alien taking the guise of the dead.

I told Thomas: Ghosts are not your ancestor spirits, who have been taken across the Fold and whose memory stays to teach and protect. More ghosts are terrible things of rage and hate; only a noble few have sense enough to protect the world they have left. I told Bartholomew: There are more things on either side of the Fold than you can know, varied and each different from the next. Such eldritch usurpers as you imagine no doubt exist, but there is as little doubt that other things march beside them in the parade of the River's denizens. There are things as pathetic as your terrors are horrific, things as trapped and lost as the mightiest nightmare is at home in the River.

What worries me, though, is not so much what ghosts are, but what they mean. Ghosts should not be as they are, or in such numbers. That most souls cannot cross the Fold into the hereafter is a dire portent, for all the world outside of Vimary will become populated with ghosts until their weight suffocates the living. Worse, the Sea of the Lost draws them out into the void where they are drawn out into nothing: where ghosts die. Yes, as is foretold in the Prophecy of Joshua. There is a great imbalance between Flesh and Spirit, made worse by the adamantine Fold. I worry that such inflexibility will end in nothing but destruction.

Necromancy

From the ritual mind of Maire Grey, former Evan Shaman:

Dear Goddess, it should be a Yagan trying this, not me. . .

I feel the curve of the drums beneath my palms, rough aged skin, rough with the pulse of the life the wearer once led, under green trees by flowing water. Old Anna was wise in the ways of life and death and saw far beyond this world. Now her spirit lives on in my drum, showing me the way. My hands sound her heart, now quickening with fear, with anger, with passion, with joy, now relaxing into slumber, following the course of a life. My heart matches her heart. It quickens with the drumbeat, sounding loud in my chest to drown the pulse of my hands. The roots I swallowed draw me away as the line between life and death, flesh and spirit, blurs and wavers before my eyes — my eyes, an illusion that winks out of existence before I truly recognize it. The drumbeat continues to sound in my soul as my hands reach for the jawbone. There is life there, faint and barely recognizable. A memory of a life, as my drum is a memory of a life.

The River carries me along, and I feel it, this other connected to me through this bit of old life. Goddess! There are too many of them! Beyond the other, beyond him, there are so many Lost Ones crowding and pulling, wanting the bit of spirit that contains me, to draw it in and drown it in their anger and fear. It would be so easy to let go, to drift along into their reach. They pull me, these faces and hands, some familiar, some almost comforting. They want me to join them. My spirit tugs and pulls to be free of my flesh.

My hands tighten around the bit of bone from the long-dead Keeper. Where are you? My hands tighten, old crumbling teeth biting into my flesh. The very force of my life flows through my hands, flooding into old porous bone like a torrent of water irrigating a long-dry field. Of their own accord, my hands raise the jawbone to my face, as if to warm it with the breath from my mouth. Flesh and bone meet, touch, then start to fuse with a sizzle like frying meat. The drum of my heart beats a staccato, fleeing pulse, and from far away I hear a woman's voice shrieking. The sound yanks me from the River, dripping spirit and gasping for air.

The screaming voice is mine. Goddess, Mother. . . the bone is part of me. . .

Through Me the Dead Speak

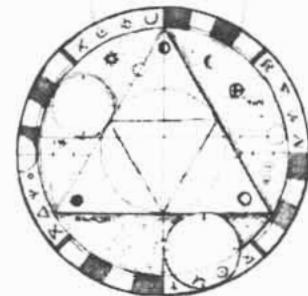
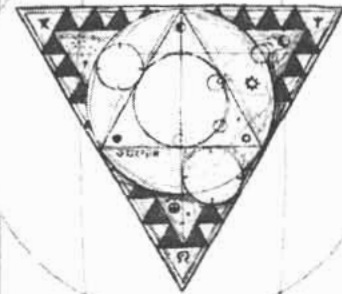
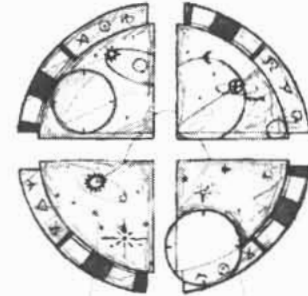
From the Memories of Thomas, Jacker:

When Maire raised the bone in her hand and pressed it to her mouth, I did not move. When she pressed it tight and it sank through her skin like a rock through water, I was too horrified to breathe. A cold, clammy shudder ran up my spine, and I trembled like a coward. It was only when she fell over, passing out, that I moved. Rushing forward with Bart and Elias on my heels, I grabbed Maire up and leaned her into my lap, her head pressing against my stomach. My fingers sought out the beating pulse in her neck, and found it — strong but slow, as though she had been long asleep. I could not help but stare at her mouth, at her jaw, but when I ran my fingers over her skin, it felt the same as always — as though the terrible joining had been an illusion.


Just then her eyes snapped open, and I jumped so hard I nearly spilled her from my lap. There were eyes staring out from the burnt-out holes in her face — real eyes. They were not Maire's eyes. They were a slick slate color that never should have been in Maire's face, and they seemed hazy, as though looking out through a thick mist. A voice spoke out of Maire's mouth, and I could not hear it.

Bartholomew screamed and jumped backwards, for it was the voice of a man. "He is inside of her!"

Spitting rage leaped into my breast, and I threw the possessed body out of my lap. I screamed in rage, incoherently damning the ghost to hell, telling him that I would kill him, cut his soul from reality. I drew my dagger, and only Elias catching my wrist with both hands kept me from stabbing Maire through the eye. With quick, slicing images of me as a raging beast cast into my mind, Elias convinced me to calm myself, to gain control and listen.



3. Out of the Cradle


 Jawboning

From the memories of Thomas, Jacker:


Only after Elias' command calmed me did I notice that Maire's mouth was still speaking with Lashim's voice. Bartholomew, though pale and shaking, was chanting slowly — bringing that voice into the place in my heart where I could still hear.

"Boy, calm yourself. I am not hurting your woman, nor stealing her body away. She is still here, but just breathing now, catching her mind up again. You think what she just did was easy? I am only borrowing her tongue just now, and with her permission besides." She sat up while that alien voice spoke from her lips, the movements of a quirky man and not a priestly woman. I wanted to kick her back down, but Elias was staring at me so that I could not.

"Find yourself some reason, boy. What kind of old fool do you take me for? What good would it do me to harm her? I know damn well that if I tried to take her from you that you'd cut us both down sooner than let me have her body. Should I have come begging for salvation just to damn my soul again? She has saved me Thomas. Just as I — just as you — have asked her to." Those gray eyes watched me, calm and reasonable, until I put my dagger away.

"You'll have to wait for her explanation, if you're looking for one. I never could make heads or tails of your hocus-pocus, and I've had a hell of a lot longer to think it out than your average Joe. All I know is that the tide of the River isn't pulling me apart any more. I feel solid here, safe, thanks to your woman." His focus shifted a moment, his gaze distracted. "She can't talk just yet, but she can listen, and I can tell. On my side of the bargain, once we are all collected, and she is ready and rested, we will be leaving this little island behind. If you wish to find one of the last Nomads then we will have to travel far — all the way to Abora, where a maid upon a dulcimer plays. I can hear his Heart from here."

Elias and Bartholomew started throwing questions, but Lashim, with Maire's hand, waved them away. "More later. Maire is wanting her mouth back." With that the eyes closed again, and Maire staggered suddenly, like a puppet with tangled strings. I reached out and steadied her, and when she spoke again it was with her voice — though slightly slurred, and there were no more eyes in her head.


 Towards the Away

From the worried musings of Maire Grey, Herite:

We leave in three days for the Outlands. When I am not gathering supplies into bundles or listening to the men argue over which route to take first, I turn over the events of the past several days in my mind. I can feel him there, an alien mind touching my own without overlapping. I cannot read his thoughts any more than he can read mine, which is a small comfort to me. When he wishes to speak, it is as if he taps me on the shoulder, and I stand aside to let him come forward. It is awkward, but we are learning how to cooperate, albeit slowly. He is, to be sure, an excruciatingly polite passenger to carry in one's mind.

I worry about Thomas, though. He watches me with traces of madness and fear still in his eyes. I have not yet been able to fully convince him that Lashim is nothing more than a passenger that does not possess me or know my thoughts. Thomas has never been envious of any who have shared my body, but it is hard for him to think that someone else might share my mind. I believe he would wrench Lashim from me and cast him away if he could do so without harming me.

Ebb and Flow

Again and again I have gone over the ritual I used to bring Lashim to me, trying to understand what happened. What compelled me to raise the jawbone to my face? What is it about the life force within me that drew his spirit into my body? These are questions for which I do not have the answers. Nothing I have been taught speaks of this sort of experience. Even the Yagans, who have the map of Death's undiscovered country, do not do this.

What is the boundary between Life and Death? Is there a shadow land between the two where they overlap? Perhaps that is where I found myself. By using Life in conjunction with Anna's death drum and Lashim's bones, perhaps I found the place where Life and Death are inextricably intertwined. Even that, though, goes against what I was taught. Most believe that Eminences are separate from one another, and do not normally touch or overlap.

How does that make sense? Rivers are not divided into neat little sections, each marked off one from another. Through our Eminences, we have divided up the River ourselves, put in floodgates and dams to try and control and direct the flow of Dream. Perhaps the first step to true freedom and understanding is to learn to tear down the floodgates and allow the River to flow free. In our attempts to make the River something we can understand, we have limited ourselves.

For all of my talk to Elias of boats and fish, even the Evans have their own constructs in which to swim the River. There are those on Hom who do not seem to be limited by any Eminence. Perhaps that is why the Fatimas fear them enough to destroy their own children. I was taught to hate the Guides, to despise them for crimes that may not have been theirs. I will seek them or one of their students out when we return, to see if they understand what it is to travel the River's currents with no constructs to guide and limit them.



Chapter Four: The Dread Voyage

Mountain, plain, and sea
I have walked upon all
Blinding bright and ebon night
I have walked through all.
Yet the most dread journey
I have ever walked
Was into my heart
Where all fear to walk.

— Dahlian Song



You Take the High Road

From the ledger of Elias Scribner:

We do not need any of your World Before abominations to travel that direction, Lashim. The Stilt-walkers came back from the Autumn Caravan with stories of great expanses of fertile, flat land along the south bank of the Great River. We can travel across that until we pass the Otter, cross over on rafts and then proceed north. Yes, of course it will take longer than your damned 'Thunder Canoe' but it also will not consign our souls to any more perdition than we've already earned. Those belching, roaring behemoths are what destroyed the World Before and brought the Z'bri. You Keepers erode the Fold with your infernal 'Technosmithing' but I, for one, will not tempt another invasion of the Beasts.

The Past in Shadows

Lashim, Keeper Ghost, Speaks to Elias:

Let me see if I've got this straight. You believe that because people from the World Before traveled and worked and cooked and played with machines, that somehow they lost the connection to their souls. You think that because of this, a great emptiness came over the River, and that this emptiness created a suction on a gateway that you call The Fold to some Spirit Realm where the Z'bri lived, and pulled them into this world.

You've got it all wrong. The problem is, you don't understand what the World Before was like. The hole in your theory is nothing more than a matter of population. Let's play a little game, can we? Close your eyes. In your mind's eye, picture all of the tribesmen from Westholm to the Rust Wastes. Now add all of us on the Keep. Now add all the Squats and all the Serfs and Zoms, and even the Z'bri and your Fatimas too. See them? It's quite a crowd, isn't it? That many all lived in the land you know as Bazaar. Now double it, triple it, quadruple it, turn it tenfold. That's the population from Bazaar to the Seven Fingers, and that's only one city. And all around Vimary, less than a day's walk in any direction, every direction, there is another city. There are cities all the way south to the end of the world, all the way north to the Cold Death, all the way east to the Great Water, and all the way west down the Great River to Rhanto, which saw three times as many people than ever lived in Vimary. Do you honestly think that all of those people, jostling against each other every day, communicating constantly, seeing nothing but seas of people everywhere they went, could lose touch with their souls, or really, the souls of everyone around them? Not a chance.

Maybe you've got it all backwards, and there was too much of the spirit in this world yet to be released from the flesh and it took up so much space in the River that it blew open what you're calling The Fold and into the place the Z'bri lived. Maybe men's souls were so strong that the Z'bri could smell them, and liked what they smelled, and came to dine. Maybe it was all planned. Maybe it was an accident. You can't blame the machines. They're just the tools man used for the sake of his own survival, to keep the hoards of other men at bay, if only for a little while, to safeguard his sanity — and in the process, his soul.

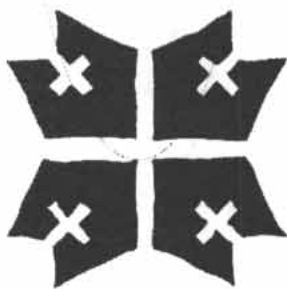
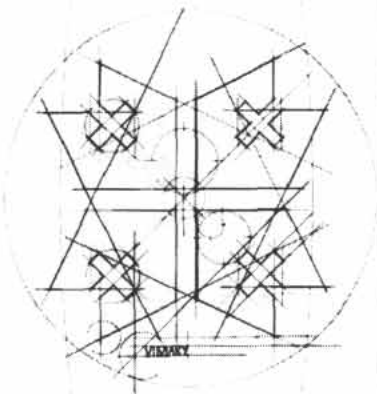


The Banging of a Gun

The Words of Thomas, Jacker:

I am sorry Elias, old friend, but I think you are wrong in this, at least in part. Now I know that I am a simple man, and do not know much about the annals of law and history, or of the other important things about which you two speak; but I do know about fighting. As a Templar it was my duty to protect the Nation from the Z'bri. Now as a Jacker it is my duty to protect you all, and to carry the war to the Z'bri. I have learned to fight with sword, spear and shield to do this. No one complains about that — but the truth is that all of those weapons are tools.

Why then would it be wrong to use one of the weapons the Keepers have? The shotguns and such that the Keepers use and some Templars 'borrow' are tools, too, made of fire and the hands of men. I see no real difference between them. If one can put one's soul into the forging, the maintenance, and the use of a sword, then why can they not do the same with a bullet-thrower? The only difference that I have ever seen is that the guns the Keepers use are better at their job than our weapons are. If I can kill a Z'bri with accuracy from twice as far as I could wound them with a bow, then why should I not? It would let me do my duty better, and that is all there really is to it.



Slave to the Grind

Maire Grey joins the debate:

Thomas, Z'bri Sundering has the ability to kill more effectively at a distance than your weapons. Would you also choose to wield that as well, in your desire to keep us safe? It is all well and good to compare Keeper weapons with your sword, but your sword is not touched by the taint of the World Before. I have heard the legends. Everything from the World Before was created by a machine, untouched by human hand or human soul. I have heard it said that even children could be created by a machine, with nothing to do with mothers or wombs! To follow after the ways of machines is to reduce humanity itself to little more than machinery. There is a surety in knowing the crafter of a tool you use, whether it be bowl or shield. You cannot trust something that was created by a machine with no soul or heart.

How Like an Angel

Lashim, Keeper Ghost speaking from Maire's mouth;

You've been fed lies since your crib days and that's all you know. How can you think you understand the World Before when the memories of your people have been muddled by the Z'bri and distorted by your own trash goddesses? You have been bred to fear machines and all of the enrichments they provide for one simple reason. When you are laboring hard in your fields, when you are crafting your baskets by hand, when you are face to face with your own death on the battlefield, you have no time to think for yourselves. Listen to me well when I say that in the Days Before, the only thing man had to mistrust or fear was other men. It is you who keep those autonomous golem-machines in power when you surrender your lives to them in prayer and service. As long as your people fear machines, they will fear your goddesses; as long as they fear, they will obey.

When Will You Learn?

Stooping Hawk reports to Stone:

We were on the ridge known as Mountain's Finger, overlooking the valleys to the south, when we heard them coming. The Tribals are so loud, you can hear them a league off, shouting at each other and trampling over everything in their path. They do not tread lightly; they do not pick out the hunting paths of the fox or wolf. They stride through whatever is in their path, and ignore the earth they pass over. They are full of dreams and I think their eyes must reflect only the skies; they do not seem to mind to the details of the body and the world.

They did not see us in our hiding place at the top of the ridge, looking down at them as they came up the river valley. At first we were awed; these were strangers from the south, rumored to be powerful in ways we cannot understand. They passed the guardian-stones set on either side of the river without pausing and at first I thought they disparaged the stones' power to judge them, but Cloud pointed out that they did not even see them, did not feel the spirits within them. He laughed at them, and our fear vanished. These were not powerful shamans, these were ignorant little otters chattering far from the River. Their speech was like a man who was made stupid by a horse kick: clatter and terror, meaning nothing. There were four of them, and they came from the south: this is what Little River told you she heard Big River whispering. They were what we were told to look for. Because my horse is fastest, Cloud sent me to tell you we found them and the others are bringing them to your cabin. The four who will ride the Rivers are coming. Let all preparations be made.

A Friend of a Friend


From the memories of Thomas, Jacker:

I could not believe I had been so blind. I had been so intent upon our discussions that I had not been paying proper attention to the world through which we walked. I did not see the Squat war party till they were nearly on us. There were perhaps a dozen of them, all on the long legged horses of the plains and all carrying sharp, long lances that made such horses deadly in melee. Cursing, I yanked out my blade and barked at the others to fall into a circle. Bartholomew and Elias stood there blinking, and I had to yell at them again before they fell in. It is always bad to get too deeply into the River, even if just in conversation — it distracts. When they realized we had seen them the Squats stopped their advance. I took advantage of the situation by starting the deep breathing, the controlled and set motions that would focus my mind into the patterns of Battle. With my sword cutting air in front of me I did my best to keep some small part of my mind on the Squats, in case they charged. It is not an easy thing to do. Battle takes up all of one's mind and body, leading to the void where nothing else matters.

As soon as I began my kata, the Squats started yelling, waving spears and wheeling on their horses — retreating a ways up the hill. I did not let it distract me. Nothing can be allowed to distract you when you are wielding Synthesis, such is the road to darkness. I kept focusing, and felt some small satisfaction in their increasing agitation. They must have had experience with a Joanite warrior in the past, and had been bitten hard enough that they had learned to be wary of our arts. I focused on the tip of my sword, watching it cut at the air, imagining it cutting into their flesh. Just as everything was starting to fall into place, just as the silence of Battle was falling over my mind, Lashim spoke from Maire's mouth. Every time he did that it cut into my heart like a knife. I hated it, and I hated him for it. I nearly lost the motions of Battle, and felt my spirit and mind bend like a bow pulled too far. Cursing I focused all my will, and managed to keep things from falling apart, completing the kata with an ungainly haste.

Once done I was able to listen to Elias and Lashim speaking. Elias' word-images were questions of certainty, and the ghost replied, "Well, I haven't ever talked to these particular ones, but I've conversed with the dead variety. They're a friendly enough sort if you know how to talk to them; I'm sure we can come to terms."

They all looked to me. I looked to the Squats, sitting more calmly on their steeds now — watching me. "All right. Call to them — but I will keep my sword out." I had the silence of Battle in my mind, and was unwilling to release it. Synthesis is a drug of its own in that way, an addiction that cannot be shaken.




On the Back of the Wind

From the memories of Thomas, Jacker:

Maire walked out and greeted the Squats in their own tongue. I felt another flash of anger at Lashim endangering her so, but I held my ground and my tongue. When he called to them they called back quickly, and after only a few minutes of talking they slung their spears alongside their saddles and rode forward calmly, smiles creasing their dark faces. One of them pointed at me repeatedly as they came forward, and without Lashim needing to translate I knew his point. I put my sword away, letting the last vestiges of Battle drift off of me like a virgin shedding her clothes. The Squats came fully forward, talking with Lashim in excited voices. Slowly I realized that I could understand parts of their speech, could make out the basics of their conversation. Lashim was telling them that we were "Walkers as you are Riders, and we know of the Spirits." I couldn't make out exactly what he meant, but it reassured the Squats. After not too long they swung down from their saddles and came to embrace us like brothers.

After that first meeting they brought extra horses that they had left hidden behind the hill, and offered to let us ride with them to their camp. Lashim told us that we should accept, as they would help speed us and keep us safe. Everyone else agreed quickly, so I had no choice but to follow along. I took a spirited stallion, knowing I could handle it. One does not become a Templar without knowing how to ride, after all. Through Lashim the Squats told me, with a deep solemnity, as though introducing me to their mother, that my horse was named Wind. I smiled and pretended that I understood. Naming a horse I can grasp, but not putting such importance upon the name. Elias, Bartholomew and Maire we gave gentle geldings too, named Grass, Pinnate and Turtle. Elias fell off Turtle twice while trying to mount. The Squats nearly died laughing while they watched him. Once we got Elias onto his horse we rode off at a fair pace. Though I was comfortable enough on my horse the Squats seemed born to theirs — almost as if they were one being with their mount. I could not help but envy them that grace.



Speaking of Spirits

From the memories of Thomas, Jacker:

As we rode, the leader of the Squat band approached me. His men were busy trying to keep Elias on his horse — with little success. I was starting to feel bad for Elias, as he couldn't ride more than the distance of an arrow's flight without falling. I left him to the Squats. They seemed to know what they were doing.

At first I did not realize the leader, whose name I found out was Cloud, was speaking to me. He had to hit my shoulder to get my attention. He spoke quickly at me, seeming upset, so I pulled back my hair to show him that I had no ears. That calmed him, and he spoke more slowly — looking directly at me as he did. It was hard to read his lips, as he spoke only a smattering of Tribal, and I only a few words of his language. Eventually, however, we worked out a rhythm that let us communicate. He asked me first if I was a Shaman. I shook my head and told him no, then pointed to Maire and said that she was. He thought on that for several moments, then looked to me and said, "But you have spirits that come to your sword. How do you know their names if you are not a Shaman?"

"I have no spirits that come to my sword." I said, not grasping what he was driving at. "My own spirit guides my sword — none other." Trying to communicate with him was difficult: because I could not hear his soul in my mind, or see the images of his thoughts as I did with my brother and sister Ferrymen, he did not seem real. It was as though they were all that was fully real in my life, and the rest of the world just a silent shadow.

He thought about that in silence. Elias fell off his horse again and landed on his head. After we made sure he was all right, Cloud asked me again. "What is the name of your sword? Did you bind it or did your Shaman bind it for you?"

I am a slow man sometimes, but I finally realized what he was asking about. He wanted to know about Battle, about Synthesis, but did not understand that I did not deal with spirits to touch the River. "Neither. My sword has no name. It has

no spirits that guide it. I guide my sword with my own spirit. My own spirit is the only one that I need to touch the River."

He looked at me with big eyes at that, and moved his horse a little bit farther away from me. After a time he nodded, "I understand. You are a spirit yourself. You wear a human skin to please the Shaman." At that point I gave up. I realized that the difficulties of our languages were nothing compared to the separations in the way we saw the River. I did not understand his use of names and spirits, and he could not understand that I touched upon the River directly. I told him that I could not explain it well, and that he should speak to Elias, who knew more than I of such matters.

Friend, Hear Me

Cloud tells his story over the campfire:

The small, silent one must have been drunk; perhaps that was why he was so quiet! He fell off his horse more times than I could count, and looked confused each time it happened. You could tell by the way he looked at his horse's back that he was sure he was missing something simple, that if us Squats could do something, surely he could master it in a heartbeat! Finally I rode over to his horse and cooed to it, lifting her head up to see me.

I crooned to the horse, rocked back and forth to keep time and her attention. I sang, "Help this funny little one, see that he stays astride you. Do not let him slip and fall, do not let him come to the ground again. Help him so he does not crack his funny little skull, help him until we come to Stone's cabin." I showed the horse the fetish of the Riders, the sign of Tanglemane running beneath Mountain, and pointed to our honored horse spirit who protects and provides for us, his favored people. The mare whinnied and tossed her mane, nodding to me, and I rode on. The silent one did not fall again. I caught him looking to me later that day, that same confused look on his face, like he was still missing something simple. I put on the stone face and did not laugh; that would be bad hospitality. I had to ride up ahead and scout the trail three times, riding far enough that I could laugh until my sides hurt. These River-Riders: what do they know of the Rivers, Great or small? They cannot even speak to a horse; how can they speak to Little River, let alone father Mountain?

The Stone that Speaks

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

We rode the damnable horses for a little less than a week, traveling ever further north and higher up the mountainside. Eventually we came upon an encampment nestled between two high ridges, a pocket of verdant green amidst gray rock. Unlike the other camps we had passed, this was no temporary affair. There were a few tents around the outskirts, but the heart of the camp was all wooden cabins. The air was thick with the smoke of cook-fires, and I realized how long it had been since I had sat at a table, if only to have a simple meal. High up at the lip of the fertile valley was a cabin no larger than the others, built at the line where the advance of trees was halted by bare rock. Our guides took us there and called out in their own language. The deer pelt that

4. The Dread Voyage



Stone, Riders-with-Spirits Shaman

Crooked and bent but still hard and strong, Stone is the pre-eminent shaman of the Cult of Mountain among the Riders-with-Spirits. He is old and ancient like the Mountain he worships, possessing a keen insight into human motivations and idiosyncrasies. Accustomed to the awe and respect he receives from the Riders, his interactions with Tribals and Fallen usually twist into a bizarre mix of misunderstanding and browbeating.

While neither Mountain nor Little River have confided in him, he has heard in their voices a creeping, growing weakness, and he knows there is something wrong. This knowledge has woken him up in a cold sweat, and the nightmares of such a powerful Dreamer have begun to manifest as problems in the Rider's camp. Stone has been considering creating a hermitage on Mountain's peak, but has put his plans on hold in the hopes that the Ferrymen Little River told him were coming might be able to ease his mind.

Highlights: Inscrutable, harsh and wise


Attributes: AGI -1, APP -2, BLD -2, FIT -2, KNO +3, PSY +4, WIL +2

Skills: Dreaming 4/+4, Human Perception 2/+4, Lore (River of Dream) 3/+3, Lore (Spirits) 3/+3, Riding 2/-1, Ritual 3/+3

4. The Dread Voyage

hung over the door was drawn aside, and an old man stepped out and squinted into the sunlight. "I recognize that man," came Lashim's voice from behind me. "I knew him in life — some. . . ninety years ago."

A smile split the ancient man's face, and he raised his arms in greetings. "Friends!" he shouted in our language, "The Ferrymen, the River Riders, you have come as Mountain's Daughter said!" He called each of us by name, stepping forward to clasp our hands and draw us to the ground. His own hands were callused and hard, and the muscles on his arm twisted like veins of ore. His whole bearing seemed to speak of power and immutability, and when he told us his name, "Stone, servant of Mountain," I wondered if his Name had made his body like rock. Then I corrected myself, knowing that outside of the Nation, no one knew their Names. Stone invited us into his cabin, pulling our arms towards the door and wheedling with us to follow. "Come, come share a meal with me," he said, brilliant smile still cutting his face in half. "Together we can speak of things hidden and things lost, things yet to be found."



Dreams of the Land

Stone, servant of Mountain, speaks:

You have come far, but you will go farther yet; you think your journey is complete but I tell you — you are only now about to take the first step. I know of your power; Mountain has told me of it, telling me to give you all respect and honor. He has told me to tell you these things, but I tell you something more. I am powerless before your might, but I tell you that you are stupid, blind and foolish, ignorant of powers greater than yourselves and oblivious to the great workings about you. Sit down, young one. I am not done talking to you yet.

Dream answers your call and you are mighty because of this, but there are spirits so ancient and magnificent that your power is as nothing to them. You and your Fatimas might wage war with the Beasts on the very skin of these vast powers and they would not notice your antics. Even Big River, whom you swim in and live in, only moves when you dip your hands into her, and still she flows on around you. You live among spirits and dreams and yet you ignore them; when will the powerful Dreamers from the south learn of the yet more powerful masters of the Spirit World?

Let me teach you of Mountain and his daughter, Little River. Let me tell you of the choirs of spirits who guide the Riders. We live in the world of earth and body, and yet the spirits of the other world walk among us. It was always this way, even though Mankind forgot the spirits for a time. The Beasts changed that, coming and enslaving you and casting out the rest. While they tortured and changed you, they hunted us; in our desperation we turned to the old spirits our fathers had forgotten. They taught us to ride horses faster than Z'bri, showed us the secret hiding places among Mountain's feet. Little River taught us to Dream again, and introduced us to yet more spirits, powers who teach and defend those who give them honor. A Rider-With-Spirits is never lost, for he only asks the spirits of the air to tell him which direction and how far off Mountain is; all spirits can see Mountain, for he is great enough to reach the sky.

For what reason have you been brought to us? An odd question! Your ghost-guide leads you to seek for a man, a spirit, perhaps a myth; who can be of more help to you than the spirits which are this Nomad's sometimes-cousins? You think a man like me knows where the Nomads are? How foolish can you be?



A Request

From the memory of Bartholomew the Child:

As Stone chuckled at us, the blood rose in my cheeks, and I fought to keep my words from tumbling rashly from my mouth to the old man's ears. Taking a deep breath, I said, "No, Servant of Mountain, we are not so foolish as to believe that any living man or woman knows where the last Nomads are. If that were so, we would not seek spiritual assistance in this. You are wise in ways of dreaming that we have never before seen or considered. These great spirits you speak of, surely they would know of the Nomads? For they too, were wise in the ways of spirits, far more than we. These spirit-cousins of which you speak, would you be willing to help us contact them, to see if they can help us on our quest?"

I held my breath while the old man considered his answer. "I do not know if Mountain will help you," he said, "for he is old and removed from the world of flesh." He eyed me with the gaze of a shrewd trader about to get the best of a deal. "I will help you though, and call to the spirits, for a price. I will help you for a future claim."

It took a moment before his meaning was clear, and I glanced at the others around me. A future claim, with no limits set on it. . . we would owe him whatever he would ask of us in the future, as little as a shared meal, or as great as our very lives. It was Maire who first nodded to me. Thomas came next, then Elias, with a worried frown crossing his brow. "We accept your offer," I said, feeling a tingling pull at the back of my eyes, a trickle of fear down my spine at what this old man might ask of us in the future.

Stone smiled. "Then we will work together to call to the spirits."

Calling to Mountain

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

The next day we ascended the mountain, swathed in furs and carrying chopped wood on our backs. There were no trees beyond Stone's cabin, and we passed through a world composed only of granite, snow and ice. We traveled three days, each day more difficult, the trail steeper and our stomachs emptier. When we reached the summit, Stone led us into a rocky chasm no wider than the span of Thomas' arms. The wind whipped through the grotto and the small fire we built in its center gave no warmth. Dizzy with fasting, we sat in a circle and began to chant, sending Stone into the River of Dream.

We could see Stone's progress in the flickering flames of the campfire; it seemed a hazy, half-realized world from the outside, but the old shaman himself was another matter. Tall and strong, his hair a raven black it could not have truly been in tens of years, he ran across hills and plains, forded rivers and still continued on. His strength and speed were unmatched by anything I had seen before, and I marveled at his power. I realized once again how little I knew of the River of Dream; compared to this man I crawled on hands and knees when I Dreamt. Remembering his account of the spirits he knew, I trembled to think what a man of his power would revere with such awe.



Mountain

Ancient beyond human understanding, Mountain remembers the dawn of time, and knows secrets that were lost before the World Before was. All his power, however, cannot cure the sickness that lies in his own heart. For most of his life Mountain has slept, not noticing the world of Flesh, which all seemed unreal to his ancient mind.

There is little that can stir Mountain from his ancient slumber. Stone and a few other great holy men among the Squats know his True Name, which can sometimes be used to rouse him. In general, however, even that will only draw his attention if Mountain feels that the call is urgent in the great and long lasting ways that seem most real to him.

Highlights: Ancient, Deep, Wise

Attributes: BLD n/a, CRE 0, INF +3, KNO +10, PER -1, PSY +10, WIL +20, STR +20, HEA +15, STA 175, UD/AD 46

Skills and Abilities: Combat Sense 1/0, Hand-to-Hand 3/0, Intimidate 5/+20, Lore (spirit) 8/+10, Mythology 6/+10. Bound to the Land (Mountain cannot leave his domain, not even to journey the River of Dream; all he can do is call out to those who are willing to listen), Dreams of Ancient Days (Mountain can take any number of passengers into the River of Dream), Father of the Land (Mountain has power over all spirits in his domain), Rage of the Peak (Mountain can create earthquakes and mudslides that do from 40 to 100 points of damage), Visions of Days Past (Mountain can remember things that few other spirits remember. His memory of recent events, however, is dim).

The rolling dream landscape fell away, and Stone loped across an endless plain, never tiring, never slowing. At the center of that plain stood a single, lonely mountain, and even I could see the ancient strength within those rocks, the everlasting, immutable wisdom that was Mountain. Stone raised his hands and shouted in his own tongue, offering gifts of greenweed, and supplicating himself before the mighty Rock King.

The Mountain Speaks

From the memories of Thomas, Jacker:


The voice of Mountain was a thunder across the plain, and at the sound my knees went weak and I fell to the ground. Even in my dreams of Joan's voice I had never imagined such a sound. Tera Sheba's voice, when She cast us out, was as nothing compared to this low rumbling echoing through my veins. It shook me through my bones, it made me see how small I was upon the face of the vast Earth. At the same time, however, it made me feel whole, made me feel a part of something greater than I was — for though the voice was as vast as the sky, it spoke my name, and in that voice I felt my own worth.

"Stand Thomas, stand Maire." The voice rumbled through the ground. "I do not wish your worship." I forced myself to my feet, and the voice spoke again, flashing through the sky. "I have watched you, I have seen your pain and your quest. I have been waiting for you for some time already." I wondered what time was to Mountain, and pondered at what it must mean that so old and great a spirit felt that it had been waiting for us for any length of time. I think that is when I began to suspect what lay ahead of us, the true scope of what we were trying to do. Mountain had waited for us.

"I will give you the help you seek, for so it was ordained before even I was born." My soul wanted to cry out at those words. "You may find that which you seek, but never will you do so in the shallow, hard world in which you now walk. If you wish to find the true path you must take your flesh, your body, into the World Between. On the River you must sail as Flesh."

My mouth was dry; my heart was pounding. What Mountain commanded was impossible — no one could enter the River of Dream in the flesh. The Fatimas alone did that, and only because their whole being, body and soul, was consecrated to the Goddess. I did not think even they could bring a mere human bodily into the River. Even if it were done, what would it mean for those who walked that path — to be of flesh in a world of dreams? Mountain must have known my doubt, and he said. "My Daughter, Little River, will aid you. She will take you upon her currents, and bring you beyond the Veil. You will leave the shallow world behind, and will find things beyond which you have dreamed. Go now. Stone will aid you, and help you to prepare. When all is ready Little River will come." With that we went, led by Stone across spaces greater than imagining.



Stone's Price

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

Stone stood, uncertain on mortal feet, and stepped over to a small hole in the rock wall, drawing out a pair of canteens and a handful of jerky wrapped in leaves. Warning us not to eat or drink too much, he sat back down and added wood to the guttering fire. "Mountain's Daughter will help you, but you will need a boat so that she can reach you. I will help build you this boat, but you must help me and my tribe in return. A boat to carry you will be a great undertaking, and will require lumber and other resources of my tribe; likewise, the service I ask of you is a great undertaking, and will require all of your skill and power."

"To the south and west of here there stands a Z'bri stronghold known by men as Rhanto," Stone explained. "My tribe moves with the weather and the seasons; every autumn when we pass near their domain we are attacked. Once we could fight them off, and our young men almost looked forward to their chance of gaining honor in battle.

"In recent years, the ranks of beasts have fought behind an infernal master, an abomination created by the Beasts. It stalks the River of Dream, slaying our spirit brothers and hunting our women in their dreams. I ask you to travel first to this monster's citadel and slay him, so that the Riders-With-Spirits can roam free again."

Thomas spoke before the rest of us had a chance to even consider the proposal, accepting the terms without hesitation and with eyes blazing with zeal. Reluctantly, I nodded in assent with the others, knowing that the Jacker's bloodlust would not let us decline. I remember thinking that Thomas asked for so little and gave so much; surely we could indulge him this once. Certainly four powerful Dreamers, one of them an ex-Templar, could dispatch some Z'bri plaything.





Little River, Mountain's Daughter:

Little River is the daughter of Mountain, a small spring birthed from his side who collects the melting waters of the snow that crowns his peak, and then runs down his flanks and across the land below. Though she is not the largest or most powerful River spirit, she is potent and very friendly to humanity. She can take the forms either of a beautiful nymph or a river of clean and silver water which runs in any direction that she chooses. Unlike most river spirits, she is not bound to follow the course of a physical river, for she has no physical form. Little River is a creature of Dream and Spirit, and is one of the few pure and unspoiled things left on the earth.

Highlights: Beautiful, kind, ever moving

Attributes: CRE +2, INF +3, KNO +3, PER +1, PSY +2, WIL +5, STR +5, HEA +2, STA 60, ULD/AD 10.

Skills and Abilities: Combat Sense 2/+1, Dodge 1/+2, Hand-to-Hand 2/+2, Law 1/+3, Lore (spirit) 3/+3, Lore (Outlands) 2/+3, Mythology 1/+3, Notice 2/+1.

Upon My Waters (If a specially consecrated and prepared ship is made, Little River may carry it into the Dreaming physically, as though the boat were a Shallow.) Touch the River (May carry up to 5 passengers in her waters into the River of Dream, or may send dreams to Characters any distance away), Water of Life (May heal any one wound of a Character who bathes in her waters, or may make the Character immune to disease for a full year).

The Flying Dutchman

From the words of Cloud, Squat Warleader:

None of us knew what the strangers had spoken with Stone about. None of us dared to ask. There are things best left unknown and untouched. That is one of life's hard lessons, one that kills those who do not learn. None of us asked, none of them told, and so I never knew. I might have asked Thomas. I liked him, there was a strength about him that reminded me of my father. He was a hard one, but not mean or loud in the way of some hard men. But every time I tried to walk towards him I would feel fear clenching my stomach. What was I to say to him? He was a Shaman at the least, and more likely he was a great spirit who only took the image of a human to walk among us. I didn't think that he would harm me, but other spirits that knew him might. We live and die by the spirits' wrath, and I would not tempt their anger. Whatever Thomas was, his destiny was terrible, and I wanted no part of it.

Whatever it was that they spoke of, the day after they came off the mountain they set about building a boat. Many of my brothers decided that they were touched by the spirits to madness, for there were no large bodies of water within 50 miles. I wasn't sure they were mad, but I was still worried by it. So I watched them work from a distance, and worried about what it meant. The woman, Maire, and the spirit that lived in her mouth, directed the building of the boat. I do not know what powerful medicine she used, but the boat they built was remarkable. It was made with the wood of twenty trees, which they cut down and shaped into boards and masts, and had sails made of the hides of a dozen aurochs. It was like a boat I had once seen the Novohuron use on the Lakes, but even more imposing. I think it may have been all the ropes, all the levers and clever pulleys that they built to help them raise and lower the sails. I heard Thomas several times question the boat, thinking it impossible that so small a group could control such a large vessel. The spirit in Maire's mouth, however, laughed and told him to have some trust.

When the body of the boat was finished, Stone came to help them bind its spirit. He and Elias carved the whole of the boat, every last inch, with a thousand runes and the names of every spirit that Stone and that strange, silent man knew. It took them twice as long to bind the spirit as it had taken to build the body. I did not even dare watch that part, and stayed away from camp while they worked. When everything was finished the spirit in the Shaman's mouth named the boat "The Flying Dutchman" and laughed. No one else did, and I was left wondering what the name meant.

The Call

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

The boat was placed in the center of a wide, circular clearing, and the four of us climbed inside as Stone gathered his tribe together. Arrayed out under the trees that ringed around us, men and horses both were decorated with paint and feathers, magnificent in their pageantry. They began chanting, a long slow song that gained speed as it accumulated singers; Bartholomew explained that the chant brought the tribe together to begin the ritual.

Soon we could not see the forest behind the Squats and their horses, and the chant changed, a few select voices coming to the fore while the rest of the tribe sang the chorus and prepared the horses. Bartholomew struggled to translate, paraphrasing through Inspiration. They told the story of Mountain and his daughter, reminding them both of the gifts and honor the tribe had given them. They called on Mountain to see the Ferryman who had come as he had foretold, and asked that he send his daughter to see us on our way. Mounted Squats circled around us, their horses dancing underneath them. Individual horses fell out of the stately ring, racing through the space between the circle of singers and our boat, leaping in the air as their riders shouted and waved their weapons.

Trails of smoke followed lazily after the pipes that passed from hand to hand, and a great gray cloud began to accumulate over the singing, chanting, clapping squats. Stone went along the circle, stopping and taking the outstretched hand of every squat, and with a quick slash of his stone knife opening a red gash in their palm. After him followed a snowy white horse; each bloodied hand reached forward and left their mark on its side, its neck, and its haunches. By the time the shaman had traversed half the circle, the horse was pink with blood; when the sun set and Stone completed his orbit the horse was unrelieved red.

Points of firelight kindled all along the circle, and Stone rode on the red horse with a smoking pipe in one hand and a spear in the other. He guided the horse with his knees, shouting into the sky and pulling off the pipe. Again the old man raced along the rows of squats, whipping them into a fury of chanting and clapping, striking spears to shields to keep time. The eastern horizon glowed, and the morning star appeared over the trees; Stone rode up to the boat, naked skin coated with sweat, horse foaming at the mouth. The shaman handed Bartholomew the pipe, indicating that we should pass it around the boat, and then his horse skipped away again, and the squats roared with renewed song.

The Answer

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

At first I could not tell if the far-off sighing was the wind in the trees or just some sound in the Squat chants, but as the Dawn Star lifted into the sky the rushing background intensified. Dream began to intrude on the haze of smoke that hung about the meadow, blurring the corners of my vision. I looked to my cellmates and saw that they could feel it, too. When Dreaming, it is the Dreamer who dives into the River; this time the River was coming to us, threatening in its immensity and danger, swelling like a wave ready to capsize and drown us in Dream. I sat down, hard.

The boat shifted underneath us, rolling softly into the soil of the meadow. I looked out at the Squats, still deep in their ritual but fading away into the mist and smoke. The roar of their voices melted into the roar of wind and water, and the boat jerked forward, seeming to come unfastened from the ground. A cool, moist touch traced my cheek, and in the swirls of mist that surrounded us I thought I saw a face. Little River was here. The fog around did not fade away, but coalesced into a tide of rushing water. Bartholomew suddenly shouted, "Rocks!" and leapt to the tiller. Despite myself I laughed and struggled across the tipping boat to help him. I had not expected the boat to be anything more than metaphor, much like the 'Big River' the squats used to refer to the River of Dream. I had forgotten that within the River, metaphors are as real as anything else; because we call the place between Flesh and Spirit the River of Dream, the River will have rocks.





Into the Melting Realm

From the memory of Bartholomew the Child:

After the tumultuous roaring of the water settled, I had a chance to look around us to see where we are. It was the same valley that Stone's people live in, except that it wasn't. Stone's land was dry almost to the point of being arid, and the land about us now was green and bright. It is the river, of course. There is no river through Stone's valley as there is here. Beyond the confines of our boat I can see the river that carries us. There is a haziness to her, giving the impression of a lovely young woman. Mountain's daughter, he said.

There is a haziness to everything here, as if the physical reality of things within the River is blurred by the spiritual reality, overlapping chalk drawings of forms and beings. No, that is not quite right. In the World of the Flesh, the spiritual often appears as shadows of the physical. In this place, it feels almost the opposite. Our physical selves are here, but there is so much more to our spirits. It is like seeing with new eyes, experiencing everything around me as if I have been reborn.

I have never felt anything like this. It has a warmth similar to intense use of Synthesis, but it is not the same. There is an exhilarating sense of . . . of connection, of being one with our surroundings. At the same time, it is dizzying almost to the point of nausea. My senses are overwhelmed; trying to process what part of the mind insists is not really there. The fully waking part of me insists that this river that bears our boat does not exist, cannot exist, and yet my body feels the sensation of the boat rocking beneath my feet. There is little concrete here for the senses to hold on to, with each thing seeming to melt into every other thing. My body feels almost sluggish, trying to adapt to the more fluid spiritual aspect surrounding it. It is like drowning in air. It is the most marvelously frightening thing I have ever known.



The Second Beside Me

From the dream-soaked thoughts of Maire Grey:

The first thing I become aware of is that the pressure of another being within my mind is lessened. I can feel the shifting beneath my feet that tells me our boat has been cast adrift on a river, and that the river is within the River, to judge by the feel about me. What has happened doesn't become clear until I hear Thomas breathe, "You."

"Thomas," I say, hearing my voice twinned in Lashim's voice, Lashim, who now stands at my side, a physically present being. "Thomas, it's all right." My voice speaks those words, but they do not come from my mind. Rather they are an echo of Lashim's words, just as he echoed mine. The jawbone, it seems, still connects us, even though we are two instead of one.

"Stop using her voice!" I can hear Thomas's teeth grinding from where I stand and I step toward him. As I move, I realize that the pressure of Lashim in my mind has not lessened so much as shifted to encompass my whole body, giving me a constant low-grade awareness of him moving alongside me as I move. I know, without being able to see, that we are occasionally mirroring our movements as well as our words, although the binding there is not quite so strong.

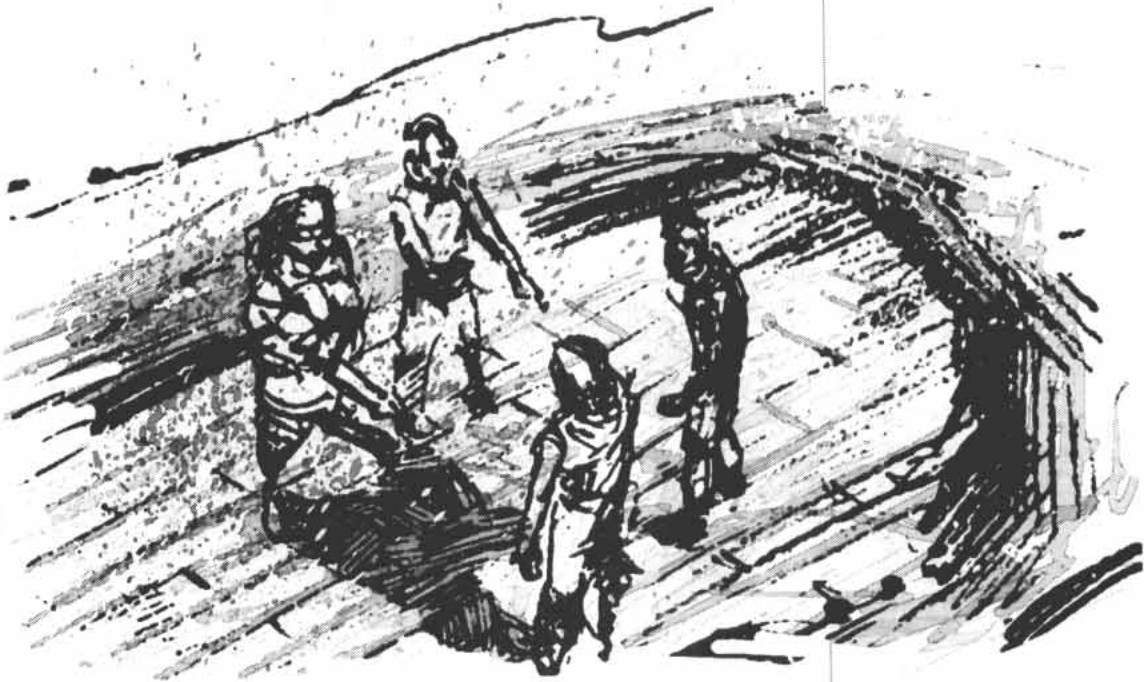


"Thomas." This time the words are my own, with Lashim's voice behind them. "Lashim is still bound to my life, just as he was in the world of flesh. We are still one, but here, in this place, one thing may be seen as two." Looking down, I see that Thomas and I cast a single shadow, one form and one being. Pointing towards it, I say softly, "And two may be seen as one. Lashim and I are one in body in the world of the flesh, just as you and I are one in spirit, Thomas. Here, in this world between, neither flesh nor spirit alone, I am tied to you both. Reality is as water here, Thomas. It ebbs between flesh and spirit, flowing between the two in constant motion."

The Guide

Stone's Last Words to the Ferryman:

Hare bless your steps! Otter guide your travel! Give bread to the water of Little River, and she will speed you on your way! Do not forget your promise to dispatch the war-hound of the Beasts so that our travels will be safe, as well! Follow this dove; it will fly before your ship and show you the way down Big River to where he lurks. The monster's name is Elatha, and he walks the River of Dream as well as on the land. His presence in the River is an abomination, an affront to both worlds. Attack him there, where he is weakest, where he is still uncertain. Joshua guide your sword!



Chapter Five: Dreams of Fire

The Lightbringers speak about peace and unity, about the dreams that they have of the time when all are one and all can see eye to eye. They say their dreams come from the One Goddess, that she leads them towards peace and understanding. I have to wonder then, when I dream of screams and fire, of men and beasts alike perishing under my blade — do my dreams come from the Seed? How different are my dreams from those of the beasts, and how different does that make them from me? While Lightbringers dream of peace, I dream of fire. The implications haunt me.

— Mek, Jacker



The Wall

From the story told by Alisha, Doomsayer Hag:

"The Dove lead them southward for two days. Little River wound always below, a ribbon of water that should not have been deep enough to let their boat pass — but pass they did, with the speed of the wind. With sails always full, The Flying Dutchman sped through the rippling world, up mountains, across plains, and even through the sky. In that place there was no separation of things, and one thing was another.

"On the third day they first saw the Wall. At first it was a brightness on the horizon, an alien light. Soon it stretched out like a serpent across the land — a wall of flame that howled high into the sky with spectral fingers that clawed at clouds.

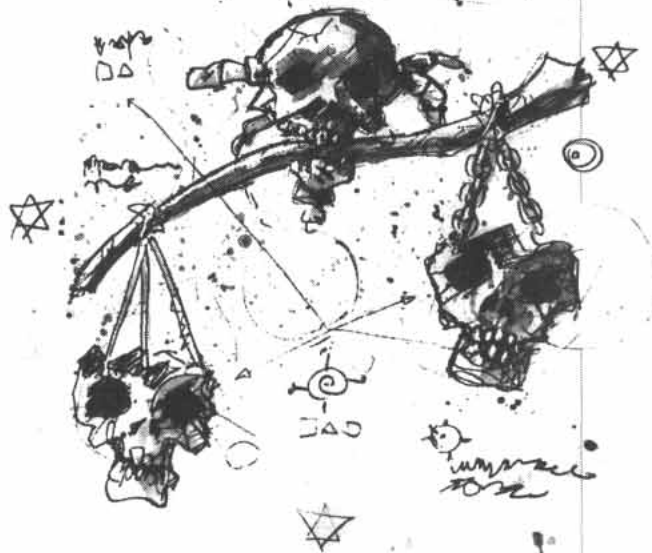
"Ahead of them flew the Dove. Its white body sped towards the Wall, but stopped before crossing over. Three times it circled, then flew back to the Dutchman. There it landed upon the prow of that cursed ship, watching with ancient eyes."

For Thy Heart

The words of Thomas, Jacker:

We must go through that wall, we must go to the other side and find the beasts who have built it and cut their spirits from their flesh! Can you not hear it? I can, though my ears are burnt away. Those are souls screaming in that fire, the smoke is their essence bleeding away from them — destroying them not just now but for ever and eternity. That is how our ancestors screamed in the camps. I know those screams, they haunt my dreams and my waking mind. Our mother's mothers died screaming like that, and none would lift a finger to help them. Even today we hide and whimper with fear while the screams go on. Are we so little? Are we so hollow that we dishonor our ancestors with cowardice?

I do not know how they have done it, to bind spirits into that fire as fuel — but I can see the hollow eyes, the screaming mouths in the shape of the flames. It makes my heart cry out for vengeance. We know that the Z'bri can do that — that they can bind souls to the world. I have been into the lands of the H'l Kar, and have seen what they do. None of you have. What that wall represents is not just pain, but eternal pain. It represents the sundering of spirit and will, the separation of the soul from the dreams that make it free. This is what the beasts would do to us all; burn us forever. If you fall to their hands you never rise up again; they make us not just slaves, but thralls eternal. Come now, let us put away fear. Let us go through that wall and find what has set the fire. Let us set the screaming souls free, so that they — and we — are not damned forever.






Voice of Reason

Maire tries to calm her lover:

I am no coward, Thomas. Neither am I a fool. Look there. The spirit sent to guide us does not cross the wall, either because it cannot or it will not. Our place is to remain here — for now. Thomas, Thomas, I know what our ancestors suffered. Have I not felt and heard and seen the same things as you, through stories and rituals we have shared? I was born of the Tribe of Mothers. I know well what debt we owe to those who suffered and died so that we might be free.

But Thomas, you who come from the Warrior's Tribe, tell me: when you face a foe that possesses infinitely greater strength, do you run screaming into the front, howling for blood as you squander what strength your army does have? Or do you pause, and plan? Do you place your strength carefully, to gain the greatest good? Do you let the enemy come to you, so that you may face it on your terms? Thomas, you cannot win this war if you die in a pointless, angry gesture. We already know the enemy is coming to us. Stone told us that it would come from that wall, the one you hate so much, the one that has filled my dreams since I was a child. . . We know it is coming. Let us wait here for it, ready to strike hard and fast when it finally steps from beyond that cursed wall. We will be waiting for it, and together we will take back what it has stolen from us and from our ancestors.



Words of Warning

The memories of Thomas, Jacker:

I did not like Maire's words, I did not like the fear that I saw in everyone else's eyes, but there was nothing I could do about it. Without them I would be unable to pass the wall, much less bring an end to whatever was causing it. I let my protests and demands fall silent, and put the anger from my mind. In order to keep the madness at bay I began to caution the others about what we would face. None of them had ever faced the Z'bri in combat before, and I knew it would be a hard trial upon them.

"You have all heard that Synthesis does not work well on Z'bri. That is only half the truth. A Z'bri fouls and twists the world about them. If you try to bring Dream through you and into this world when you are close to them, it shreds in your hands like old linen pulled too hard. The Z'bri are the antithesis of Dream, and their very being rends the spirit and the flesh apart, leaving you unable to bring your Synthesis to bear. Worse, when a Z'bri comes near, you start to forget your spirit, start to forget you are human. Your body wishes to take over, to run and howl and murder as a wild beast does — without trace of heart or spirit to guide you.

"That is why you must remain calm near the Z'bri. If you slip, if you lose hold of your spirit, your strength, for just a moment, they can turn you into a beast. Not only that, they gain power when you fall. Where our Synthesis joins us and lifts us, their Sundering takes a toll on them. It is not Dream that they wield, but the Seed. Anything that makes them feel more physical, more alive, more burning and devouringly real increases their power. Anything that brings the Seed closer to dominance in our world makes them stronger. Our own anger and lust releases the Seed, and so feeds their power. They take strength from the obsession with the flesh and the flesh alone, the denial of spirit that thinking only of base pleasure and pain can bring."

Elias spoke then, the images-words moving through my mind. *How does a Z'bri come into the River, if its very being is against the nature of Dream?*

"I do not know, Elias. Everything I know of the Z'bri says that they should not be able to. No Z'bri that I have ever heard of has been able to enter the River. It is against their nature. I think it is something lost to them, a gift that they may once have had but was stripped when they left the One Goddess and fell completely to the perversion of the Seed. They can corrupt the River where it flows about their abodes — the whole River about the H'l Kar, for instance, is rancid

and burning. No one goes there for long without going mad from the ravenous hate and hunger that hangs in the air like a shroud. It is as though any place they live for long enough becomes so twisted that spirit cannot even touch upon it without growing sick. But that is only their taint: their spirits and bodies are not supposed to be able to enter the River."

Maire spoke next, her voice worried with that edge that meant she was thinking of things larger than ourselves, issues of importance to all life. "If the Z'bri are death to dreams, if they destroy the spirit as you've told us —then would not a Z'bri coming into the River. . . unravel it? Destroy the very ground upon which it walked?"

I thought a moment, and found no good answer. I had seen a boy once, an Agnite, who had crossed the path of a hooded Z'bri. He had dreamed once, had talked about all his hopes and prayers. After the Z'bri he had never dreamed again and just plodded his petty pace from day to day. All I said, however, was "We shall see. Part of me hopes that Stone was wrong — that what walks here is just a spirit corrupted by the Z'bri and not really a Z'bri itself." I hoped for that. But I did not believe it. I watched the spirits dying in the fire, and I was afraid.

Dark Walker

From the Memories of Thomas, Jacker:

After I had spoken with the others, we pulled the Dutchman to the side of the River. I had no desire to endanger our transportation in battle, and had less desire to bring Little River into the presence of Z'bri. For all her power she was pure, but nothing that touches the Z'bri remains pure. All of us are dirty with it, and sometimes it feels like we will never be clean. So we moored the boat on the shore, and gave bread to Little River to let her know that we would soon return. I could not tell what the land looked like in the World of Flesh, but in the River it was badlands, a rolling plain of stunted growth, cracked earth, and broken hopes. Something great had lived here once, and had been killed beyond raising. It made me want to weep as we passed through the terrain, concealing ourselves behind blasted stumps and withered shoots.

Quickly and quietly we moved, finding a slight rise that gave us a good view of the land about us. Despite what Elias often writes of the stupidity of "Jacker Tactics" the truth is we are not stupid. No Jacker who lives long attacks the Beasts head on in raw anger. Such is the path of death. Our ways are watching, scouting, striking from ambush and melting away before the beasts can bring their powers to bear upon us. It is an ancient tradition, and when done for a noble purpose is a noble method. So we went to scout, to observe the monstrosity that Stone had told us of. I planned to track it for at least a day, to learn its habits and methods, before attacking. In battle, however, the best laid plans of men and mice are oft torn asunder. Not long after we had settled into the sparse shade from a broken, twisted rise of ground, the world began to go mad. It came out of nowhere, a sudden berserk fury of the elements. Between one moment and the next the flying force of an approaching storm sang like a dirge across the firmament. In the space of a heartbeat the sky became a sepulcher, a vault of vapors and howling. Above us was the sound of spirits being twisted and racked upon a wheel of pain.



As we stood, astounded, the air seemed to split, sucking the breath from our lungs and blasting the sight from our eyes. Black rain and hail beat us, laced with fire that fell from the heavens to burn our skin and set our hair to blazing. The wind whipped wild about us, tearing at clothes and weapons with cold and clinging fingers that tried to strip our flesh from our bones. It was as though the body of the One, the very earth itself, had gone raw with rage. The entire world about us went mad, and we began to scream. Maire burst out of her cover, beating at her hair with frantic hands. Elias covered himself, hands over head as though he could deny the sudden rage of abused nature. Lashim, the coward, fled into the distance — flying on ghostly wings that our bodies could not follow.

Rage

The raging thoughts of Thomas, Jacker:

When I saw that puling little Keeper ghost, that lying coward who had tricked us out into the middle of this hell and then abandoned us, I felt as though my brain had broken. I could feel the white aneurysm, a paroxysm of hate sunder my reason and my sense from me. I should have realized then, should have been able to fight back. I could not; the hate was so complete and sudden that I was drowned in it before I realized I was being held under the black water of corruption. I leapt from my hiding place, sword already in my hand. I screamed curses, vile words, at Lashim's fleeing back. I raved and spasmed, swinging my sword as though I could cut his pestilent head from his body across all the distance that separated us. I howled like the maddest wolf that ever starved under the horned moon, and I did not care who or what might hear me.

Maire came to me then, her heart yelling to me across the howling of the ill wind. She tried to calm me, tried to give me images of peace, of calm lands and sunny skies. Through the bond we shared I felt words of retreat, her wish to flee this cursed place. I did not listen. I could not listen. I was blood mad, the rancid, salty and soul-compelling taste of the Seed as thick in my mouth as feces and honey. I turned upon her, the woman whom I had loved for more than half of my life, the woman to whom I had dedicated my soul. I turned upon her and I hated her. Her words from before came to me, of her fear of the wall, of her cowardice. She had never loved me as much as I loved her. Then she smiled at me, tentatively, hopefully. It was more than I could bear, and I smashed my gauntleted fist into her head as hard as I could. I howled orgasmically as I felt her scalp split, saw her fall to the ground in a heap — freshly slaughtered meat.

Then Elias leapt on me, the sickening little sneak, and struck me from behind with his dagger. It entered my flesh with red pain, and I shuddered for it. He was not a trained warrior, however, and was unable to strike hard enough to put me down. I turned on my heel and brought my sword down in an overhand arc. The pommel struck his face, and he too fell — burbling bubbles of blood out the wreckage of his mouth and nose. I realized then that only Bartholomew was left, and once I killed him I would be able to drink their hot blood and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look upon it.

Divided We Fall

From the memory of Bartholomew the Child:

The rage was everywhere around us, filling the air with heat and screams, all of the sounds from the Wall amplified and focused into the center of each of us. I felt it pulling at my mind, screaming for blood, for war, for vengeance, blind rage trying to take over. I managed to resist, only to watch, horrified, as Thomas struck down Maire and Elias. Then he turned on me, lips pulled back from his teeth in a bitter snarl. "If you want what's mine, little boy, then come take it!" he screamed, running for me.

Fumbling, I reached out to his mind and found it, wrapping my own around that ball of blind hate to try and soothe his Beast-induced madness. We struggled like that for Goddess knows how long, our minds locked in a dance of fire and ice, both held still with the effort. Then the anger that hung in the air like screams slipped between Thomas and I, twisting the hold I had on his mind.

I tumbled into a nightmare landscape, pulling Thomas with me. There was no reality here, no line between spirit and dream and flesh, and everything I saw before me seemed hungry, ready to rend and tear my spirit from me. The Unity I tried to wield turned in my grasp like a wicked knife. I knew nothing of Thomas; I had no awareness of whether he was alive or dead or if he was killing me even then. Instead, I found myself connected to the souls within the Wall, feeling each intimate detail of their agony imprinting itself on the core of my being. I lived lifetime after lifetime, always dying and being thrown into the Wall of Fire. Screaming, I threw my wracked body at the ground, and knew no more.



Speaking with the Devil

From the story of Alisha, Doomsayer Hag:

They both fell then. Bartholomew struck the ground, a baby dropped to break its ribs upon the floor. Thomas was so full of rage and hate that he could not lie still, but beat his thick head upon a rock until his blood smeared the ground about him and he finally passed into unconsciousness. Thus all the Ferryman, powerful as they may have been, were rendered senseless before their foe even showed his face to them. It had been a trap, of course, something that Thomas was later to reflect upon with bitterness that verged onto self-hatred. The Beast that walked the River had known of the Ferryman's quest, had touched Stone's mind to frame his demand, heard them coming, had watched and waited as they climbed from their boat to find cover. It had waited patiently, and then let the full force of its being loose upon them. Then, when they had defeated themselves, it came and gathered them up.

When they finally awoke they found themselves lying side by side, dressed in garments of purest white. Their hands were doubled upon their breasts, above their heart, as though laid out for an Evan wake. Their horror at their state only increased when they all realized they could not move, could not even speak. All they could manage was to lie still and cold upon the ground, eyes open and staring at the dark and swirling maelstrom above their heads. Though it is not recorded upon the skin, I can only imagine that they must have thought they were dead, that this was the damnation that they had found for themselves. Near behind them was the wailing and howling of damned spirits, the sound of maledictions wrung from the throats of souls consigned to burn forever in flame. It did not take long before they recognized the sound. It was the Wall of Fire, and its ghastly pale light fell upon them. It was a light that illuminated only flaws.

It was Maire who first realized he was there, as he rose up beside her — the demon that even Stone and Mountain had feared. For a single moment he looked like a man, a beautiful man, but a man most mortal nonetheless. Then they saw his eyes, and in those eyes was the center of the maelstrom that shook the world about them. With a long and forked tongue, he licked his lips as he looked down upon them. They knew him in their hearts, and his name burned through their minds with a bitter realization. Maire's terror broke the stillness laid upon her and she screamed. Elatha, lord of fear, laughed to hear it.

5. Dreams of Fire



Elatha: Dreamer, Lord, and Monstrosity

There was once a man whose spirit burned like the sun, the potential of humanity made manifest. His pride caused him to fall and he was corrupted, bound as a serf to one of the Melanis of Rhanto. There was also a Z'bri Lord who gathered like minds around him and experimented upon everything that lived, in order to try to understand the nature of the River and humanity's bond with Dream.

In one glorious experiment, the Lord and the Serf whom he had corrupted were put into a womb together with the Heartstone of one of the Nomads. The power of their souls twisted through the cracks of the universe, grew under the influence of the Nomad's Heart, played upon the flaw of the closed Fold, and rose together as one being — Elatha.

Elatha is a monstrosity. He should not exist. His very being disrupts the River of Dream and further widens the gap between the World of Flesh and the World of Spirit. When he walks the River his corruption spreads, turning the River into a nightmare of storms and pain. Elatha is a living symbol of how wrong the world has become. He is also, however, almost completely immortal and powerful beyond reckoning.

Highlights: God-like power, unnatural, wrong

Eminences: Death, Life, Fury, Conflict and Shadows

Atmosphere: Koleris and Melanis

Aspects: Animation, The Burning, Chaining, Exsanguination, Holding, Inspiration, Shaping, The Shattering


 Fear Not

From the memories of Thomas, Jacker:

I could hear Maire screaming, but could not look about to see her, could not reach out to comfort her. I was as stone still and cold as though dead, and I felt the terror of the Beast that loomed above me twist in my stomach. I have been so afraid in my life that I vomited from sheer terror, but at that moment all those memories seemed like a child's useless worries. I was afraid to the core of everything that I was, and the demon saw it in my eyes.

"Fear not!" He spoke in the twilight dim, and his voice was such that men and goddesses would march to hell for him — or to flee him. "Fear not, brave warrior, for you are about to do the world a service such as few ever have a chance to perform." He walked behind me, between the Wall of Fire and my body, but no shadow fell across me. "You should know the pride of sacrifice, how good and noble it is to die for one's people." He laughed then, and the sound racked me. I could hear him moving things, heard the thump of a drum as it bounced briefly off of something hard. I heard the silk sound of a knife being drawn from a sheath, and realized that he was preparing ritual implements, that he was readying to sacrifice us to that Wall, to burn and scream forever. I pushed against his will with all my being, and still could not move or even speak.

"Your world, our world, is in grave danger, you see." He spoke to us as he laid out his implements of bone and flesh, "There is a great imbalance coming about. When the Old Walkers closed the Fold between the worlds they did not truly realize what they had done. They cut off the paths between the worlds, and made the whole into many separate parts. It is much like a mirror struck with a hammer, shattered shards that are sharp to the touch, and which show only fragments of the image that once was.

"Part of the price of this horrid act was that those who die cannot pass through the Fold, and return to the World of the Spirit where they take their proper place in the balance of life and death. Oh, I know that you have some grinning skull-spirit who claims to guide a few of your kind through that barrier, but the vast majority of humanity dies without that service — assuming the service is truly as it is claimed to be. Souls are damned here, in this decaying realm, never able to return to whence they came.

"These souls, however, are weak things — ephemeral, wingless, broken. Lacking the strength to cross the Fold they also lack the strength to stay long in this place. The currents of the River, the eternal forces of entropy, drag them to the Sea of the Lost. There they are drowned and dragged down, crushed and cursed and churned into a mass of loss and hatred that has no face or form, only endless disintegration of memory and name. That alone would be a pity, for a soul with no name cannot be coaxed to scream, or be brought to return between pleasures to serve its master again. It is worse, however, because the Sea has a weight — an overflowing weight. So many souls are dragged down into its cold, dead depths that it is starting to breach the dikes and shores that hold it back. If that should happen, if so many souls were lost that the Sea burst its bounds, the results would likely destroy us all.

"That is the reason that you must make your sacrifice. You will be bound into this Wall. Here you will burn, and writhe, and scream music for my ears. Most importantly, here you will never end. You will never be swept into the Sea of the Lost, never add the weight of your souls to the mass that threatens to crush us all, and your captivity will thus help to save all the world. You will join all the thousands of others to help stop, if not repair, the damage that the Walkers and your kind together have caused."


 No Peace This Side of Heaven

From the mind of Elatha, Monstrosity:

Though the men fought against the powers that bound them with rare and delicious hatred, it was the woman who managed to free her mouth to speak. Her soul flashed bright rage and her words spat spite at me. It was all I could do not

to laugh, for with all that anger in her I felt that I must love her. "Liar!" She screamed, and I went to kneel at her side. The ground rippled below us, and she was raised up on a barrow mound that erected below her. "You do no good; you do this for the pleasure it brings you!" She tried to spit at me then, but the drool only splattered across her chin.


With one finger I wiped away her fluid, trailing my nail across her lips. Her muscles writhed below her flesh, but still she could not move, only barely managed to force words from her trembling lips. "You and your kind, your twisted logic, your contempt for life — you are what is wrong. You are the reason that the River has gone wrong. Your presence here is an affront to the One, and She withdraws from the world because of you!" She flung words at me like venom, like they would tear my heart from my corpse and strike it against a rock. I slipped my finger into her mouth to silence her, and make her listen for a moment. Her jaws clamped down on my finger, teeth biting down till my blood squirted across her tongue.

"How? How are we what is wrong with your spirit? We did not close the Fold; we did not wish to be trapped in a hell where we could not feel. Do you know what it is like for us here? We cannot *feel* in the bodies we take; it is as though we lived life with leather covering our whole body, dulling all our senses. To my brothers your biting their finger to the bone would only be a dull ache — and an ache is like an orgasm after ages of feeling nothing." I swirled my finger in her mouth, and she stopped biting, letting her jaws unclench. I withdrew my finger, needing to hear the lust and hate in her answer.

"You lie! You came here and took us, you broke it all. It is your fault, for you gave in to the Seed. You let yourselves be corrupted! You are monsters, you are hate and foulness! You are so twisted that the very River vomits at your smell! Look around you, look at how the sky blackens and the earth shudders at your touch!"

I put my finger back into her mouth, and this time she did not bite. I stroked the pad over her teeth, hoping to coax another love nip from her. This time, however, she only clenched her lovely jaw and shuddered as my blood ran across her tongue. "But everyone is corrupted, at least a little. There is nothing which is pure." Her lips pulsed around my finger, my will soaking into her skin, bringing that anger to lust, making her suck upon my intruding flesh. She moaned about my finger and I leaned in, letting my teeth and tongue touch her skin as I spoke. "And as for the shuddering of the earth — perhaps it is not what you think. Perhaps it is the shuddering of a lover." With that I thrust my hand down into her mouth, forcing my finger into the gripping canal of her throat. She thrashed and clenched under me, body rebelling as her chyme gushed up, burning around my finger as she vomited and choked, trying to reject my words and my flesh.





Reflections

"Look at you now, spasming and vomiting and clenching in pain. You could say I do this to you — but you would do it to yourself if I did not. I have seen humans who eat only to vomit it up, then return to their food. You scream in rage at the Wall that I have made to save us all — but you would make it as well, given the chance. I have seen humans herding other humans into ovens, heard the screams as their ashes poured out the chimneystacks. For anger and hate, for the comfort of the beast, you burn each other."

Taking my finger from her mouth I wiped the spew of her belly off of her face, and watched her suck in air desperately. "Even now you fight for it, fight with it. Your rage grows, and your body responds. That is what you are, it is what we are. Humanity and the Z'bri are just two sides of the same eternal coin. All we are is you, and whatever you give to us you really claim for yourself. There is nothing that I or any of my brothers has ever done to one of yours save you dreamed it first. There is nothing we have done that humanity has not done to itself — or to us. We were locked away, slaves in a black cell, for eons beyond your knowing. You did that to us, so we returned a part of the favor."



The Mirror Cracked

She shook again, eyes finally coming back to focus on me. I smiled and she moaned, shivering through the center of her body. "You are the Z'bri, and they are you. Which is why I will rule you both — because I am whole. I am perfect." I pressed my finger back into her mouth, and her throat sealed around it again, helpless. I took a strip of flesh from her body then, peeling it from her thigh and held it up before her face. "This side, the outer flesh, is you and your kind." I turned it so the bloody side faced her, "This is the Z'bri. Two sides, one whole."

I took the strip and gave it a half twist, then brought the ends together and sealed them so that there was no break. "This is me." I ran my finger around the Mobius strip, starting on the white side, and letting it trail all the way around — over flesh and blood both. "I am one side — the whole united into perfect One." I could see the understanding in their eyes then. I smiled as the woman moaned and the men shuddered in fear and hate. "I am not what is breaking the world, lovely. I am what will fix it. For humanity and the Z'bri both — I am destiny."



Ghost of a Chance

From the memories of Thomas Jacker:

I convulsed and pressed, forcing my body against the hold of this demon's will with everything that I had. I brought forth all my love, all my devotion and bravery, and I struggled against the invisible bonds that held me. All that my striving gained me was a slight twitch of my fingers and to roll my head to the side just a bit — taking Maire out of my field of vision. I nearly gave up then. All my vaunted prowess and knowledge had come to nothing, and I knew that we lay there because of my foolishness and failure. I felt the spirit draining out of me, the gulf of despair looming.


I was saved by a flicker of motion behind Elatha's back — something creeping through the rubble of old buildings that stretched out behind him. He was so arrogant and certain that he gloated over Maire without stopping to consider that one of our number had escaped. I tried to keep my eyes from betraying the movement, tried to keep my body or aura from telling the demon that I had felt a sudden surge of hope in my heart almost as terrible as my shame had been. Amid the rubble, carrying my sword in his hand, Lashim approached the demon. Alone and untrained in the use of the weapon he came to aid us, to save us, though he had to sense the dreadful power. The man I had hated, whom I had cursed and called coward, came to the gates of hell to save me and those that I loved.

I watched as he moved, motions jerky with fear, out from his cover and began to move faster — charging towards the demon's back. I closed my eyes then, gathering my focus into my heart. I was not helpless; I was not about to die. In my mind I saw the burning image of the stained glass window that I had used to pray, before, and for the first time since my fall I called to Joan in the silence of my heart.

I heard the sudden roar of rage and pain as Lashim struck, and in that moment I uncoiled from the deeps of my heart. In one focused, controlled surge I burst upwards. The bonds that held me shattered, and Elatha staggered back, bleeding across his back and hands pressed against his head as I snapped his control. I could feel Elias and Maire moving even as I did, Bartholomew just a second behind.

Elatha's eyes came back down to us, and he howled in hatred. He charged towards us, Lashim the only barrier between. That brave ghost turned, and with an underhand toss threw my sword to me — knowing he could not use it to stop the demon. As my blade returned to my hand, caught out of the air, Elatha's claws hooked into Lashim's ghostly soul and rent him in twain. Our companion of so many miles never even had a chance to scream before Elatha threw his remains into the fire. He died there to save us, sacrificed for those he had once considered savages. My mind went blank, and Battle came into my heart.





Joining the Sundered

From the story told by Alisha, Doomsayer Hag:

The battle that followed was as terrible as it was short. Thomas was as mad with righteous fury as he had been mad with hatred when Elatha first came upon them. He had always been powerful in the arts of Synthesis and Battle, as you well know, but now he was transformed. In the River of Dream many of the limitations of the flesh are removed, and in that place Synthesis is not the same as it is on this side of the veil. Here you must stretch and reach, must let part of your mind and soul drift into that realm, and then bring a bit of it back to this place. That is the greatest and most difficult task of Synthesis. But there, in the world of dreams and motion, there was no need to reach. The very air and land rose up to Thomas's call, and his power grew beyond what any have ever seen in the waking world.


Nor was Thomas alone. Elias, who had most argued with Lashim, had also come to most love him; his rage added to Thomas's, and they both showed that day that they were true heirs to Joshua's legacy, for they called up the forces of the River in a ravaging torrent that could crush any lesser being. Bartholomew joined with them, adding his power to Elias' guidance, and the two of them made all the Ferrymen together battle with one heart and one mind, working together in perfect unison.



Mother, Guard Me

It was Maire, however, who rose up the greatest of the storm. She always had been close with the land and with its spirits, and in that time and place they came to her hands like hounds to a master's heel. They were only too eager to aid her, and the land itself rebelled against Elatha under her direction. Those four together were four of the greatest Dreamers that this sad, tiny isle has ever produced, and that day they found the fullness of their power.

It might even have been enough, had they faced anything other than what they did. Maybe they could have faced even the dreaded Baron of the H'l Kar on that day. But what they faced was power beyond what any have ever faced — perhaps a power as great as the Fatimas themselves. Elatha battered aside Thomas' sword and struck Elias down. So great were the forces that clashed that day that the very world about them began to dissolve. The Ferrymen called up the substance of Dream to fight for them, and Elatha rent it into nothingness. The perversion that let him enter the River did not allow Sundering to be used there safely, and the very substance of the Great Architecture about them began to cave in. The substance of reality about them wore through like a grass house in a great wind, and spirits and souls alike howled as they were destroyed.



Losing the War

From the horrified thoughts of Bartholomew the Child:

Surely this battle can last no longer. Either the Beast must die, or we will. Thomas and Elias have seen the worst of it, but surely their blows must be weakening the Beast! Agony, red and white behind my eyes, rips through me body and soul, sending me tumbling, howling to the writhing ground. The flesh and bone of my chest is torn apart, spilling my blood into the thirsty dust beneath me. For a single sickening moment I can see my own heart, beating fearfully in my chest. Then Maire's touch is upon me, weak but warm, closing the worst of the wound, stopping that which would kill me.

I lie in the dirt, rolling my eyes to the heavens and I see the flesh of reality itself being pulled apart, sundering bone and tendon as if it were a roasted bird on the supper table. The spirits above us wink out of existence like dying sparks, leaving no trace of their being but an afterimage on the eyes. Distance grows and contracts like over-elastic skin, now pulled so tight that it must soon tear, now bunched and wrinkled as a Yagan's cheeks.

In my soul I can hear all of reality shrieking in the same agony I feel burning my chest. We cannot win. The others must see this. The clash of Sundering and Synthesis is pulling the River apart, the essence of the Seed and the essence of the One Goddess canceling and destroying one another, threatening to take all of reality with it. Elatha laughs, and I realize this destruction is what he seeks. The harder we fight, the more we help him in his cause. I begin to scream to the others, to convince them to turn away from the fight and flee.

The Flight

From the memories of Thomas, Jacker:

Bartholomew's voice finally broke through my rage, and I realized that he was correct — we could not win. The ground under my feet seemed to flow with every breath I took, and it seemed that I could see a tossing water through the rents in the soil — a great and endless sea that waited to consume me. That I was bleeding from a dozen wounds, that Elias could barely stand, seemed less important than the fact that we were destroying the very world about us, and still losing.

I spun away from Elatha, and sprinted away from him. I called to the others, and hearing or not they followed me. As they ran past me I turned and hurled a spear formed of Dream. It was a desperate, foolish gamble. The One Goddess, however, often pities fools and so she did that day. The spear struck Elatha in the top of his thigh, and he nearly fell. While he stopped to wrench the Dream-steel from his flesh we fled, running with the wind pushing at our backs and the spirits of air and earth screaming for us to flee.

Wings of Fear

No one led us, we were all too short of breath to speak, and we all knew where we had to run to anyway. We all knew that under our own power Elatha would catch us, and that our only hope was the speed of the Flying Dutchman upon Little River. We reached the boat and the waiting River at a dead run. Any sailors who have ever lived would have been awed at the speed with which we got the boat on the waves and running. Maire called to all the spirits that could still hear us to fill our sails, and I fed all the bread that we had remaining to Little River, begging her for speed. We flew upon the waves, hardly even seeming to touch the waters.

Bartholomew swung through rigging and controlled the rudder as though he were four men, and for a few moments I dared to hope that we had broken free. But when I looked to the skies I saw the dark storm that followed Elatha bearing down upon us. He was close, and growing closer despite all that we could do.



The Fold

Reflections of Thomas, Jacker:

I was so busy watching the storm that gathered, black and churning as it waited to spill down upon us, that I did not notice the change until it was too late. Little River had been carrying us straight away from Elatha, rushing across hills and valleys alike, when suddenly she cut to one side to run perpendicular to our old path. I nearly screamed at her in anger, so fearful was I, because in turning she had brought us closer to the taint that chased us. I was saved from blasphemy when I looked to the path we had been following. There, in the air before us, hung a curtain of aether, a flickering thickness that looked something like the heat hazes that dance over blacktops in the middle of summer. It looked like it should have been nothing, but somehow I knew in my gut that it was the end of our journey.

Even with Little River having changed course we still came closer to that wavering in the air, that point with no thickness that was still an utter and absolute wall. As we came closer I heard it, though there was no sound, a keening in the air, a high pitched screeching squeal that set my teeth on edge and made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. We drifted closer yet, and that sound made me unable to sit still, moving about the boat with restless nerves that competed with my fear of the approaching demon. The others seemed to sense it too.

When we came close enough we saw that the haze was not easy; its surface was tortured, strained, and filled with uneasy motions. Faces screamed at us through the surface of it, like children pressing their faces against a thin bit of fabric till the strain makes it conform to their features. Clawed hands were pushing against the shuddering veil from the other side, seeming to try to claw their way through with a desperate urgency. The whole of it convulsed, a dam about to burst, and where the River of Dream came close to it everything seemed to vanish, mist in bright sun.

Finally, as the haze curled around us, trapping us in a box with no outlet, I realized what it was that hung before us, and realized that it both was and was not really there. The image was only a construction of my mind to let my eyes see what my spirit knew. We had come to the Fold, and we were trapped between it and the King of Fear.

The Plight of Mountain's Daughter

From the troubled thoughts of Maire Grey:

The taste of Elatha's foul blood still burns in my throat, making me want to vomit again, until my throat bursts if need be, anything to clear that vile feeling from my body. I understand violation now, better than any resident of Ile Perdue ever could, better than anyone untouched by the slime of a Z'bri's taint. The most sickening thing is the knowing that the burning in my belly, even now, does not come entirely from hatred.

From beneath the Dutchman, the river that carries us, as if hearing my thoughts, begins to scream, her waters roiling and tossing us about. Each of us flies to the edge of the craft, looking to see the river below. It is Bartholomew who sees it first, his horrified whisper causing me to shut the spiritual link that allows me to see through the others' eyes. "She. . . I can see her face."

I do not want to see. I can feel the horror from Thomas's mind slowly prying at the barrier I erected, until I too have to look upon the screaming, writhing River. Little River's lovely face, the one so reminiscent of a young woman, is contorted in agony, twisted in torment. The Dutchman gives a sickening lurch beneath my feet, spilling me to the deck. Above me I can hear the men yelling confused questions. Beneath me I can hear the shrieks of Mountain's Daughter. My mouth burns as I realize Elatha is attacking her to stop us.

"He's killing her!" I scream. The waters that have carried us so far are drying up. There is nothing we can do. I rise to my feet and stand beside Thomas. Together the four of us watch as Elatha devours the River's spirit, drying her up into nearly nothing. Somewhere in my heart, I can feel the granite tears of Mountain tearing at me. Even one as old as he is not too old to know grief. Finally the screaming stops, leaving us trapped between Elatha and the Fold with nowhere to go, on a landed ship. Between the buzzing, grating whine of the Fold before us and the growing laughter of the Z'bri behind us, I realize that we are doomed.

Bartholomew is weeping near the prow of the boat, speaking to the Dove that has led us so far. "Please! You must know of somewhere we can go. No! No, don't leave us here to die!" I hear the fluttering of spiritual wings, circling over my head and climbing still higher until I can hear them no longer. The only sound that remains between the maddening song of the Fold and the demon wail of the Monster is the soft broken sobbing of Bartholomew.



Chapter Six: Starlight, Starbright

One brief spark between the sky and the dark,
For a single moment above the candle dancing.
Darkness howls back from the silence of light
Illuminating a single second of eternity, which
reveals
Methuselahs, whose tears river in laugh lines
For ancient days and the death of kings. Now
All fall silent, though laments still flow so fast.
— Song of Stars





Along the Moonlight Path

From the memory of Bartholomew the Child:

The last of the sun's light — for there was a sun of sorts here — died with the departure of the Dove. I knew I should be strong the way that Maire and Thomas and Elias were strong, but I could not, and I wept like the child I have always been. I saw what Elatha had done to Maire and to Little River, still felt the burning wound in my own chest, and I was afraid.

It was Thomas who knelt beside me, putting an arm around my shoulders. "Bartholomew." His voice was almost fatherly. "Look." He lifted my chin towards the path of the Dove's ascent. There, following that same twisting route was a path of silver light. Stars and stardust coalesced into a bright trail behind the Dove's feathers as if they were formed from the Dove itself. For a moment my fear melted into wonder at the beauty of it.

"What does it mean?" Maire asked, coming closer and crouching near me.

Elias joined us as well. *Perhaps we are to follow it. The Dove was to be our guide. I do not think it would desert us now when we need it most.*

"Lashim called this vessel the Flying Dutchman," Thomas rumbled. "Let us see what he meant by it. I say we follow the path. Where else are we to go?"

I looked from one face to another, these three that I had come to love as my own blood, and I heard the Monster's laughter growing closer. I felt his madness tugging at my heart again. "Follow the path," I agreed, clasping Thomas's shoulder in true unity for the first time. It was a simple thing for the four of us to turn the boat around. Even with Little River gone, there seemed enough left of her spirit that, combined with our own strength, we were able to guide the prow of the Dutchman onto the base of the river of stars that lay above us. With a murmured prayer on all our lips, we settled in as the wind began to catch at the sails.

Bless Lashim. Whatever his laughter meant when he named our ship, his words were true. When the sails unfurled, the Dutchman lurched forward as if moving through sluggish currents. Slowly the ship began to rise. We began to spiral up through the sky as if we were borne aloft by wings. Soon the remains of Little River were left behind, along with the Fold, along with Elatha, along with everything we had ever known. Ahead lay only the stars.



6. Starlight, Strabright


 The Sky is Full of Stars

From the Story of Alisha, Doomsayer Hag:

Up that river of stars the Flying Dutchman sailed. A wind, a gale, caught at its sails and lifted it up and away from the River, away from any world any of us have ever known. Who knows what that trail was? Perhaps it was left by Dove's wings, or perhaps in dying Little River was able to transcend the River and fly to the home of spirits. Either way, it is a thing the likes of which I have never heard. It was a path of light and spirit that lifted the Ferryman away from the River and took them to the Orbs and Spheres, beyond the edge of the reality that we know, and beyond even that which we Dream.

From the bow of their ship they watched as the whole of reality, the Worlds of Flesh, Spirit and Dream drifted away below them. Soon there was nothing about them but the endless darkness and the infinite stars. The Dove flew before them still, leading them across their path of light, into the great expanse of the endless night. They watched and wondered, and spoke of the things which they had seen.


 Musing on Muses

From the ledger of Elias Scribner:

You have experience with the Beasts, Thomas. What was that thing?

That is a disappointing answer. You have seen nothing like him before? I thought that Z'bri could not enter the River of Dream; it is a realm denied them. Either through their hubris in crossing the Fold, or perhaps in its Closing, they are unable to touch the interface between Flesh and Spirit. Curious, though, that they seem to be their own interface — spirits encased in borrowed flesh. I wonder if that is the source of their Sundering: in eschewing the River of Dream, they have learned to separate Spirit from Flesh on their own. Certainly their Sundering cannot have any natural origin. It cannot be natural to destroy the proper order of things.

I begin to think in our travels that there is no sanity left in the world. If Zoms and Skullers are the smallest indicators of this imbalance, Elatha must be the worst. If he can enter the River and do such damage even to the place where the tatters of the Fold remain, he is a greater threat than all the Z'bri together. At least he does not seem to think he can re-open or destroy the Fold; that would be catastrophic, I fear.

Thomas, that is nothing to joke about. Surely things are bad now, but opening the Fold again would solve nothing but the Z'bri's frustration. Leaping from body to body again, being anywhere in anyone's skin, there would be no way to stop them. I wouldn't think your Jacker heart—

Forgive me, Thomas. I do poorly to oversimplify you and your brethren. It is the same crime as assuming Maire's only desire is the destruction of the Fatimas. There is a good case for either the Fatimas or the Z'bri to be our greatest enemies, but there are also so many intricacies within the arguments. We know where the Z'bri came from — but the Fatimas? They tell us the One Goddess sent them across the Fold, but we would be fools to trust them. They walk among us but we are ignorant of their origins or natures. Have you ever wondered, Thomas, what the Fatimas are made of? A spirit animating dead material — a feat no other spirit can perform. A spirit strong enough to forge links between human souls and the River of Dream.

What is this connection we have to the River? We use it and study it, but do we understand it? How does my soul touch the place where Flesh meets Spirit and bring that power back to me? When we sleep we naturally find ourselves in the River of Dream, but only some can tame those treacherous waters: those who the Fatimas support, propping up with their own enigmatic power, and those like us, Fallen exercising a power just as enigmatic and just as poorly understood. I have spent twenty years studying the Laws of Dream, Thomas, and still I have more questions than answers.

The Spirits Pass Over

From the Story of Alisha, Doomsayer Hag:

Their words and musings cut off then. About them rose a feeling like the clean calm before a storm — a motion with no presence. Thomas leapt to his feet and put a hand to his sword. Casting about with the trained eyes of a warrior he looked for the danger he felt must be coming upon the Flying Dutchman. He cast his eyes upwards, and his hand fell from his sword. They did not know what they were seeing at first. It started as a cascade, a motion of form and tone, an image with no substance. Across the backs of the stars it moved, singing with their light as it passed over. It was only as the cascade came closer, and turned into a thousand different forms that the Ferryman realized what they were seeing. The Spirits, the Unembodied were passing over.

It nearly blinded their minds, for men are not meant to see pure spirit with eyes of flesh. In the River we see the mingling of flesh, spirit and dream — the eternal becomes finite and we can speak to it through masks of our dreams. In that place, however, there were no masks, and the Ferryman looked upon the true form of the Spirits. The Ferryman cried out then, with one voice. They cried for help, begged for mercy, and covered their eyes, their ears, their mouths. One form detached from the rest of the spirits. Like a falling star it plummeted towards them. At first they could not make sense of it, knew it only as a feeling of endless wisdom and a stern resolve that was as large as eternity.

It touched the edge of their ship, and for a moment it remained as it was — beyond human understanding. After a moment, however, their minds recognized the force, and put a mask over it that they could see it by a face that they knew. Great Owl perched on the prow of their ship, and he spoke Elias' name.



6. Starlight, Strabright

I Heard the Owl Call My Name

Song of Stars

Everything that is has a spirit, even the eternal harmony of the planets, the orbs and the stars as they spin through their spheres of eternity. The spirit of this eternal round is Song of Stars. Where the Fatimas are dynamic and humanistic goddesses, and Mountain is vast and ancient in the earth, Song of Stars is beyond comprehension. He has existed since the beginning of time, and will exist until time's end. Unfathomable, endless and deathless, Song of Stars is alpha and omega, first and last, and knows and sees everything in the sum total of reality.

Song of Stars is also afraid, for he is dying and he does not know why, and cannot stop himself from falling. The very fabric of the universe, not just the little corner of Vimary, is starting to fall apart, and Song of Stars feels it like the first palpitating beats of a heart attack. Despite all his power, however, he can do nothing but watch and occasionally move a small piece. He has come to realize that the salvation of the universe rests not in the hands of forces such as he, but in the small and fragile hands of humanity. He has seen that the salvation of all will come from out of the cradle of Vimary, and there is no sacrifice he will not make to ensure that those who must restore the universe will be able to do so.

Highlights: Eternal, Unfathomable, Platonic

Game Notes: Song of Stars is vastly powerful, but also very limited. His power is such that he can move solar systems at his will, but cannot touch upon the smaller units of life. Bringing the Ferryman to him required the aid of many other Spirits and the manipulation of destinies stretching back through millennia. In general he is a thing apart from the world of Tribe 8, whose influence is only felt through third and fourth-removed intermediaries.

From a diary transcribed to flesh:

Talons dug into the side of the boat, carelessly splintering the wood with the simple strength of its being; it was not the Great Owl, even though it sometimes resembled it. The blinding spirit seemed to have a shell around it, a failing mask I could tell was of my own construction, my own thoughts and fears reaching forward to cloak that divinity in a form more palatable and less fearsome to my cowering soul. The Owl tipped forward and called me by name, drawing me closer with its voice. Trembling, I stepped forward, wincing each time the mask slipped and revealed what resided within.

Closer, I could see my reflection within the Owl's eyes, concave and slightly distorted across the arctic blue iris and black as pitch pupil. The Owl returned my gaze, studying me in silence, looking past my flesh and down to my very soul. Its face flickered, dazzling me with the light inside, and when the mirror of an eye returned, a voice terrible and wise spoke. "You have seen a thing that few mortals have ever seen, Elias. You have seen the face of a spirit before the masks of dream and flesh have been pressed upon it. You have completed your quest, and found the Wanderer."

Looking into the Owl's eye, I saw myself looking back. "I am the Wanderer." The words came to my lips automatically, undistorted by my missing tongue.

"How many times were you told, Elias, that the study of Dream is the study of souls, and the study of your own soul?" the spirit asked, its owl mask dissolving. "Few see what is; to those who can see, it is criminal to remain mute. You will become great, Elias Dreamquill, but not in this life. This life is spent, and spent well, but it is forfeit."

The spirit turned, a fluid motion unrelated to form or body, and looked across the sea to a place of darkness and light. "Song of Stars awaits your audience. The Ferryman must finish what has already begun."





The Singing Star

From the memory of Maire Grey, Herite:

When we had left the Owl behind, I found my way over to Elias and drew him into my arms, cradling him. The others were silent, each of us trying to understand the spirit's words. Although the Owl did not say, I felt that all of our lives were forfeit, not simply Elias'. We had faced the fire of my dreams and won our way beyond it. Were we now to be lost beyond reckoning? If so, had it been worth it? To have seen the glory of the universe pressed small, given into our hands to study and toy with, like overeager children; was it worth our lives? The question hung over our small craft, unspoken and unanswered as I cradled Elias. I felt Doom pressing down upon us, even as Glory swam beneath, lifting us up. Would we be crushed between them?

I heard Thomas speaking quietly to Bartholomew, discussing which direction we should take. He said, with his unerring sense of direction, "There. Steer there, to that dark place between the stars." I felt the slow tug of the boat beginning to move forward once more.

None of us spoke as we journeyed forward, each of us, no doubt, wondering at the things we had seen and what might lie ahead of us. It was Bartholomew who first noticed it. "It's getting brighter," he said.

Elias lifted his head from my breast and pulled away from me. *I thought I was imagining it at first.*

The three agreed that there was a light ahead of us, growing steadily brighter. I could not see the cold silver glow, but I could feel it over the skin of my face. My soul froze at the touch, even as it exulted within me. The change was so subtle. I do not know when I first realized that I could see the light as well as feel it. I felt that I was standing in an empty, dark clearing, with only this single blinding shaft of light radiating down upon me. I stood in the boat and turned towards the light, letting its cold brilliance sear into my mind.

We sailed faster towards the light. The spirits that had been flowing above our heads suddenly vanished into it. Hearing the others, I realized it had grown so bright that they too could see nothing except its radiance. My body felt suffused with light; it seemed that I could send it streaming back, light flowing through my eyes and fingertips and hair. There was a terrible beauty to it, cold and inhuman and perfect. It felt as though I were touching a god.

The boat came to a stop, and everything about us grew utterly still. The stillness was so complete that it was not even disturbed by the sound of our breath. There was nothing. Nothing existed outside of the light. I reached to either side of me, catching Thomas and Elias by the hands to reassure myself that we ourselves still existed. The song that shattered the stillness began as a single low note, one so low that it made my bones throb before I could hear it. Other voices joined the first, the sound carrying crystalline perfection to our ears. I knew the light that drew us here had been given a voice. I knew we were hearing the voices of the stars.

The Scribe's Questions

Elias, Scribe of Stars, calls to Song of Stars:

Tell us, brilliant majesty, what must be done.

The World Above and the World Below drift apart.

What has destroyed their sympathy?

The River of Dream is polluted with the brackish Sea.

What will stem the tide?

The Great Architecture groans in agony, its foundations skewed and tumbled.

Where has the cornerstone gone?

What can humanity do when the power of a Star fails?

6. Starlight, Strabright



 What the Sun Has Seen

From the Story of Alisha, Doomsayer Hag:

Then they could go no farther, could urge the sail no more. The light was around them, through them — it seemed as though the light was them. Their hearts and souls reverberated like the plucked strings of a harp, sounding in time with the song that surrounded them, the song that was the light. I cannot hope to describe that song, not even while I feel it still humming through this skin. It was both a whisper and a shout. It was the golden clarion of the sun and the foul rag and bone heap beating of the human heart. It was the song that every musician, priest and poet who has ever dared to reach towards eternity has heard in her heart of hearts.

That song spoke to them. It called each of them by name, and tears poured from their eyes. The song spoke in their hearts and told them that it was sorry. Thomas, who at that moment became the Knight of Stars, called back and asked the song why it should feel sorrow. There was a pulse, a flicker-flash across their eyes and they saw the whole of reality stretched out below them. They saw the endless dance of stars and spheres, the orbs rolling through their motion. As they watched the stars began to dim, and light and darkness alike begin to waver, to curdle and rot.

The song spoke in their hearts again, like the wind above a calm, clear lake. It told them that it was dying. It told them that the universe was dying. The uneven flux and flow of life and death, the broken scale, was washing away the mores of reality. It told them that if the balance was not soon restored that everything that had ever been was damned and doomed. So it told them, and Elias called back, asking what they could do that the Voice could not. How can flesh prevail where a Star despaired?


 Bless, Curse Me Now

The Voice of Eternity Spoke:

In the heart, in the soul, and in the bright darkness of eternity, the Song of Stars responded to Elias.

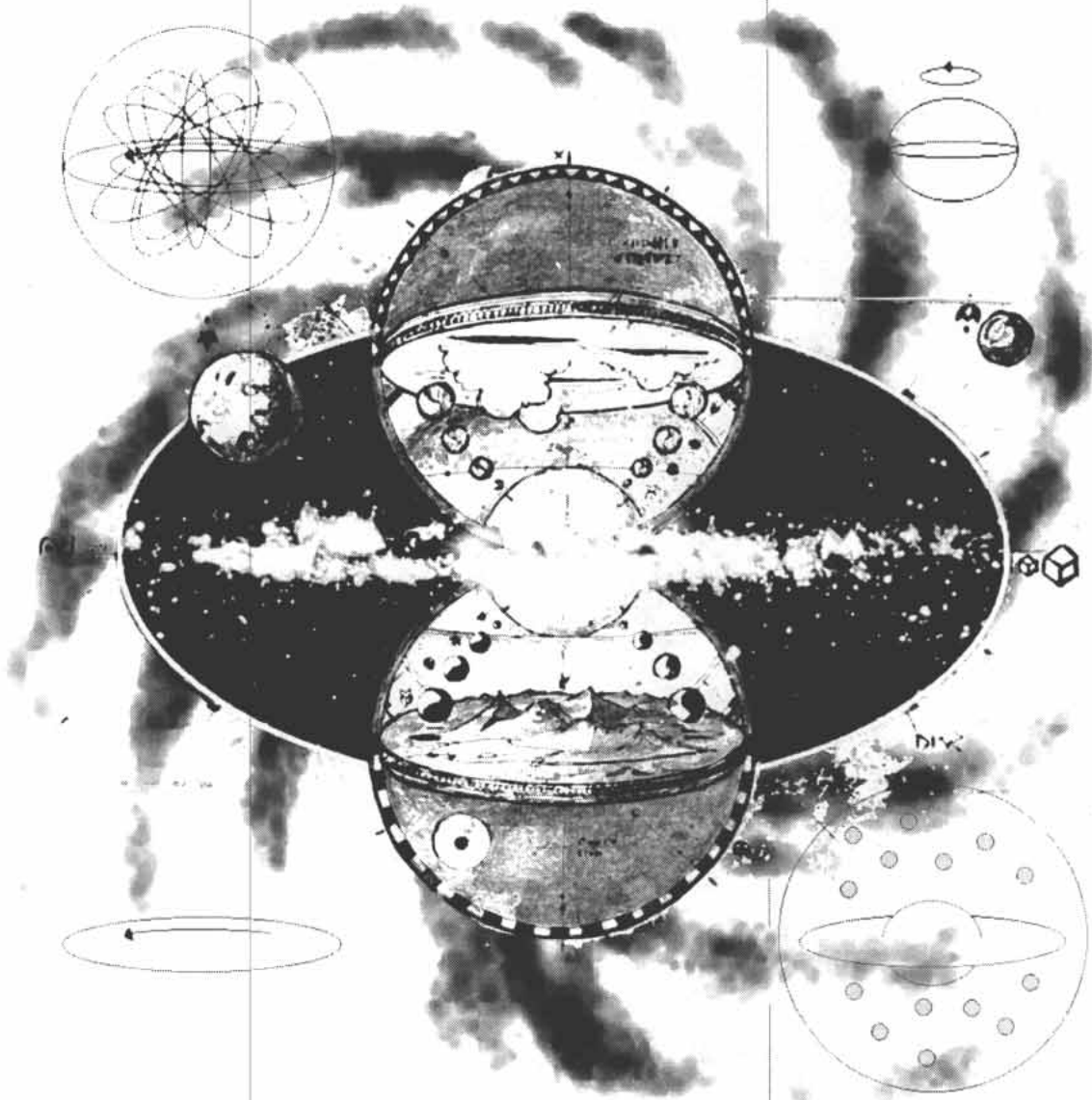
"What is may not be changed to what must be by any single soul. Such a task is beyond you, as it is beyond me. I do not ask that you mend the break; such is not your part in the song at the heart of all. Your task is other: for you it is left to blaze the trail, to search out the paths of salvation. You are no great prophets, but this is your great matter — you shall become the vanguard for your people. You shall blaze through the darkness, falling as a star, so that those who follow with flaming swords and burning hearts may find the way. You shall not save us, but you shall show the way to those who may.

"So now I bless you, I curse you, and I pray for your forgiveness. That I have touched upon you will forever destroy that which once you were. The twain of mortal hearts and eternal light should never meet, but there was no other path. Hear me now, and know your destiny:

"You shall never return to your homes, never again hear the calling of the cattle on the hillside, never again smell the warmth of parchment in stacks and books. You shall never again know rest; from this day out your eyes shall not close. You shall know no shelter, no place will take you or guard you. You will wander, friendless, hapless, hopeless and unshriven, until you have found the path that must be, found the chorus that shall sound all spirits to sing in balance once again. Death shall not ease you; forever shall your spirits sail adrift on the River of Dream. 'Til time and times are done you shall be the small beacon of light that lures the steps of others down your path. That others may know peace, you shall know none.

"In return you will have all the knowledge you wanted, and I hope that it is of comfort to you, for it is the only gift I have to give. Now go, and walk to the far shores. I shall return you to your own sphere, that you might continue on the endless voyage."

6. Starlight, Starbright



Chapter Seven: Around the Fire

Every great person has faced a moment when she realized that she had to make a choice. Right or wrong, good or ill, she had to choose — then had to walk on without ever looking back.

That, children, is what it is to be a hero: to make a choice, and never look back.

— Sayings of Joan



The Final Blow

From the stories of Janus, Jacker:

I became aware of the old crone's finger trembling, her breath rasping slightly against the back of her throat. I blinked, and felt that my eyes were dry from having gone too long without moistening. Nothing moved in that little hut save for the flickers of the fire, the stir of smoke about our faces. What were we to think, what were we to say? The story we had been told sounded true as a Trump in our ears, and yet it shattered everything we had thought we knew about the world.

Alisha forced her finger on, across the ridge of skin that had once covered a man's spine. Her voice quavered slightly as she spoke, half reading and half speaking what we all knew must be the story's conclusion. "Song of Stars returned them to the Earth, to an ocean that they had never seen or dreamed of. It was a place beyond which they have ever guessed. They drifted for some time, each in their own thoughts. It was Elias who came first to the conclusion of what must be done. He told the others that they could not do this thing alone, could not blaze a path if we of Hom did not know that we were to look for their marks. He knew, in his discerning heart, that no one could break Song of Star's word and return to this world, however, and so he told his friends what they had to do. His eyes wept, but did not waver.

"Maire drew out the last runes on his skin, and she and Thomas set them in ink. Their hands were clumsy with lack of practice and with tears. They wrote the last of this story here, upon the sacred serpent trail of his skin. They sang him then to sleep, sang peace to his heart and mind. Thomas then stabbed him through the ear, killing him without marking the skin. Maire turned his organs and his bones, his essence, into a liquid that they poured out from his eyes and mouth. They gave that substance which had once been their friend to the water, to the River and the Sea, as payment. The skin they then committed unto the waters, praying, singing, hoping, compelling it to come safe to the hands of those who could read it, to the ears of those who would listen."

The hag took a deep breath then, and her eyes met mine across the fire. "So Elias, Scribe of Stars, died and gave his soul to the Water: so that we could hear and know, so that we could follow, so that we would not be damned as he had damned himself."

7. Around the fire



The Wanderer

Even death will not spare Elias from
Song of Stars' curse and blessing.
The shade known among
Doomsayers as 'The Wanderer'
haunts Hom and greater Vimary,
forever searching for a way back to
the Flying Dutchman to fulfill the
quest he shares with his doomed
comrades. The Wanderer does not
speak, but seems more coherent
than most specters. He is also
eminently knowledgeable about the
River of Dream and other occult
subjects, and might be willing to
offer advice or assistance to those
seeking answers to enigmatic
questions. His price, however, is
always the same: help reunite him
with his quest, a need so imperative
it tears at his soul each night he is
away from it.

Highlights: Silent, Wary, Compelled

Eminence: Mystery

Attributes: KNO +4, PSY +2

Skills: Lore (River of Dream) 4/+4,
Dreaming 3/+2, Synthesis 4

7. Around the fire


 This Tale Told

From the stories of Janus, Jacker:

The fire had burned low before any of us moved. No one would meet my eyes, and I was glad — for I did not want to meet theirs. What could we say into that silence? That we would take up the crown of thorns, that we would walk against the demon Elatha, that we would fight our way to the stars themselves? I felt like a child, groping after the stride of a giant.

It was Alisha who moved first, taking up a jar of yellow fat. With her wrinkled old hands she began to rub the pungent goop into the back of the skin, working with slow, circular patience. "This must be kept," she said when she realized we were watching on. "This must be kept for any who wishes to look on it. I think. . ." and here she hesitated, a strange note of confusion in her old voice, "I think I will have Den Hades look after it. I know I cannot be its keeper."

Wendel cleared his throat then, coughing against the irritation of the smoke that clung to him. "What of the others — what happened to Thomas and Maire? What happened to Bartholomew?" That last name caught at his throat, and I wondered if he had known his fellow once-Agnite.

Old hands stretched the skin, struggling it over a frame of reeds. "I do not know; the skin does not say." When it looked like Wendel would ask further she snapped, "Child, I do not know how this story ends — it is not written. If you want my guess it is that they wander still, lost and alone in a realm beyond their understanding."

I spoke, my voice as soft and afraid as my soul, "Just like us. Just like us — if Song of Stars spoke true. If the world is broken, if we are falling apart faster and faster, like shards of a spear struck too hard — if this is all true, how do any of us know what road to walk? What truth do any of us know?" Alisha looked into my eyes for a long moment, and did not answer.


 Take Up This Cross

From the stories of Janus, Jacker

Instead it was Wendel who spoke. "What truth? Did you not listen to anything the wise-woman had to say? Did you not hear Elias' story? If the world is broken—" He paused, his voice cracking. "If the world is broken, then it is for us to fix it." Before any of us could say a word, he leapt to his feet, looking at all of us around the fire with reddened eyes. "Don't you understand? This is our calling." With impatient young hands he swiped at his tears.

"Do you think the Z'bri will solve the problem? You heard their solution: destroy us all! And the Tribes. . . do you believe the Fatimas will even admit there is a problem? Maire saw as much, why can't you? No. Only the Fallen have the vision and the strength to repair the damage done to the River. There is little reason to fear, for our souls are whole and free, while those in the Tribes are nothing but shadow-puppets whom the Fatimas teach to dance."

"Little reason?" the Doomsayer cackled dryly. "Aye, little reason for fear, between the demon's wall of souls and the Sea of the Lost and the Fold itself."

Fear and anger and shame fought within my breast. This boy, this child, was ready to take up the burden that I could not. Anger took prominence. "What, Wendel, do you think to succeed where Tribal priestesses have failed? We know nothing about the River, much less of how to repair the damage done. This is not our battle, it is for others to fight."

Wendel's eyes met mine across the fire, hot with challenge and anger. "When the Fatimas first came to the camps, did we know how to fight the Z'bri? We did not, but we learned, through blood and sacrifice. When the Fallen came to Hom, did they know what lay before them, how they would survive? No — but again, they learned, through blood and sacrifice. Everything worthwhile comes with a cost. We can right this wrong, if we but have the courage to pay the price. I have that courage. If the rest of you do, we can make this world right again."

I lowered my eyes as he walked out, leaving us in stunned silence. I knew I had watched the boy grow to a man in the space of moments. I felt the eyes of the rest of our cell heavy upon me, and when I looked up again, I saw my own doubt and fear reflected in their faces. No one followed after him, but the question hung in the smoky air above our heads, unspoken. Was Wendel a young fool bound for destruction? Or was he a man on the truest quest of all? I could not answer then, as I cannot answer now, for to answer would be to make my choice.

Elias' tale haunts me still. I see it, too, in the eyes of my cellmates with each day that passes with no word of Wendel. I am old enough to understand that most true tales do not have happy endings, but I am young enough to still hope.



Chapter Eight: The Substance of Spirit

Bones of bread, blood of red wine

Swallowed, show the face

Greater than understanding.

— Brotherhood Chant



SPIRITUALITY IN A BROKEN UNIVERSE

Once upon a time, long ago there may have been a world in which all things were balanced. Between the World of Spirit and the World of Flesh, between Humanity and Z'bri, between the One Goddess and the Seed there may have been a dynamic equilibrium, a balance of motion, of give and take. There may have been, once, but it is doubtful. The Great Architecture has never been stable; it is a thing that has always moved in and out of balance. Now, however, it has reached critical mass. The world of **Tribe 8** is broken, and unless it can be fixed everything will fall apart.

No one knows what started the break down of reality. It may have happened in the World Before, a great imbalance that opened the way for Nomads and Z'bri to pour into the world. It may have happened when the Nomads closed the Fold, or when the Z'bri went mad and surrendered completely to the Seed. Most likely all of these things contributed to the damage, one wrong piling on top of the others until the weight started to crush any hope of balance.

In the world of **Tribe 8** the dead cannot rest, angels have become demons, humanity is enslaved to their saviors, and the Sea of the Lost swells with souls of the damned. Monstrosities walk the earth, and the River of Dream is becoming a land of nightmares where even spirits fear to tread. It is a bleak world. It is not, however, a hopeless one. The wrong things can be put right, but only with blood and sacrifice. It is this struggle, the quest to find out what has gone wrong with the world and how it can be fixed, that is at the heart of **Tribe 8**.

Understanding the make up of the metaphysical world of **Tribe 8** is vitally important to any campaign. It is not an easy thing, however, as matters of spirituality will always be cloudy and subject to personal interpretation. There are, however, a few key points that can be used to help Weavers build their vision of the **Tribe 8** universe and its tottering construction. These ideas and themes should never be seen as limitations, and should not straitjacket imagination. Rather they should be used as jumping-off points for creativity.

PLAYING WITH SPIRITUALITY

With all the diverse and deep currents running through the world of **Tribe 8**, putting everything together into a coherent story can be daunting for even an experienced Weaver. There are, however, several methods and techniques that can help bring all the great and lofty concepts down to a level where they can be used to create a fun and interesting game. Of all these the first and most important is to remember that the point of the game is to have fun. Everything else is secondary.

SYMBOLISM

There is little that is more important to a spiritual game than symbolism. The full truth and nature of the Great Architecture, the One Goddess or the Seed are well beyond the ability of the human mind to grasp. Knowing such things directly is impossible. Humans deal with the vast world of spirits, dreams, gods and demons in terms of symbols and ideas, feelings and emotions. Great Owl, for example, is not truly a big bird — that is simply the symbolic manifestation which stems from its interaction with humanity.

For the Weaver, symbolism can be a rich and diverse tool. In a spiritual game everything can become symbolic. Because the physical world is only part of reality, there are deeper currents in everything with which the Characters can interact. These manifest through symbol and metaphor. The weather can show the mood of the spirits, storms representing imbalance or anger, peaceful rains speaking of souls at peace. The bitter cold of a Yagan's home can represent the callousness of her heart. Not everything should be a symbol, of course, but careful application of images can go a long way to building a rich undertone of spirituality.

Literature and movies are full of symbols and metaphors. Wise Weavers can use these resources, gleaning inspiration from anything that strikes their fancy. If it makes an impression, it can probably be used to benefit the game. More information on using symbolism is given in the individual sections, to give more specific ideas of how to use the technique in conjunction with those aspects of the game.



OMENS AND DREAMS

One of the most common places to use symbolism is in dreams and omens. The importance of these two tools cannot be overstated. In the world of **Tribe 8** dreams are not sputterings of an unconscious mind, they are insight into both the self and the River of Dream. A Character who dreams of an event and then comes upon the event in her waking life will see the event as significant, something personally related to her, and not a random occurrence or coincidence. Dreams are wonderful plot hooks, but are also essential to creating the deep and intuitive connection Characters feel with the world around them.

Omens and prophecy work in much the same way. A Character who randomly meets a Z'bri Lord may be horrified, but will likely read nothing deeper into the encounter. A Character who is told by a Doomsayer that she will meet her bane by moonlight, and then meets the Z'bri Lord under the full moon, will find the encounter to be deeply and personally important. Weavers who use omens and prophecy wisely can easily connect Characters to the world around them in a deep and meaningful way.

DESTINY

In a spiritual cycle, Characters are not randomly tossed about. They may be manipulated and driven to dark extremes, but there will always be a reason, and that reason is that the Characters can do something that no one else can. Using omens and prophecy is one step in establishing this, but it does not end there. Others try the things that the Characters try, and fail. Mentors, guides and helpers come forward for the Characters when they refuse to take on others. Things happen for (and to) the Characters because they are important. The wise and learned will recognize the Characters by omens and signs that precede and follow them. There is something that they must do, something that only they can do.

The living universe of **Tribe 8** knows that it is dying, and the PCs have been chosen as the agents of its salvation. Whether they live or die may not matter, but their actions determine the future and have been prepared for in the past. Of course if the Characters are the forces of hope, then there will be equally or more powerful forces arrayed to stop them. Destiny is not an assurance of success, it is an assurance that one's actions matter and have real meaning.

THE AFFECTIVE UNIVERSE

In a spiritual cycle the universe is not an impersonal, mechanical place. The universe, from the lowest beast to the mightiest spirit, is aware of the Characters. **Tribe 8** Characters live in an animistic universe, a universe in which everything has a spirit. Rocks and lakes are not inanimate matter, but are the homes of spirits who can speak with and affect the PCs. Spirits interact with them and develop feelings towards them. When the Characters kill a deer without thinking about it, they may offend the spirit of the deer. When they give bread to the river they sail upon, they appease the spirit who sleeps under the waves.

Everything the Characters do should matter. They live in a world that notices them and responds to them. The universe may love them, it may hate them, it may need them alive or wish them dead — but in the end they matter. Weavers should use rituals, dreams and visitations to get the Characters to interact with spirits, form alliances and enemies, and live in a world that notices and reacts to them.

UNCERTAINTY

Little that is deeply spiritual is certain. Learning about the nature of the Great Architecture is terribly difficult. Every element in the universe sees the rest from its own subjective and skewed point of view, so even the honest give misleading information. Finding out what is true and what is not is often a difficult, time-consuming and painful process of comparing notes, testing ideas, and listening to one's heart.

As a result, when Characters think they have found something true, they should be given indications that all may not be as they assumed. Only through faith, trial and experience should they come to know the deeper mysteries of the universe. It is the trial of the magi to learn the unknowable truth in the depth of one's own heart.

DUALISM

Everything in the **Tribe 8** universe has an opposite. For the One Goddess there is the Seed, for humanity there is the Z'bri, for the Nation there are the Fallen, and so on. These opposites are fundamentally opposed and inexorably linked. The One Goddess is good and nurturing, the Seed wild and destroying — but the One Goddess also has the capacity for anger, and without the Seed life would crowd itself out of existence.

There should be a balance between the dualistic poles of the universe. This does not mean that both sides must be equal, but that they must have a harmony between them, an organic give and take that keeps the universe moving. In **Tribe 8**, however, the balance is out of kilter. Below is an examination of some of the important dualisms, and what may be wrong with them.

THE ONE GODDESS AND THE SEED

In many ways the One Goddess and the Seed represent all of the other dualistic divisions. They are male/female, love/hate, Synthesis/sundering, hope/fear and life/death, among others. Many Tribal priestesses believe that the One Goddess and the Seed are the source of all things, that the interaction and the friction between them is what forms reality.

The One Goddess is the nurturing female force. She is also the essence of Synthesis, and in this her truest face is shown. The One Goddess joins things together, making spirit and flesh join into dream, making sperm and egg join into life, and tying the World of the Flesh to the World of the Spirit and making existence possible.

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

The Seed is the destroying male force. He is the essence of Sundering. He tears things apart, separating dream into spirit and flesh, making body and soul part in death, and keeping the World of the Flesh and the World of the Spirit from becoming one and thus destroying each other.

No one knows where the balance between the Seed and the One Goddess went wrong. The Tribals argue fervently that everything is the fault of the Seed and the corrupted Z'bri. The Z'bri, on the other hand, often say that the lack of immediacy of the One Goddess, her forgetful and overly protective nature, has smothered possibility and left humanity and the Z'bri alike to rot. There are no clear answers, however, and many of the more esoteric and learned priests and Dreamers worry that both the One and the Seed may be equally at fault.

HUMANITY AND THE Z'BRI

If the oldest of the Z'bri Lords are to be believed, in a time ancient even in the World Before, the Z'bri and humanity lived together, in constant conflict with each other. The Z'bri, however, took themselves apart from humans to create a balance and allow both to achieve their potential. This time and this separation are more mythical than historical, but suggest that there was once some harmony which has now been lost. It did not last. In the time of the World Before humanity forgot their spirits, lost track of the fact that there was more to life than the flesh. The Z'bri lost all sense of physical sensation, and lost their hope of pleasure.

Whatever the truth of the tales is, most believe that the Openers came to try to restore the balance. After them came the Z'bri, who had been as out of balance as humanity. While humanity had largely forgotten the spiritual side of their existence, the Z'bri had starved for the gift of flesh. Touching it drove them mad, and so began their fall. After the Nomads, enlightened creatures formed from a spiritual and physical fusion of the Openers and their most devoted followers, closed the Fold, the Z'bri went completely mad. They surrendered to Sundering, to the lure of destruction that brought them a reminder of the world they had lost. In enslaving humanity, they themselves became enslaved.

The Hunters, however, say that at the same time humanity lost its balance as well. No longer able to look at the Z'bri in any objective manner, they came to hate everything associated with the beasts so much that it drove them mad. Now humans hate the Z'bri as much or more than the Z'bri hate humanity. Caught in the middle, the Hunters despair that no one remembers that the Z'bri were once more than they are now, or that the Z'bri originally came to try to save humanity from itself. Though no one could really blame the Tribals for hating the beasts that tormented them, the Hunters worry that the hatred between their brothers and humanity is only making both more ill in spirit.

As far as most on Vimary know, Baba Yaga alone is capable of taking souls across the Fold so that they can return to the World of Spirit after separating from their bodies. This leads to a huge problem — Baba Yaga only takes the spirits of faithful Tribals (and a few others whom She deems worthy) to their fate. The spirits of the vast majority of humanity are trapped on the wrong side of the Fold. They become ghosts, many of whom are swept away into the Sea of the Lost.

From the Sea many ghosts try to reach out to those they knew in life, bringing the taint of death into the world of the living. The Dream Harrowers were created to combat this threat, but they are slowly losing ground. The suffering of ghosts in the Sea and the sheer spiritual weight of so many souls on the wrong side of the Fold further widen the gap between the two Worlds. The Guides and Baba Yaga are starting to worry that there are no longer enough souls in the World of Spirit, and far too many in the Sea. Those spirits sent to the Sea cannot be reborn — which means that as more and more spirits are swept into the Sea there are fewer and fewer souls available to be born into new bodies. Because the dead cannot rest, the living cannot rise.



TRIBAL VIEWS

Most of the information given above is not known to the Tribes, or at least not widely known. A few of the more esoteric members of the priesthoods and sisterhoods are beginning to suspect some of the facts, but they keep their information carefully hidden. If they were to speak of what they knew, the very best they could hope for would be panic and derision among their listeners. Death or exile would be much more likely. As a result they do not speak, and no one else truly suspects.

Most Tribals have a very simplistic view of the world about them. They believe that the One Goddess is pure and ultimate good and that she should be worshipped through the Fatimas. The Seed is a completely negative force, something to be feared and destroyed. Not all Tribals hate the Seed, however, or think of it as absolutely evil. They believe that the Z'bri are that expression of evil, and reserve a kind of abstract fear for the unembodied Seed.

In the Tribal mind all good (Tribal) souls will be saved by Baba Yaga, and the damnation of other souls to the Sea of the Lost is either not thought about at all or is considered a deserving fate for wretches who are not really human anyway. Most Tribals are thus complacent. They pray to their Fatima and to the One, and blame misfortune on the Seed — that is enough for them. Those Tribals who do look deeper, mostly those in the Sisterhoods, often have some initial questions about the troubles they see about them. Most, however, are content when their superiors or Fatimas tell them that things are as they should be. It is, after all, easier to accept a lie than to have to face a terrible truth.

FALLEN VIEWS

There is a higher percentage of active Synthesis users and Dreamers among the Fallen than among the Tribals. The Fallen are also more likely to challenge accepted Tribal dogma and search for their own answers to questions about spirituality and the nature of the Great Architecture. As a result there is more diversity of opinion about the nature of reality among the Fallen than in any other group of people alive. Of course, just because they have diversity does not mean that they have the truth.

As a result there are several heretical sects and beliefs among the Fallen. Most Fallen do not drift far from Tribal belief, but some groups become incredibly radical. Some of the larger heretical sects include:

Goddess of the Seed: A large faction, mostly comprised of Herites, believes that the Fatimas were created by the Seed. They do not dispute the Fatimas' power, or that they are something different (none would say "greater") than humanity or the Z'bri. In their theology the Fatimas are the souls of Z'bri who were slain in the early days after the Opening. They tell of great Lords of the beasts who enslaved entire cities, only to have their slaves rise up against them with the terrible weapons of the World Before. Because this was before the closing of the Fold the Lords did not stay dead. They did, however, learn a lesson. When they returned to enslave humanity again they made

humans love them rather than fear them, knowing that the most controlled slave is one who believes herself free. Some say that Joshua too was of the Seed, but that he rebelled, returning to the One Goddess just before he was murdered.

Demurgists: This radical heresy states that the One Goddess is the true Goddess of the World of the Spirit, but that the Seed is the absolute God of the World of the Flesh. When the Fold was closed the One Goddess was cut off from humanity, and with her all good in the world. With her gone, the Seed became the lord of the World of the Flesh, and turned it into his playground of madness and terror. This belief system is split into two camps. One camp believes in extreme asceticism and denial of the flesh. They live to die and to transcend the world of the Seed. The others, however, believe that while they live in this world they should serve its God, and thus indulge in all sorts of cruelties and horrors with the justification that they are only fulfilling their place in a twisted world.

The Motherless: Even among the Fallen those who hold to this belief are shunned. The Motherless are those who have started to deny that there is a One Goddess or a Seed at all. In their eyes there are no great and unifying forces, no spiritual masters of the universe. They do not deny magic or spirits, as they have seen such with their own eyes, but they do deny that there is a God or Goddess behind it all. In their eyes the One and the Seed are just names for natural forces. Most are merely non-theistic, believing that the One and the Seed represent forces that exist, but that they are not embodied in any way. Others are agnostic, and believe that the One and the Seed are just masks that humanity puts on the cosmos.

Salvationists: A group born out of the Lightbringers and hated with a passion by Jackers, the Salvationists are those who believe that in order for humanity to be saved they must save their "brothers in the mirror" — the Z'bri. In the belief system of these renegades the Z'bri are corrupted and evil but not beyond hope. They were sent to this world for a reason and must be cleansed so that they can fulfill their purpose. Salvationists argue that if the Z'bri are not saved and returned to balance with humanity, then humankind will never find balance with itself. They often argue with Jackers, saying that in killing Z'bri they are killing humanity. The Jacker counter-argument often involves violence.

THE GUIDES

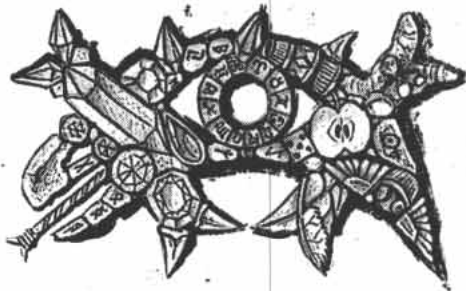
Of all the people on Vimary those who have the clearest picture of the universe are the Guides. Led by Halos and Den Hades and slowly growing in number, the Guides are trying to teach the Fallen about deeper and more philosophical truths than most have been ready to consider. How they came to this knowledge is still a mystery, though many Fallen believe that they are connected to the wandering Strangers who came to the Camps, the survivors from the group of Nomads who closed the Fold. How they are related is a subject of great speculation, and theories run the gamut from mystery cults that remember old teachings to a Hunter who reclaimed his Nomad heritage and taught the Guides deep secrets. There are also some who say the Guides killed Mary, and from Her dying soul learned their mystic arts.

The Guides are able to use Z'bri Heartstones to power their Synthesis and to go into parts of the River of Dream that are not accessible to anyone else. They also maintain close ties with the Hunters, and teach and learn with them. This is, fundamentally, how Hunters came to learn Synthesis, and also means that the Guides might, someday, learn Sundering. A very select few know that the Guides make the weapons that the Hunters carry in return for the Heartstones from those Z'bri the Hunters have killed, but their methods for doing so are kept absolutely secret.

Whatever the source of their knowledge, the Guides are powerful because they have learned things that others do not even suspect, but they must also be careful. Even as imposing as they are, the Guides are still human, and some of the truths they know would get them killed if they were revealed before the audience is ready.

The Guides know how badly the universe is out of balance, and that the current relations between humanity, the Z'bri and the Fatimas are only making things worse. For now, they are focusing their efforts on trying to bring the Fallen to know themselves. It is their hope that if the Fallen can come to truly understand their own hearts, they can then be led to see their place in the Great Architecture clearly enough and they will be able to take steps to fix the damage that has already been done.

An encounter with the Guides is never easy on members of the Fallen. The Guides are mysterious and powerful, and they teach with puzzles, riddles and anagogic stories that the Fallen have to puzzle and work at in order to understand. They are also not above arranging for the Fallen to be subjected to trials and tests if they think it will help them learn. Though it troubles the hearts of most Guides, the time of reckoning is coming and they know that the future will be bought with the blood and sacrifice of the Eighth Tribe.



THE RIVER OF DREAM

The Physical and Spiritual Orbs can be viewed as spiritual tectonic plates; the Fold forms the fault line between them. Both Orbs are in continual motion, and when those movements clash, the fault line creates mountains, canyons, earthquakes and volcanoes. This chaotic borderland is the River of Dream, where Flesh and Spirit clash and interact, allowing mortal man to dream and glimpse the perfection of divinity. The Physical Orb depends on the power and inspiration it receives from the Spiritual Orb through the River of Dream; it is commonly believed that the Spiritual Orb requires the worship and honor the Physical Orb gives in return. Because of its place as the exchange of power between Orbs, the River of Dream is a powerful and dynamic place, making it both an invaluable resource and a dangerous chaos.

By its very nature the River should be flexible to accommodate the wild and unpredictable power thrown off by the interaction of the Orbs; with the closing of the Fold, however, the 'fault line' was nailed down, unable to move or shift. Without any give to allow for change, the Fold's inflexibility is quickly leading to a critical instability in the River of Dream. The Fold will either buckle and collapse under the stress, or the Spiritual and Physical Orbs will begin to drift apart. Either scenario will create a void in the River's place. Since both Orbs require the interaction of the other, this would be the effective end of the world.

THEMES AND MOODS

The River of Dream is an elusive, enigmatic and dangerous place; it is also an integral part of both the game of **Tribe 8** as well as the lives of the Characters. It is an inescapable part of the world and therefore will no doubt make an appearance in any game. The key to Weaving the River of Dream effectively is to maintain an aura of mystery made even eerier by the setting's familiarity: the River is composed of equal parts Flesh and Spirit, and is the place where sleeping souls dream. Every Character has been there before, and some savants and experienced Dreamers may have been there quite often, but this only serves to heighten, not diminish, its strangeness.

SUBJECTIVITY

Any experience in the River should be a personal one. Before the session begins, Weavers should ask the Players what their Characters dream of, what lingering doubts haunt them, and what concerns strike to their hearts. When the Characters enter the River of Dream, Weavers should use these elements mercilessly, taunting them with whispers and hints that the objects of their desires and nightmares are lurking just beyond the bend. Spirits or other inhabitants of the River take on the shape of dreams or fears, matching their personalities with what the dream means to the Character. If, for instance, a spirit is desperate for help, it may take on the form of a younger sister whom the Character could not save in reality.

8. Weaver's Resources

In a similar vein, not everything that is encountered in the River will look the same, or mean the same thing, to every person. Because the River is a mingling of Spirit and Flesh into Dream, it is a very subjective place. Not every Character need see the same symbol in the same way, and Weavers should feel free to explore what each Character thinks and feels about the things they encounter. The spirit who comes in the form of a dead younger sister, for example, could be a sign of hope and redemption to one Character, but a sign of failure and the price of the past to another. Weavers and Players should work together to make each journey in the River one that is flexible and meaningful.

ARCHETYPE

The other side of the coin is the River's more universal aspect: not only is it the place where the Character comes to dream, it is where the whole world dreams. Therefore the River is as likely or even more likely to showcase the dreams of a nation or a religion. The River is where legends and gods walk, and most spirits will appear as they are reputed or believed to appear, usually in magnificent forms symbolic of their core virtues. The landscape itself will mirror the beliefs and dreams of humanity: the Great Hill is almost a mountain in the River, while the Discarded Lands are nearly forgotten and can be cleared by some Dreamers with a single step.

It is also important to remember that not everything in the River needs to be new or original. Many of the most powerful images that are found in the River are those that are old and archetypal. Weavers should look into myth, folklore and religion for symbols with a deep and powerful meaning. It is not necessary for the River to be original, but it is important for it to be entertaining and meaningful. Images of swords in stones, of cups of forgiveness, of fire and blood, and the hopeful/mournful symbolism of white are all very old motifs, but used correctly can still be very powerful ones.

POSSIBILITY AND CHANGE

It is important to note, however, that the River of Dream does not exist as a product of solely human belief. It is, instead, the interaction between Flesh and Spirit. In the simplest terms, the elements that compose the River derive their form from the Physical Orb, while their inspiration comes from the Spiritual Orb. An encounter within the River of Dream is an encounter with something alien and otherworldly cloaked in familiar shapes and forms. Dreamers see things within the River of Dream, not because they are created by their dreams, but because their dreams contact something from beyond their world. These otherworldly powers and forces are formed and channeled by human dreams, and the resulting 'spirit' is greater than the sum of its parts. The River of Dream is composed of such spirit matter, from awesome beings like Great Owl to the very ground a Dreamer walks on. It is not that the ground is unable to speak; it simply does not choose to. Usually.

Because of the unadulterated possibility that the Spiritual Orb provides, things within the River of Dream need not remain constant or static. This is why the ground can speak if it wishes, and also why the River is never the same twice. The River molds itself to the situation, acting, reacting and existing in whichever way is the most appropriate. What was in one location once may not be there again. What was an impassable mountain range in the last dream may be cleft with a pass the next dream. The very landscape will change in order to channel questing Dreamers along the path towards their destination, although this does not make anything easier. Any such path will be littered with tests to determine if the Dreamers are worthy of achieving their goal, as well as obstacles and difficulties which will purge the Dreamer of undesirable qualities or instill desirable qualities in their character. No Dreamer reaches the end of their vision quest without being changed in the process, made ready to encounter what is at its end.

COSMOGRAPHY OF THE RIVER OF DREAM

The River of Dream is laid out roughly parallel to the Physical Orb, but the similarity both ends and begins there. The River takes its form from the World of Flesh, but that template is not left unadulterated. Within the River of Dream mountains turn to molehills and rivers change their course at whim, and the constant flux generated by the Spiritual Orb's influence on the River twists and distorts the original landscape. Only the influence of the Physical Orb keeps the River in any semblance of order or rationality. Therefore a Dreamer entering the River can expect her surroundings to be somewhat similar, but not identical, to where she left her body.

GULLIES

At the very boundary between Flesh and Dream are Gullies; some are special places known as holy ground where the spirits commune and speak to humanity. Others are known as terrifying pockets of nightmare that bleed into the Physical Orb. The distinction between Flesh and Dream is never absolute; a gully is a location within the World of Flesh where the difference between the physical and the spiritual is so indistinct it may as well not exist at all. Vistas open within gullies, allowing viewers to see directly into the River of Dream, offering wondrous or terrifying visions to the unwary. Spirits may walk through the World of Flesh within a Gully, although they do not stray far. Many Dreamers make pilgrimages to these locations to speak with spirits and gain wisdom.

There are very few Gullies known on Vimary, or even the surrounding Outlands. The spiritual focus, power, and the inherently shifting nature of the River make Gullies among the rarest phenomena known to man. Any Gully will be very obviously enchanted and holy or unholy. Veruka's Tower, the Circle of the Chosen and High Mountain are examples of Gullies. Because Dream is so close at hand, Synthesis, both Ritual and Conjunctional, is made easier here, and all such uses gain an extra die. The powers of spirits and even the Sundering

of Z'bri are also boosted, sometimes to drastic degrees. Synthesis so close to the River also entails some danger; any loss of equilibrium casts the wielder through the Gully and into the River of Dream.

ANCHORS

Few works of man are reflected in the River of Dream; those few that do are steeped in powerful emotions or are a focus of humanity's hopes and dreams. These man-made structures exist in the Physical Orb and the River of Dream, and are called Anchors; they have been impressed on the River of Dream through the concentrated dreams of humanity. Since they exist in both the Physical Orb as well as the River of Dream, they can serve as bridges between the two realms. Moreover, because they are composed of human dreams, they are more amenable to being shaped by human Dreamers, and some have become stockpiles of spirit-shaped tools and weapons.

Anchors will almost always be places that have been the locations of, and the centers of, a great number of dreams, hopes and fears — or at least a few very intense ones. Any place that is important to the hearts and minds of the people could become an Anchor. Examples of Anchors include Mortuary, the Skyrealm of T'Phalus and Olympus. Anchors can also be Gullies, such as in the case of Veruka's Tower. Any use of the Dreaming skill by a human Dreamer incurs a +1 modifier within an Anchor. Entering the River of Dream through trance also benefits from this modifier.

DENS

Many powerful spirits call the River of Dream their home, and most consider some small portion of it theirs. The area around a powerful spirit's home twists and bends to their essence, taking on aspects that the spirit finds pleasing and complementary to its nature. Lesser spirits of a similar type or mindset congregate in the Den, and often serve as messengers or guards to the Den's owner. Spirits interested in contact with humanity such as Totems will construct entrances or trails into their Dens to guide (and instruct) any pilgrims to their home.

Hooded Falcon's Aerie is one such Den, inhabited by a patron Totem of the Templars, Hooded Falcon. Hidden within the River's mirror of the Hunting Paths, the Aerie is set at the top of a mountain that does not exist in the World of Flesh. Within the thick walls is a small 'monastery' attended by a handful of Templar and countless bird spirits. The Aerie is the final destination of Templar initiates; the path there is difficult, littered with challenges and obstacles designed to test and teach the initiates' determination, strength of will and the mettle of their hearts. There, the initiates are inducted both into the Sisterhood as well as the Joanite internal inquisition. There they learn that one day Hooded Falcon will be freed of his blinders and cast out to fly across the world; so too will the Joanites be loosed from their shackles and sent into the world to do their work.



EDDIES

The River of Dream flows beneath and through all things, a hair's breadth away. The River's flow is not, however, constant. Powerful currents wash through some locations; in others, the River pools and stills, creating a reservoir of Dream. These places are often made into ritual spaces called Eddies. An Eddy's power must be tapped through a ritual specific to the Eddy, but can greatly assist any Synthesis performed there.

Each Eddy works differently; some confer a simple bonus modifier to the die roll; others extend the reach of the Synthesis performed there to great distances; others are linked to specific Eminences or Aspects. Weavers are encouraged to use their imagination when creating an Eddy, and to link the place's nature to the bonuses it gives. A grove sacred to the Evans may give a bonus to any Life Synthesis used on plants, while a haunted tomb may allow contact with ghosts whose bodies are buried there.

Circle of Spirit: This ritual space on Hom is one example of an Eddy. The Eddy can only be tapped through self-sacrifice; most Fallen make a token sacrifice of blood, but the Circle has seen its share of suicides, as well. The power of Dream then rushes through the ritualist who made the sacrifice, allowing her to focus the raw potential into great acts (and sometimes her last act) of Synthesis. The Fallen have performed many group rituals there, with the ritual leader giving her blood or life to unlock the Eddy. Most of these rituals are planned and executed in secret, since any given ritual would prompt a detractor on Hom to interrupt the ritual. Z'bri cannot make use of the Circle of Spirit, since the bodies they wear are not their own.

Abonom: Abonom is built around the site of a powerful Eddy, with the Great Trident rising up from its location. The Rakh Hive's intended use of the Eddy is unknown, but the presence of their Melanis associates has prompted some to whisper that the Trident will channel the Eddy's power and tear open the Fold once again.

SHALLOWS

The nature of Sundering tears Spirit away from the Physical Orb, and in locations where Sundering is performed repeatedly, the cumulative effect is that the Spiritual Orb is pushed away from the Physical Orb. In most Z'bri controlled lands this effect warps the River, making it sick and dirty. However, if pushed too far, great amounts of Sundering and large scale abominations in one place can push the Orbs to the brink of total separation. Since the River of Dream exists as an interface between the two, this separation weakens the River in the area, attenuating it into shallows. At that point the River becomes a marshy waste in the area surrounding this breach, and even the physical world about it becomes a no-man's-land of waste and decay. In a Shallow all Synthesis rolls are made at a -1.

THE SHORES

Where the Physical Orb, the River of Dream and the Sea of the Lost meet are the Shores, a small corridor marking the separation of the world of the living from the world of lost souls. As the Fold stands between Flesh and Spirit, the Shores stand between Flesh and the Void. Souls outside of Baba Yaga's grace find themselves unable to cross the Fold, and they then drift to the Shores and then out into the Sea. Some few sometimes claw their way back out of the Sea and onto the Shores, intent on entering the World of Flesh once more. Many seek to live again, although this is denied them; most will haunt those they loved or the places they lived, forever trying to recreate their lives. The Dream Harrowers patrol the Shores and prevent most ghosts from re-entering the Physical Orb.

Even though the Shores exist just beside the Physical Orb, the journey there is difficult, and not all Dreamers know the way. The Shores lie in the direction of the Sea of the Lost, and the Dreamer must travel towards the horizon of existence to get there. The easiest ways are to follow a spirit associated with death, decay and entropy as they pass through secret ways, or to take one of the portals within the Great Hill Anchor maintained (and kept secret) by the Yagans. More difficult routes there include exhausting spirit quests, and a ritualized 'death' of the Dreamer, usually by creating her own funeral in a Dream-Realm. The primary danger to all these ways, however, is that if the Dreamer takes the path too far, she will overshoot the Shores and find herself in the Sea of the Lost.

DREAMING

The most common means through which humanity interacts with the River of Dream is through its own dreams; some adepts have learned some control over their dreams, represented by the Dreaming skill. Those without the Dreaming skill but with the awareness that dreams can, in theory, be controlled (this includes any Tribal or Fallen, but few others) may try to make do with an unskilled roll, modified by PSY. Most Tribals and Fallen in this category, however, know better than to risk losing their souls to the Sea of the Lost with such foolhardy stunts.

There are two basic ways to enter the River of Dream. The first is through the dreams that come naturally in sleep. When a Dreamer sleeps, she enters the River automatically, but instead of wandering aimlessly throughout the River, she creates a small, personalized pocket called a Dream Realm where personal dreams will occur and she can rest, as it is with all sleepers. Stepping out of the Dream Realm and into the surrounding River requires active use of the Dreaming skill; once abandoned, the Dream Realm fades away. After the Dreamer performs whatever business she had in the River, she may wake back to her body with another Dreaming roll. Gallivanting through the River of Dream is mentally and psychically exhausting, and affords no rest. The Threshold for both leaving a Dream-Realm and waking again is dependent on how rested the Character is: a Character who has just had a night's worth of restful sleep rolls against a Threshold of 3; after a full day of waking activity, the Threshold is 4; every day of missed or partial sleep raises the

MANIPULATING DREAM-REALMS

Threshold an additional +1. It is common, especially among Yagans, to sleep for rest and then sleep for visions before waking to confront the day.

The second avenue into the River of Dream is through a self-induced trance, much like the trance required to wield Synthesis, only prolonged. This entrance into the River bypasses the Dream Realm and is unaffected by lost sleep; its Threshold is 6, modified by ritual aids and support (as detailed in the **Tribe 8 Rulebook**, page 162). The Dreamer's anima, or soul, is cast into the River of Dream and is free to act and move within that realm. Return to her body is automatic unless some other force prevents her. The primary advantage to entering the River through trance is that the Dreamer may be assisted by others and maintains a slight connection with her body. She may speak with those nearby, although the communication will be distorted and somewhat difficult. Her attendants may observe her progress, usually by gazing into a pool of water or a fire, giving advice and assistance throughout the vision quest. Attendants can even perform Conjunctional Synthesis for the Dreamer's benefit, although any loss of Equilibrium affects not only the wielder but also the Dreamer, and maybe even the other attendants as well.

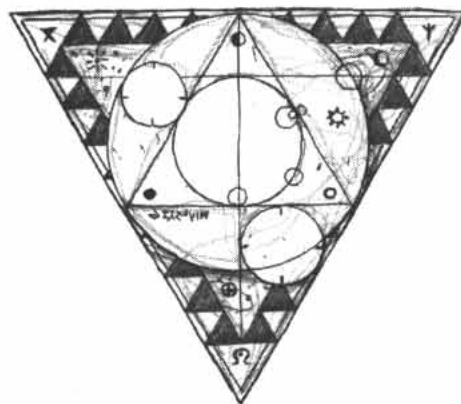
Once in the River of Dream, the Dreamer may travel through the eerie and fickle landscape as she pleases. The simplest mode of travel is to walk, but as this is a realm of dream and possibility, other options are available. A skilled Dreamer may conjure herself wings to fly on, or mold her anima into the form of a wolf to run in. The Joanite cavalry are known to enter the River of Dream along with their horses, and ride as they do in the flesh. A Dreamer may also form herself tools, weapons and clothing out of her anima. These tools are extensions of the Dreamer's own abilities, and can no more be given to another Dreamer than a warrior's martial prowess can be handed over to an untrained combatant. Any manipulation of one's own anima requires a Dreaming roll. The Dreaming roll is modified by Psyche normally, but may be modified by any other Attribute or Skill deemed appropriate (AçI to create wings, Melee to create a sword, Carpentry to create a saw). The result determines how drastic the change and effective the tool.

A Dreamer may also extend her manipulation beyond herself and into her dreamscape, the portion of the River of Dream immediately surrounding her. This is significantly more difficult, and is performed with a Dreaming test opposed by WIL. Because of the nature of the River of Dream, the rocks, trees and even the ground are animated with spirit to some degree, and possess a will of their own. Most 'incidental' spirits have effective Attributes of zero, but Dreamers who come to rely on a readily malleable environment will be surprised sooner or later. Twisting spirits out of their natural shape, especially without asking their permission, is considered very rude, and characters doing so with impunity will incur not only the wrath of the spirits in question, but other more powerful spirits, as well. Other Dreamers may be manipulated with Dreaming, and this is more difficult, yet. The roll gains a +2 modifier and the Dreamer may elect to oppose with WIL or Dreaming. Neither spirits nor Dreamers can be damaged or destroyed in this way, but they may be all but incapacitated by, for instance, taking away their legs, arms and mouth.

Once out of her Dream-Realm, a Dreamer may recreate another one at any time. This can be a useful tactic for many reasons. One Dream Realm looks very much like another without careful scrutiny, and makes a good (if vulnerable) place to hide from pursuers. Dream-Realms are also personalized to the Dreamer, making her more powerful while in it. The Threshold for creating a new Dream-Realm is 4; the MoS serves as a modifier to the Dreamer's further Dreaming rolls made within.

Spirits may be tricked or trapped into a Dream-Realm, although this is somewhat dangerous — with all her own dreams, hopes and fears arrayed out around her, the Dreamer also is more vulnerable to attack. A Dream-Realm constructed out of elements associated with the spirit or its type (a funeral for ghosts, a forest for a tree spirit) may entice the spirit to enter. Alternately, a Dreamer may attempt to sweep the spirit inside at the moment of the Dream-Realm's creation with a Dreaming roll modified by WIL and opposed by the spirit's WIL. Once inside, the spirit may not leave until it wins a contest of WIL, with its MoF for the entrapment (if any) as a negative modifier. Any actions the spirit takes to affect the Dreamer are made at +3; a spirit usually escapes a Dream-Realm by trampling the Dreamer on its way out.

A Dreamer can also enter the Dream-Realms of others she finds within the River of Dream by rolling a Contest of Dreaming. Untrained Dreamers must roll unskilled. The invading Dreamer's MoS becomes a positive modifier for all subsequent Dreaming rolls inside, and she is free to haunt, torture, interrogate, soothe or heal the dreamer at will. If the invading Dreamer fails, the sleeping person may choose whether to lock out the invader or to let her in — with a negative modifier to all the invader's Dreaming rolls inside. If the Dreamer is locked out, she will be unable to invade until the subject wakes, sleeps and dreams again; if the Dreamer is let in, she cannot refuse, and can only escape as a spirit would, above. If the invading Dreamer fumbles her Dreaming roll, she cannot make any Dreaming actions once in the Dream Realm, and acts as an untrained Dreamer for all other purposes. The sleeper may expel the invader at any time she wishes, or wait until she wakes up, when the Dreamer is dropped out of the Dream-Realm automatically.



PHYSICALLY ENTERING THE RIVER

It is not normally possible for any Dreamer, no matter how powerful, to enter into the River of Dream in the flesh. There are, however, a very few extremely powerful spirits capable of carrying Characters bodily into the River; and there are rare times where a Gully may allow the Character to physically walk in the River. Doing so is inherently dangerous, but offers several tempting benefits.

Any Character physically present in the River of Dream adds one die to her Synthesis skill, and adds a +2 bonus to her Synthesis rolls. Because she is in the river both physically and spiritually, it is very easy for her to use and meld both sides of the River to her will and skill. In addition, a Character physically present in the River may not be forced into a dreamscape, and she keeps all of her physical gear — removing the need to recreate it through use of the Dreaming skill.

The dangers are just as great. If a Character who is physically in the River of Dream loses Equilibrium, she does not become disconnected as she normally would. She still suffers the normal penalties, but she also takes physical wounds as her body is wracked and warped by the flow of the River. A Character who suffers distortion takes a Flesh Wound, Disconnection results in a Deep Wound and Separation results in Instant Death.

Just as dangerous, is the fact that once a Character has found her way bodily into the River she has no guaranteed way of getting out. Unlike a dreaming person, she cannot simply wake up. If the spirit that brought her across abandons her, or if the Gully she crossed through falters, the Character could be stuck in the River eternally.

ASPECTS AND DREAMING

Certain Aspects such as Dream Travel and Piggyback facilitate Dreaming in different ways. Since the distinction between these Aspects and Dreaming can be confusing, they are clarified below.

Dream Travel (Tribe 8 Rulebook, page 171) allows the Dreamer to enter the River of Dream with a Synthesis roll instead of Dreaming; the MoS on the Aspect roll serves as a positive modifier to all further Dreaming rolls. The Dreamer's anima appears on the Shores, a special place in the River where the World of Flesh is visible. The Dreamer may then walk through the physical world invisible, observing events and even interfering with Synthesis. Dream Travel also allows the Dreamer to possess animals (contest of WIL) and enter the dreams (use the Dream-Realm rules above) of anyone she encounters while walking the Shores.

Piggyback (p. 142, *Word of the Fates*, page 112) allows the Dreamer to latch onto a spirit once in the River of Dream. The Dreamer establishes a rapport with the spirit and is subsumed into its essence, becoming effectively invisible as the spirit goes about its business. The primary uses for this Aspect are twofold;

the first is to commune with the spirit, learning about its nature as well as the nature of its animal form; the second is to 'hitch a ride' with the spirit wherever it may be going. Since many spirits can go places that Dreamers cannot, such as secondary orbs, spirit dens, or simply travel significant distances, Piggyback can allow access to these places. The Dreamer may detach herself from the spirit at any time, or wake up to her body as normal.

COMBAT AND DREAMING

Spirit Combat is a tricky predicament, combining Dreaming and mundane fighting skills, and complicating both with the more difficult aspects of the other. With the exception of rare artifacts, no weapons or other tools are brought into the River with a Dreamer, who must forge her own (see above). An untrained Dreamer cannot create her own weapons, and must either pick up elements of dream (with the constant possibility that what was a sword the last moment has turned into something useless now) or fight barehanded. All spirit combat rolls by an untrained Dreamer are made Unskilled. A Dreamer trained in Dreaming but not fighting may create her own weapons and roll Attribute checks instead. A Dreamer trained in both Dreaming and combat skills, such as Templars or Mordred, uses the lower of her two skills.

BEYOND THE RIVER OF DREAM

In cases of extreme desperation, Herculean effort or Weaver vision, a cycle may take the Characters beyond the River of Dream into the greater Architecture of the universe. Beyond the familiar currents of the River are alien and obscure movements of Spheres and Orbs, and the crumbling foundations of the universe. At this scope, the powers involved have transcended the level of the Fatimas and are as incredible as they are inscrutable, as old as time itself. Characters lost within this setting will feel like mice running along the gears of a great machine, and can have the dubious privilege of seeing the decay and collapse of reality.

THE CRUMBLING ARCHITECTURE

It is arguably impossible for Characters to perceive the whole collapse of the Great Architecture, and even those who travel beyond the River of Dream can only take in parts and pieces of the destruction. However, it is in the River and the Orbs that the Characters will be able to see the most of the damage. Where issues of the decay of the universe may be abstract outside the River and the Orbs, inside those realities they become of prime importance. The Weaver must convey the collapse in terms of mood and with concrete and symbolic examples the Characters have access to and can also comprehend.

The Crumbling Architecture is, however, one of the few things in *Tribe 8* that does not require subtlety: the Architecture is so grand and its collapse so catastrophic that any sign of its fall is an incredible affair. This is not a license to be heavy-handed or inconsiderate of the Players, however. It is essential to begin with small, local and personalized signs of the oncoming apocalypse, building eventually to the death of everything they know. The end result should leave no doubt in the Characters' minds that the end of the world is coming, and coming soon.

THE FOLD

The Fold does not exist in any one location, and cannot be touched as one would a wall; instead, the Fold exists on a metaphysical level, separating Flesh from Spirit. It is immaterial, invisible and does not have any existence outside of as a divisor between two realms. That said, in the River of Dream the Fold often appears as a visible, material barrier that a Dreamer might reach out and touch. This both is and is not the Fold itself; the easiest way to explain it is that it is a portion of the Fold that is visible as an example of the whole. Within the River, one thing may be two; in this case, the Fold is both the universal and immaterial barrier as well as the local and touchable wall encountered by the Dreamer.

The Closed Fold is at the center of what is wrong with the Crumbling Architecture; it is the Fold which prevents the souls of the dead from passing to the afterlife, the Fold which traps the Z'bri in this Orb and drives them mad, the Fold which separates Flesh from Spirit so that humanity can only glimpse at its own potential. Sadly, the Fold is also the most indomitable aspect of the architecture, a natural barrier reinforced by the Fatimas and perverted by the self-sacrifice of the Nomads.

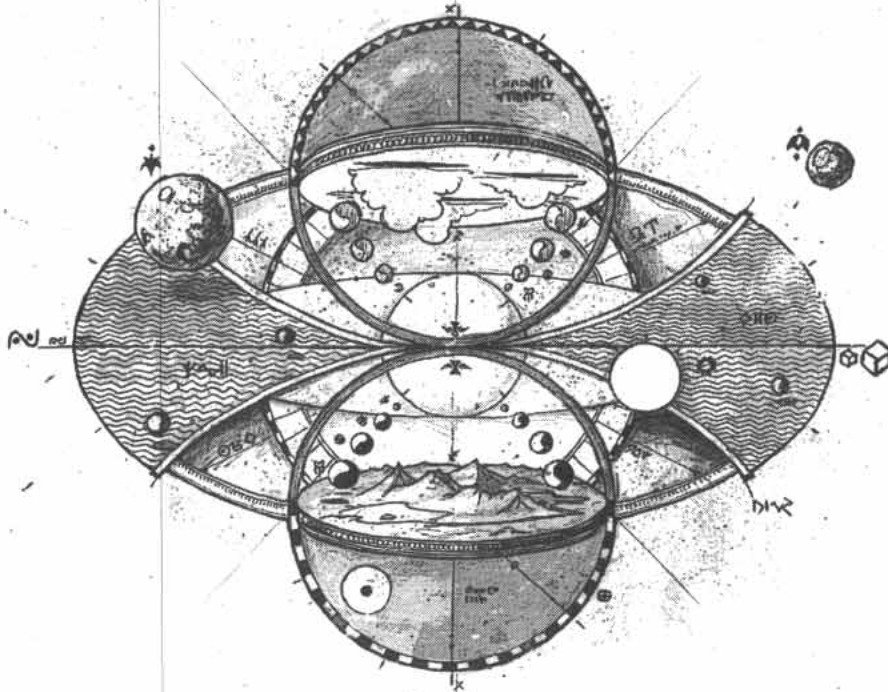
The Fold enters a cycle primarily as a symbol of both the collapse of the Great Architecture as well as its inevitability. The Fold traps the Characters in a crumbling universe, but is also the element that shows the most strain. The Fold, while immaterial, should be described as heavy, powerful and unwieldy, which makes any depiction of it buckling or threatening to break all the more terrifying. It can serve to trap the Characters, or provide a boundary that they cannot pass through. It is the final proof that the Characters and the Fallen can run no further, and must confront the looming edifice of entropy and all that is wrong in the world. It is the one thing that must change and the one thing that (seemingly) cannot.

THE SEA OF THE LOST

The Sea of the Lost sits at the periphery of the Physical and Spiritual Orbs, the place where forgotten souls go without the guidance of Baba Yaga. It is a thin, gray place stretched taut over the Void, where souls fade and are slowly pulled apart by eternity. It is a place of endless torment made only worse by the fact that the spirits trapped there bleed the very essence of their souls, losing the energy and motivation to ever overcome the pull of the Sea and escape the torment. Every soul in the Sea knows this, and most succumb to despair, knowing they will die once more, but only after eons of strangling pain and hopelessness.

It is a simple thing for a Dreamer to enter the Sea of the Lost; it is nearly impossible to get back out. Concentrating and following the resonance of forgotten and lost things, a Dreamer can find her way to the Shores, the barrier between the River and the Sea. There, it is the simple matter of stepping into the Tide. Few are so foolish. No game mechanics for the return trip are included here; returning to the Shores should be a full play session in itself, requiring the Dreamer to overcome her greatest self-doubts and summon her very last inner reserves.

Many scholars among the Doomsayers speculate that the Sea is not natural, and represents the entropy and loss that is occurring due to the Crumbling Architecture. The Physical and Spiritual Orbs depend on each other for existence, and souls are one of the ways in which this power is transferred between the two. Souls should, in the proper order of things, go from the World of Flesh to their afterlife in the World of Spirit, but are instead being lost to the Sea. None of the scholars of the Nation or Fallen are quite sure what this might mean or portend, but they are all terrified of the implications.



ORBS AND SPHERES

The origin of the secondary orbs is a great source of speculation among the Tribes and Fallen. Due to the strong connection between the Seven Sisters and many of these orbs, many conclude that they are the birthplaces of the Fatimas. Others claim that, like the Solar and Lunar spheres, the secondary orbs reflect the heavens. Another theory posits that the Closing of the Fold sent shards of the Physical and Spiritual Orbs flying into the Sea of the Lost, where they remain today. The more pragmatic and wise on Vimary agree it is doubtful that the whole truth is encapsulated in any one theory.

Those few who have made the difficult journey to visit one report that they are realms like none other. Outside of both the Physical and Spiritual Orbs, the secondary orbs are part of neither, and are the most alien places Player Characters are likely to experience. Because of this, the human psyche instinctively erects a perceptual 'bubble' in order to translate the incomprehensible setting into terms that the witness can understand. This bubble serves the same function but is not as powerful as the River of Dream, and is not only unreliable but prone to collapse, leaving the intrepid explorer face-to-face with unelaborated reality. Some adepts in the spiritual world intentionally seek to overcome their own bubble of perception. Some are rewarded with great wisdom and insights into the spiritual world; others only find insanity.

Weavers should use secondary orbs sparingly, and should remember that even reaching such a destination usually takes an inhumanly intense effort. Some few orbs, such as the Institute (*Children of Lilith* p. 81) can be reached through secret paths in the Physical Orb. Most, however, can only be reached through the River of Dream. Spirits may be able to convey a Dreamer to one of these orbs, or the Dreamer may alone pick her way through difficulties and challenges. The paths to many orbs purge or instill properties such as wisdom, courage, or fear in order to prepare any visitors for the orb itself. Many orbs are guarded, as few of these realms have been left unoccupied, providing as they do a safe haven in the midst of the Sea of the Lost.

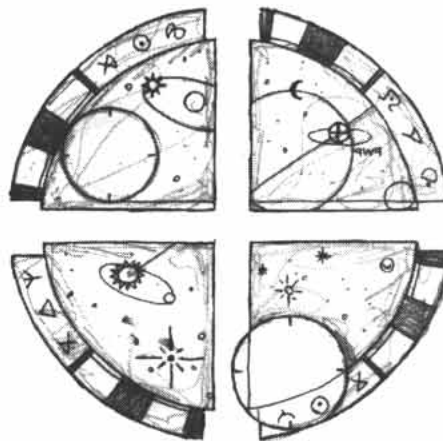
The Solar Sphere: The Solar Sphere is the most prominent of the secondary spheres, and its ruler, Song of Stars, so powerful that his light can be seen in the World of Flesh. Despite his might, a power that extends the breadth of the architecture, he is known to only a few of the most learned scholars among the Tribes. Humanity, and especially such ephemeral things as nations and even Fatimas, is so small he can barely see it, let alone interact with it regularly. His realm is distant and removed, and can only be reached with the assistance of spirits of air and light. He holds court over a magnificent array of spirits of every form and hue, but at the core of that court is a worried despair, a knowledge that the whole universe will soon be snuffed out if things do not change. Song of Stars is so powerful, however, he knows that he cannot amend the situation without destroying it utterly.

Gryphon's Gate: The orb known as Gryphon's Gate is half legend and half fact, whispered between adepts and explorers of the River of Dream. The orb is reputed to be a harsh winter wasteland of forbidding slopes, treacherous chasms and massive glaciers. Hidden somewhere within that realm is a great gate fashioned in bronze. Atop the gate is the head of an eagle; on either side rests the powerful arms and paws of an Onto. It is said that brave or foolish explorers who step through the gate are subjected to a test called the Ordeal of the Sky and, if they are deemed worthy, taken to any location in the Great Architecture. The gate can only be found, let alone used, once in a person's lifetime.

Joshua's Face: Both Doomsayers and Joshuans make pilgrimages to the Face of Joshua, although they do so by two different routes. Joshuans travel there through the Path of Blood, a painful undertaking that begins with being stabbed in the back with a dagger and ends, after endless trials of suffering and determination, with the Joshuan arriving at the peak of a mountain known as the Horn. Doomsayers take a less violent — though by no means less dangerous — journey through the Den of the Unnamable Lord of Secrets, a Totem Spirit corrupted by the Z'bri, through the Labyrinth of Night and finally into the Crypt of Joshua's Eye. There the Doomsayers seek omens and portents and perform other rituals of scrying around a pool of black water known as the Eye. Unfortunately for the Doomsayers, the Joshuans regard the Crypt, which sits at the base of the Horn, as a sacred space, and consider the Doomsayers' rituals to be defiling Joshua's memory. The Joshuans have made a handful of raids against the Doomsayers within the Crypt, and are planning a full-scale invasion to 'cleanse' the Crypt of the Fallen defilers once and for all.

SYNTHESIS

Synthesis is not like the magic in most games or books. It is a moving dream, a living process rather than a set formula. As a result it can be terribly difficult for Players and Weavers alike to understand and use Synthesis in their games. This section is devoted to making the most common and obvious use of Dreaming power more accessible and understandable.



THEMES AND MOODS

An essential part of understanding Synthesis is recognizing the themes and moods that Synthesis brings to the game. By staying true to the "feeling" of Synthesis and its spiritual and dream-like nature, Players and Weavers alike can come to a greater understanding of the process.

SPIRITUALITY

Synthesis is shamanistic, animistic, spirit magic. It is not spells tossed off with casual ease. Synthesis is a contact with another world, and should be approached with respect, caution and a goodly portion of awe. A Dreamer is not a mage whose will is so strong she can break reality, or a wizard who has studied tomes of ancient lore and knows the secret workings of the world. A Dreamer is someone who is in contact with or can contact the world of dream and unlimited possibility. Conjunctive Synthesis is the ability to bring some of that possibility to the 'real world,' the Physical Orb. The Dreamer is then a conduit, and while this role gives her some impact on the effects of Synthesis, she is not the origin of the power, and therefore is never in complete control.

DANGER

Because of this lack of true control, Synthesis is dangerous, especially in crisis (like combat). Fumbles or bad failures can take a Dreamer out of the fight, get her killed, or worse, lose her soul to the Sea. Hence the above statement about 'respect, caution and awe.' Synthesis is also, to a great degree, not fully understood. Dreamers may know how to do things, but even they argue about why what they do works. When the stakes — a Character's soul — are so high, and she doesn't really know what she is doing, then the Character will tend to be careful.

DESCRIPTION

Weavers will, at some point, run into a Player saying "I use Synthesis." A good response to this statement is "How?" A ritual-trance, long or short, is required to wield Synthesis. Rituals for Conjunctive Synthesis are intuitive, improvised affairs performed by a savant in the way of Dreams and Spirit, but that does not mean they are transparent or easy. Players and Weavers should think about what their Characters are doing every single time they use Synthesis: what tools they are using, what words they are chanting, and most importantly, why doing these things makes sense to the Characters. Describing the rituals and dreams of Characters goes a long way to reinforcing the setting and mood of **Tribe 8**.

SUBTLETY

The keyword for Synthesis is subtle. Synthesis is rarely ever used to throw fireballs or call down lightning. Because contact with the spirit world allows for a better understanding of this world, Synthesis is heavily biased towards perception. The spirit world is also confusing and enigmatic, and these attributes can be brought out of the River into the real world, allowing Synthesis to confuse perception in illusion, as well. Synthesis is also fleeting — the Great Architecture is out of balance, and the boons of the spirit world have an unsteady grip on the real. Thus remembering to keep Synthesis effects subtle, ephemeral and slightly less than "real" can go a long way to setting the tone of its workings.

SYNTHESIS BY TRIBE AND OUTLOOK

Synthesis is moving water, and the River that one person sees is not the same that another sees. Every Tribe and Outlook creates a focus for belief and understanding, giving Dreamers a way to narrow the vast potential of the River of Dream to a point where they are capable of using it. This section examines the Synthesis of each Tribe and Outlook, looking at how each Eminence is viewed and how it can be used. It is important to remember that these are general notes, and some individuals may not follow the guidelines exactly. Synthesis is always moving and mysterious.





AGNITES

Capriciousness: Synthesis, like everything else, is a game to the Agnites, perhaps the best game of all. The line between reality and dream is a tenuous one at best for all children, and for Agnites it is nearly non-existent. There is little constancy in an Agnite's world, just as there is little that is constant in the River of Dream. An Agnite is able to use that inconsistency, letting it flow through her to affect others. While the effect is not always negative, it is almost always unexpected. Capriciousness can be used to make unpredictable effects, or to make an event have an unpredictable outcome. Its effect will always be something unexpected, because it is the power of sudden change. Upheavals of fortune such as causing a sword blow to twist away or influencing the whim of a potential ally are possible effects. Capriciousness is of little use in planned events, but is of great use in destroying the plans of others.

Inspiration: Agnites draw their Inspiration largely from the child-like faith and the hope they represent to the rest of the Nation. Through their unique connection with the River they are able to channel a bit of that hope to those around them. They use Inspiration to make the impossible seem possible, such as fueling a last-ditch effort during a close fight, or to provide a clue to a seemingly impenetrable mystery. Oration is another good opportunity to use Inspiration, moving the hearts and minds of others with speeches and demonstrations. Inspiration is not effective for anything that crushes hope, and can only be used to cloud or obfuscate by "inspiring" someone towards a new goal.



DAHLIANS

Illusion: From the moment they are born into their mother's caravan, Dahlians breathe Illusion with each breath they take. For most of them, the line between what is real and what is not is a fine one, if it exists at all. Their rituals and spirituality reflect this with a curious dichotomy. Everything is real, so spirits and visions have a special significance to them. On the other hand, nothing is real, so their rituals can at times involve acts that are bizarre and often grotesque, or acts that show a casual disregard for personal well-being. Illusion is best used to mislead others and confuse the senses. While this includes altering the appearance of something, it can also be used to alter or conceal

sounds, scents and any other sensory stimuli, or to alter the appearance of the truth. Illusion can never, however, change the truth itself or directly bring lasting change to the world.

Motion: Equally disturbing to outsiders is the fact that Dahlians are not still, contemplative beings. Rather, everything they do reflects the Motion within their lives as well. Dahlian ritual is stylized, full of costumes, music and dance. Their trances often involve movement and their use of Synthesis, even when deep, powerful and thought-provoking for the participants, appears frenetic and wild to those around them. Motion works well for dramatic, superhuman physical feats, such as outrunning a horse or Keeper vehicle. Subtler uses are possible as well: an added bit of dexterity or grace, or knowing the courses and possible paths of movement a person or animal will take. Motion can be used to inhibit the physical as well, causing clumsiness. Things that are not a part of the moving, physical world are beyond Motion's scope.



EVANS

Empathy: Empathy is an Evan's link to the emotional states of those around her. By influencing another's state of mind, Evans are able to subtly read and control others, within the Tribe and without. Through this control, an Evan is able to lead a person towards what the Evan thinks is best for her — in theory, at least. Reading and influencing emotion are perhaps the most common uses of Empathy. Subtle variations could also be used as a means of determining whether or not someone seems to be telling the truth, or where a political opponent is particularly vulnerable. Empathy is not useful in matters dealing with hard fact, except to shade someone's emotional interpretation of those facts.

Life: As children of Eva the Mother, Evans find the root of their Synthesis in a far-reaching interest in all things around them, watching over their world as protectively as a mother watches her children. Life represents one aspect of this, giving an Evan governance over the physical energy that flows through the River of Dream. By understanding and controlling Life, the Evans serve as caretakers of the physical world. Healing and farming are the two most obvious uses of Life. By manipulating the flow and patterns of living things, enhancing or weakening physical Attributes are also possible. Life will not, obviously, work with non-living things, nor will it be useful in dealing with solely non-physical aspects of being.



JOANITES

Devotion: The twin fires of Devotion and Fury shape the blade of a Joanite's soul. Devotion gives her the strength of her convictions in battle, springing from the still, quiet place of the soul. Devotion is the piety that keeps a Joanite loyal to her family and above all to Joan, the same piety that kept Joan loyal to Her Sisters, even in the face of Joshua's death. It is Devotion that is at the root of Joanite bravery, an absolute faith that can move mountains. Devotion is at its strongest when used to aid actions taken in the name of a Joanite's object of devotion, particularly to protect or defend. Physical and psychological actions may be affected, as long as they are done for the good of another. Selfish acts do not fall into the realm of Devotion, nor do any actions taken against someone the Joanite has sworn to protect.

Fury: Devotion's twin, Fury, makes a Joanite's rage a terrifying sight to behold. Where Devotion comes from piety and stillness, Fury comes from the howling of all those who perished in the Camps. Like Devotion, it faces outward, a righteous anger that comes from injustice towards others. With it, a Joanite can reach beyond her physical limitations and strike as Joan's arm, with Her strength. Fury may be used selfishly, but its strength stems more from righteous fury than from rash anger. Berserker rages which allow a Character to ignore some wound penalties are a common use of Fury. Other uses would be a temporary enhancement to Strength or another physical Attribute. Fury does not help in clear thinking or planning.



MAGDALITES

Conflict: Conflict represents one half of the Magdalite paradigm, serving as a complement to the physicality of Sensuality. Conflict focuses on the power of others: not necessarily power over others, but over the shifting plays of potency as it flows and ebbs between other individuals. By heightening emotions such as jealousy or anger, a Magdalite can shift the balance of friendships and enmities alike, often turning others towards a side the Magdalite favors. Like Sensuality, the power a Magdalite using Conflict may have over others is indirect, through controlling the shifts and tides of influence and politics before them.

Sensuality: Sensuality is seen by most of Vimary as the core of everything Magdalite. This may be the truth, but not for the reason that most would understand. Where Conflict focuses on

the power of others, Sensuality focuses on the power of the self. When Magdalen claimed Her Tribe from the Rose of the Flesh, She taught them what it meant to experience pleasure beyond the hatred and corruption of the Z'bri. Magdalen gave Her followers back the power over their own bodies. Sensuality is an endless power play for those who use it, whether they are drawn to the giving of power or the accepting of it. While not limited to sexual desire, the most common uses of sensuality encompass the sexual, often by enhancing someone's desire or by making one person seem irresistible to another. Sensuality is indirect and cannot be used to force, only to influence.



SHEBANS

Truth: One element of the Justice that Tera Sheba was meant to represent is an understanding of Truth. In order for a judgment to be just, the truth must be found and brought to light. Discovering the truth of another's statement is one of the most common uses of Truth, as is compelling someone to speak only the truth. Another possible use would be to force a person to see the Truth in another's words. Truth may not be used to directly mislead another, although it is possible to present only one side of a truth and not the other. Truth may also be used to create effects that directly reveal true information, such as casting light into a dark place.

Wisdom: Along with Truth, Justice requires the Wisdom to determine what judgment is required in a situation. Not limited to simple knowledge, Wisdom reaches beyond to encompass an understanding of human nature as well as an ability to look beyond petty concerns to see the larger picture. Wisdom is useful in resolving conflict without combat, or in solving mysteries or riddles. Anything that requires clear insight and a keen perception of the self and others can be enhanced by Wisdom. Wisdom can be used to help others see, but it is more difficult to do so. Wisdom is of little use for making headway in emotionally charged situations, as it focuses on head over heart.





YAGANS

Death: After the horror of the Camps, Baba Yaga came to represent mercy to Her Tribe, in the form of Death. While Death is not always used as a mercy, it still holds those connotations to many who wield it. As the Crone leads the Tribes to the Fold after death, many within Her Tribe see themselves as the hand of their Fatima. As an Eminence, Death can be used for something as simple as assisting in butchering a cow or as an elaborate mourning ritual for a respected Little Crone. It is also useful in detecting decay, speaking to ghosts and even in delaying the moment of death, although it cannot delay it indefinitely. Death can never be used to repair or heal.

Fate: Intricately connected with Death is the Eminence of Fate. Just as death is the final destination of everyone living, Fate can be said to be the ultimate outcome of each person's life. That the Yagans have influence over both earns them their status as one of the most feared Tribes. Fate may be used to subtly influence the vagaries of chance, but normally only over events that may change a Character's life. Fate may be used to affect small, everyday events, but works best if those events have larger consequences farther down the road. If Fate is used to alter insignificant events, the changes the Fate creates will turn the 'meaningless' results into greater consequences later.



CHILDREN OF LILITH AND JOSHUANS

Force: The Joshuans, and their spiritual grandchildren, the Children of Lilith, share the Eminence of Force. Seen by some as a bizarre cult among the Eighth Tribe, and by others as the true children of Joshua's legacy, the Children of Lilith are more likely to use Force to augment an action, where a Joshuan will be more overt, often outstripping even an angry Jacker in her rage. Aside from its obvious uses in combat, Force can also be used for things such as getting through a locked door or forcing another character to back down, either through intimidation or perceiving the amount of force and power in a person, place, or thing. Force is always aggressive and direct, and is of little use in anything requiring circumspection or subtlety.

Vengeance: While both groups use Vengeance, the focus each group takes is different. Vengeance, for the Children of Lilith, is often a more intensely personal thing than for the Joshuans. While both groups seek Vengeance for a Fallen Fatima, the

Joshuans rage against a past long dead and seek revenge against an entire people, while the Children of Lilith are more likely to carry their grudges against very specific individuals, those they hold responsible for their own problems or Lilith's downfall. Vengeance is always personal on some level, and can only be used in actions that seek to redress a wrong done to the Dreamer or a group with which the Dreamer is closely affiliated.



DOOMSAYERS

Mystery: The Doomsayers seek out the knowledge that man was not meant to know, and their Eminences reflect this. Mystery is perhaps their biggest aid in their search for that knowledge. Mystery allows a Doomsayer to uncover the hidden, whether it be ephemeral knowledge or more tangible things. Leaps of intuition, finding the missing piece that allows the Character to solve a particular riddle, or even searching a room are possible uses of Mystery. To a lesser extent, Mystery can be used to conceal and obfuscate.

Shadow: Shadow reflects the dark nature of knowledge the Doomsayers seek and accumulate, and also serves as a means to protect that knowledge from the prying eyes of others. It refers to and can affect both literal and figurative shadows, whether to conceal an item or a personal motivation. A Doomsayer with this Eminence can darken a room, but she can also darken a heart, working with more negative emotions that people normally strive to keep hidden. Shadow is of little use to revelation or in situations in which the light, literal or metaphorical, is fully dominant.



HERITES

Freedom: As the most rebellious members of the Eighth Tribe, Freedom in all its forms is paramount to the Herites. Whether it is from the Fatimas, from the Z'bri or from their own natures, if the Herites have a single unifying ideal, it is freedom. As an Eminence, Freedom is most often used as a means of escaping a pursuer or captor, perhaps by increasing running speed or wriggling free of chains. Another possible use is to persuade a member of the Tribes to join the Herite's cause. Freedom cannot be used to enslave, nor is it useful for physical feats unless a Character's freedom is threatened.

Recognition: Recognition is the more internal of the two Herite Eminences. Ideological and intellectual rebels among the Herites favor this Eminence for its ability to let them see past what is immediately obvious and get to the heart of a matter. Recognition can be used to see the truth (or lack thereof) in another's statement, as it can be used to force another Character to see some fact or truth, whether about themselves or about someone else. It is possible to use Recognition to find the flaws in another's logic. Recognition cannot be used to conceal or mislead directly.



JACKERS

Bravery: The Jackers, more so than any other Outlook, have clear, first-hand knowledge of the foes the Eighth Tribe faces. Their Bravery is what gives them the strength to face those foes without backing down. As an Eminence, Bravery can be used in almost any situation where the Character is in danger, and is most often used to affect physical and WIL related tests. Bravery does not apply in any case where the Character or someone the Character cares about is not in direct danger.

Vengeance: The Jackers seek to strengthen the future by focusing on the past. First and foremost, they seek Vengeance on those who have hurt them in the past: the Z'bri, the Tribes, other enemies. Vengeance can be similar to Fury, but can also be cold and calculating as well as hot with anger. Vengeance must have some personal element to it, however. It cannot be used to strike out blindly at a random victim.



LIGHTBRINGERS

Conviction: The strength of the Lightbringers lies in their Conviction. As a rule, the Lightbringers are well rooted in their beliefs in what the Eighth Tribe should become, even if they do not always necessarily agree with one another which vision of the future is correct. A Lightbringer can use Conviction to make a particularly persuasive speech to sway a crowd or to make another Character see her point of view (although not compel her to agree). While a Lightbringer can use the strength of her Conviction to assist in physical actions (such as withstanding torture if it is related to her beliefs), Conviction cannot be used to force people to believe something the Dreamer does not believe.

Unity: It is the Lightbringers who hold closest to the hope of Joshua's prophecy. For them, the vision of the Eighth Tribe is no figure of speech but a reality for which they give their hearts and sometimes their lives. A driving goal for many of them is Unity. Through the Eminence of Unity they are able to work towards making their dream a reality. Unity can do more than simply prevent and stop fights; it can provide an added dimension to communication, allowing each participant to more clearly make herself understood, making a closer unity of thought possible. Unity may never be used to drive people apart.



MARIANS

Purity: At the root of forgiveness is the ability to leave the past behind, or even better, to offer complete absolution. Mary's Children can offer this sort of spiritual cleansing through the Eminence of Purity. Along with forgiveness, Purity is essential to cleanse the taint of the Z'bri from Tribal and Fallen alike. As the number of Marians diminishes, so too does any real hope for true cleansing. Purity extends beyond the spiritual realm and may be used to purify things of the physical realm as well, such as food or drink. Purity may never be used to change something that is not fundamentally tainted, i.e. to make an otherwise honorable Jacker "nice."

Recognition: Another part of forgiveness is recognizing and having the ability to make others recognize when forgiveness and cleansing are called for. Opening another's eyes may prove painful for the one whose eyes are opened, but it is the sort of pain that often leads to an understanding of the need for Forgiveness. Marians also use Recognition to identify others of their Tribe, and to see the true nature of those around them. As with the Herites, Recognition can never be used to deceive directly.



PLAYING WITH SYNTHESIS

Many Players and Weavers alike experience a feeling of vagueness and uncertainty about what Synthesis feels like and how it actually works in game. This section takes a closer look at the game aspects of Synthesis and how they work and relate to the game world. Some of the material gets very detailed, and it is important to remember that this is only to help increase understanding. No rule or guideline here should keep Weavers and Players from using Synthesis as the subtle and versatile dream-weaving that it is intended to be.

The basic nature of Synthesis is the utilization of the power of the River of Dream, where flesh and spirit meld and become something new, in order to change and influence the world. Synthesis works by creation. Even destructive Synthesis works by creating something, energy, a weapon, or decay and death, and letting it do the work of destruction. Under the influence of the River, where one thing can be another, a Dreamer is able to mold the world about them.

EMINENCE

Practically every Tribal and Fallen Character has Eminences. Even those who do not study Synthesis, the River of Dream, or any other occult doctrine, have this ability. Tribals are granted their Eminences when they are babies — their Fatima comes and blesses and Names the child, and thus brings them into contact with the River of Dream. Those who fall from the Tribes retain part of this connection, and keep one of their Tribal Eminences. No one is sure if this is because the Fatima marked them that deeply, or if the Eminence remains out of habit. That the children of two Fallen are able to develop Eminences that neither of their parents had seems to indicate the second, however. In any case, the Fallen develop a new Eminence, one that is based on their new perception of life.

It is the way that a Fallen sees the world that determines her second Eminence, not what group of people she associates with. Though most members of the five main Outlooks do associate with each other and consider each other members of a loose group (very loose, in the case of the Herites) that is not what gives a Fallen her connection with dream. One's beliefs are often influenced by friends and allies, but in the end it is the combination of heart and soul and deep belief, the way of looking at and interacting with the world, that determines what Eminence the Fallen develops. Because not all Fallen ever gain such a deep belief, not all have a second Eminence. For some, the Fall strips away something that never returns. Player Characters are assumed to be strong enough to find the faith and strength to develop a second Eminence.

The power of Eminence allows a Character to gain, once per session, a +2 bonus to any single roll that falls within the domain of her Eminence. A list of situations and ideas that commonly fall within each Eminence is given in *Synthesis by Tribe and Outlook* (p. 111), but Weavers and Players should be willing to be flexible. The point of Eminences is to give direction and personality to play, not to precisely define everything that may or may not be done.

This use of Eminence is a subconscious manipulation of Synthesis. The untrained Character does not usually realize that she is using low grade Synthesis, but she does know that she is doing *something*. She could pray, push herself extra hard, bargain with the One Goddess for luck, reflexively cast her mind against a problem, or just cross her fingers and jump — whatever the effect, it does not simply happen for no reason. Whether she ever realizes that she actually touched the River depends upon the Character. Many Conjunctional Synthesis users among the Fallen started off as people who were able to use their Eminences often, and came to understand and gain control over what they were doing instinctively.

CONJUNCTIONAL SYNTHESIS

Conjunctional Synthesis is quite a bit more difficult than a simple use of Eminence. Where Eminence usage is a reflexive, subconscious and indirect manipulation of the River, Conjunctional Synthesis is an active, trained and conscious ability to take the substance of Dream and make it and the world over in accordance with the Dreamer's desire. This is a massive and difficult undertaking at all times, and is never easy or terribly convenient.

The process starts with the Dreamer entering a lucid trance state. Though she does not actually fall asleep, she is not fully awake, either. The state is much like being so deeply into a daydream that she does not hear the voices of people around her. While in this state the Dreamer's soul is half in the World of Flesh, and half touching the River of Dream. Drugs help with this process, as they both relax the Character and make it easier for her to accept the changes of perception that it brings along with it. It does, however, take some training to use drugs correctly for Synthesis, as an untrained mind on hallucinogens will stumble into a realm of nightmares.

Once in the lucid trance state the Dreamer then must construct a dream, a pattern and image, which will lead to the effect that she wants to produce. This is not a science, but an art based on intuition and deep understanding of the interaction of spirit and flesh. Every Dreamer develops her own style, which works as a combination of her Eminence and personality. A Joanite Templar might say prayers or do kata forms in her head, where an Evan Shaman might dream of music that beats in time with her living pulse, and a Sheban Judge could dream of wise words, sympathy and the mysteries of resonance. Other Dreamers might construct beautiful and elaborate pictures in their head, dream of music, enter a blank and receptive trance, and so forth. The process is very individual and fluid, and is a great opportunity for roleplaying.

The difficulty of constructing the image depends on how many elements and how much effect the Synthesis is to have. Small changes to the self are easy; large changes to the greater world are much more difficult. Making a dream of one's own eyes being sharper is comparatively easy (though it still takes both skill and will). Visualizing a complete, accurate, and detailed image-pattern of a storm coming out of a clear sky is vastly

difficult, however, and nearly impossible because there are so many elements and keys that the Dreamer would have to be able to visualize, control and imagine all at once.

Once the dream-image has been made, the Dreamer then must channel the power of the River as it flows about her, merging the power of spirit, flesh, and her dream into one coherent whole. As hard as the rest of Synthesis may be, this part is by far the hardest. Even small uses can be difficult, as the substance of the River is slippery and difficult to manipulate. Sharpening one's eyesight takes about as much energy as planning, crafting and putting on a pair of glasses — all focused into the space of a few moments. Making a wind powerful enough to knock over a building, on the other hand, would require that the Dreamer summon, channel, control, and focus all the power and energy necessary to create an air front, move a building, and make the dream of it real. Only the most powerful Dreamers can even hope to perform such a task. Anyone else trying it is asking for the power she channels to rip her soul out of her body and send it hurtling towards the Sea of the Lost.

While the power is being channeled and directed into the dream-image, the effect begins to manifest in the World of Flesh. To control and direct the manifestation, the Dreamer's body and waking mind are used to create a bridge to bring the power into the real world. What the Dreamer does to create the bridge is intuitively tied to the dream-image she made: someone who dreamed of music, for example, might play, hum, or whistle a part of the song, or someone who dreamed she was an animal might mimic the animal's body language, while someone who dreamed of fury and rage might scream. Even when a Character is bound or trapped it is possible to manifest, as the movements need not be obvious — it only needs to be intuitively linked to the dream being created. Once again this is an opportunity for roleplay, showing how the Character interacts with the River and how she views herself in relation to the world around her.

Once the effect has manifested, the Dreamer must wake from her lucid trance state. This is harder than it sounds. Most Dreamers find the temptation to stay partially in the River, with the power and beauty all about them, very tempting. If the Dreamer does not wake, however, she risks both being disconnected from her body and of having the effect of her Synthesis run wild from lack of attention.

PERMUTATIONS

Here is a break down of the various modifiers that effect Synthesis, from the chart on page 165 of the *Tribe 8 Rulebook*. Included are the reasons why they modify the roll, and the way that they feel in game.

Fast and Micro-Trances: It is possible for powerful Dreamers to use micro-trances that last only seconds to produce Conjunctive effects. The difficulty of doing so, however, is prohibitive. Only the desperate, the foolish and the insane use micro-trances any more often than necessary. In order to micro-trance a Dreamer must, in the space of a mere few seconds: go into the lucid state, form a dream-image that is complete and perfect

almost instantly, channel energy from the river through the image, bring the power to the real world, manifest the power and then awaken. Considering that performing Conjunctive Synthesis under the best circumstances is difficult, the power, control and sheer luck required to do it so quickly is well beyond the ability of most Dreamers. Even Joanites and Jackers try to prepare their Synthesis before battle, working themselves up in advance, because harnessing dream in the middle of combat is nearly impossible without Fatimal aid or great risk.

Rituals: On the other hand, it is possible to vastly increase the power a Dreamer is capable of summoning by using lengthy rituals. When a Dreamer using Conjunctive Synthesis uses a ritual, it is quite different than Ritual Synthesis. In Ritual Synthesis someone unable to touch the River directly is using the power of established pattern and ceremony to create an effect. A Conjunctive Dreamer, on the other hand, is using a ritual to guide and strengthen her focus as she dips her soul directly into the River of Dream in order to gain power. The extra time, effort and focus allow the Dreamer to gather power more slowly and safely, with less chance of losing control to one of the distracting currents of the River. It also gives the Character a continuous and well-defined bridge for the manifesting of the effect. By continuously engaging in a known ritual the Character is able to shape her dream-image to a known and repeated bridge, making it easier to bring the power to manifestation.

Ceremonial Tools: Ceremonial tools work in a similar way, using familiar foci and sounds to keep the Dreamer's attention fixed and directed on the task at hand. There is a great deal of comfort to be found in the familiar, and that is of inestimable help in dealing with the chaotic and alien River. In addition actually using items that the Dreamer imagines in her dream-image brings a resonance between the River and the World of the Flesh that makes moving between them easier. Someone who dreams of an enemy's hopes turning to ash, for example will be greatly aided if they can actually feel ash slipping between their fingers.

Groups: Group Ceremonies work in a similar way, with the efforts and focus of an entire group of Dreamers working together. In a group ceremony one person forms the dream-image that will result in the effect that she wants, and then the whole group gathers the power needed to dream it into reality. In this way each person only has to gather and control a fraction of the power normally needed to create an effect, which greatly eases the process and reduces the chances of being swept away by the very forces one is trying to control.

Fatimal Aid or Hindrance: Though few Fallen have anything good to say about the Fatimas, even they cannot deny that the presence of a Fatima or the possession of a Fatimal artifact makes Conjunctive Synthesis use easier. The Fatimas, by their very nature, act as a gathering point for the power of the River and as a bridge between the River and the World of the Flesh. Items that are closely associated with them and touched with their aura also carry this benefit. On the other hand, a Fatima's will can also dampen the currents of the River. Those who try to use Synthesis against a Fatima (or even just against Her will) find that the River dries up around them. It is not like the destruction that happens around Z'bri, but that the River simply refuses to touch the Dreamer.

8. Weaver's Resources

Distractions: It almost goes without saying that Conjunctive Synthesis requires near total concentration. Anything that distracts the Dreamer, from being tortured by a Z'bri to being caressed by a Magdalite, makes it harder for the Dreamer to focus on manipulating the River. The distractions do not have to be unpleasant either — a kiss can destroy a weaving as easily as being branded with an iron.

Saving a Life: Synthesis is a gift of the One Goddess, and is the power of creation and joining. Though it can be used to destroy very effectively, its nature makes it easier to save. Whenever a Dreamer is trying to use Synthesis to save a life, the River responds more easily to her will. This works even when the endangered person does not know that the Dreamer is aiding them.

Against a Z'bri: Where Synthesis works by joining flesh and spirit, Sundering works by ripping them apart. Any area tainted by Z'bri, and especially the person and spirit of a Z'bri herself, becomes difficult to effect with Synthesis. A Dreamer who tries will feel her channeling splitting apart, as though the "thread" she was using was unraveling even as she worked. It is not impossible to affect a Z'bri with Synthesis, but it is difficult. As a result most Joanites and Jackers, who have the most experience with the Z'bri, will use their Synthesis to augment themselves rather than directly attacking the Beasts. There is one upside to this conflict, however, as Synthesis causes the same penalties to Sundering as the inverse. A sudden use of Synthesis can effectively disrupt a Sundering ritual.

In the River of Dream: Dreamers who are actually in the River of Dream when they use Conjunctive Synthesis have a large advantage. They no longer need to reach into another place and gather power and channel it across the barrier between worlds. Instead they are able to directly manipulate the living River around them. As a result much faster, more powerful, and more versatile effects become possible. (Thus the +2 bonus)

THE LIMITATIONS OF SYNTHESIS

The truth is that there are few limitations to Synthesis. If something can be dreamed it can, theoretically, be made real with Synthesis. The limits of Synthesis are the limits of human will and imagination. No one Dreamer has ever shown the will and strength of spirit to be able to channel the power required to move a mountain, for example.

Micro-trance and fast-trance Synthesis is quite limited, however. Many new Players grow frustrated with the fact that it is hard to make large effects in short order with Conjunctive Synthesis. This is deliberate. Synthesis is subtle and difficult, and does not respond well to yanking hands and hurried hearts. Some small things can be done, however, and in the heat of the moment they can be the difference between life and death. A micro-trance effect will probably not be able to kill an opponent on the spot, but it might be able to make her trip — enabling the Dreamer to gain an upper hand.

Group ceremonies with Fatimal support and ritual backing, on the other hand, are capable of massive change and need to be

carefully monitored by the Weaver. Lilith and the Fallen raised a small island using Synthesis, and such effects are not beyond replication. The combined hope, will and destiny of a large gathering of Dreamers really can change the world.

Even in the best of situations, however, there are several elements of Synthesis that a Weaver should keep in mind in order to keep its use from getting out of control. The first thing to remember is that anything that one Dreamer can do another Dreamer can probably undo, or at least make more difficult. If one group of Dreamers tries to create a storm to ravage Tribal lands, then there will almost certainly be several sisterhoods that will be able to stop the storm from ever fully manifesting. Of course this should only happen when there are in-game reasons and motivations, and should not simply become the Weaver randomly blocking the Characters.

Even without anyone blocking the Characters, information from Synthesis always comes in a visionary form, as a lucid dream, and thus can be difficult to understand or interpret. It requires some planning and work on the Weaver's part, but a good, vivid and hard to interpret vision can give someone all the information there is to have without giving away the story point blank. One of the best and most rewarding things about PC seers is playing out their quest for understanding about that which they have learned.

No intelligent Fallen (or even Tribal) Dreamer wants too much attention. Dipping into the River is not something that goes unnoticed, and Characters who use large amounts of Synthesis will draw the usually hostile attention of other Synthesis users, Z'bri, Fatimas and hostile spirits. Dreamers who push too hard at the world around them without thinking about the consequences of their actions will eventually be pushed back by someone stronger.

Also Weavers should consider a facet of prophecy, power and fate that Sophocles brought home — oftentimes the act of prophecy (or Synthesis use) and the actions taken to avoid it are what bring the prophecy's conclusion. Oedipus Rex is a perfect example of this: had his parents not left him on the hill to die, he would have known who they were and might not have killed his father and impregnated his mother. The line between seeing things (past, present and future) and influencing them can be a very fine one, if it exists at all. Weavers should be flexible when dealing with such events, as the Characters are supposed to be central and important figures who affect the world around them. The trick is, as always, to find a balance between plot and character.

EQUILIBRIUM

When a Dreamer dips her heart and soul into the massive and powerful current of the River there is an inherent risk. It is easy to be snared in the shifting dreamscapes of the River, or to have one's soul torn away and washed into damnation in the Sea of the Lost. Using Conjunctive Synthesis is never safe. It is fairly easy to lose Equilibrium at any point in the process of Conjunctive Synthesis, but the feel of lost control at each step is slightly different.

While a Dreamer is first going into her lucid trance, or is emerging from it at the end of a weaving, it is very easy to overextend the soul into the River, dipping too deep. It is at this point that the Dreamer is most likely to be disconnected, as her soul and body move slightly out of phase from each other. A Dreamer who has been disconnected is stuck in her trance, unable to interact with either the World of the Flesh or fully interact with the River of Dream. She becomes trapped in this trance state, an individual dreamscape of visions and dreams that is often a warped and bizarre reflection of the situation in the World of the Flesh at the time at which the Dreamer started her weaving. She may or may not know that she has been disconnected, but in either case must deal with her visions (which take the amount of time rolled on the Lost Equilibrium chart) before returning to consciousness.

Distortion is most likely to occur while the Dreamer is forming her dream-image or is bridging the power between the River and the World of the Flesh. Unable to fully control the visions of her own mind, her ability to separate the two worlds she is touching breaks down. Even once the Dreamer has returned to a waking state she still sees everything in symbolic and spiritual terms. The images the Dreamer sees are connected to the effect that she was trying to create, sometimes in tangential or strained ways. At lower levels of distortion the images are a minor but constant difficulty: friends may look like animals representative of their personalities, possibly causing the Dreamer to bump into them or be unable to judge distance, things far away may seem clear (without actually being so), and things close may seem blurred and unimportant. At higher levels of distortion the confusion can become crippling. Sounds of fury become deafeningly loud, slight whispers turn into screams of betrayal, and the Dreamer

becomes tormented by a world that seems to lack all coherency and stability. Even basic issues such as distance, color and perception of the self twist and warp through the looking glass.

Separation occurs most often when the Dreamer makes a mistake while channeling and focusing the power of the River. Generally, the Dreamer takes up too much energy and is suddenly caught in a powerful spiritual undertow. The resulting surge rips the Dreamer's soul from her body violently and completely. Drowning and being dragged under water are the most pleasant connotations that this process involves, and often the Dreamer is hurled through nightmares and the most twisted and warped parts of the River of Dream. There is little the Dreamer can do to save herself, though some have managed the epic quest of getting out of the River and returning to their bodies. In general, however, the Dreamer will need to be rescued by other Dreamers while her body is tended to. While the soul is gone the body goes into a deep coma, and must be force-fed and cleaned to prevent starvation and disease.

Loss of Equilibrium is never pleasant, and is one of the very real dangers that keeps over-eager Conjunctional Synthesis users in check. However, despite its dangerous and difficult nature it need not be seen as only a punishment. Very often the visions, hallucinations and travails that come with loss of Equilibrium can teach a Dreamer more about herself and her interaction with the subtle world than any number of successes can. Characters in states of distortion may receive omens and clues in their visions, though interpreting such matters is very difficult. Any Dreamer who is able to recover from the horror of separation may well have learned much about the deeper and darker currents of the River, and as a result could increase her Dreaming or Lore (River of Dream) Skills, at the Weaver's discretion.



ASPECTS

Where use of Conjunctional Synthesis is a flowing, intuitive art that relies on the strength of the Dreamer and her ability to forge connections, Aspects are set and measured uses of dreaming power, taught in a formalized way. Aspects are as close to "spells" as Synthesis comes, creating defined effects. An Aspect can be learned by anyone, regardless of what Eminence it mimics. So Joanites, who cannot use Life to heal, are still able to learn Anima if they can find an Evan willing to teach them.

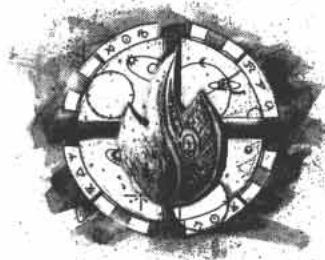
An Aspect is a special use of Synthesis that a Fatima or priesthood has developed to a controlled art. Fatimas are capable of granting Aspects fairly easily; Tribal sisterhoods are able to develop them as well, though the process takes years of trial and error. The sisterhood's organization, dedication and dogmatic approach to Synthesis make it possible for them to develop the set measures of Aspect.

The Fallen, on the other hand, have a very difficult time developing Aspects. Few Fallen have the training necessary in the first place, and they also lack either the centralized vision or large group support of the sisterhoods. A few Fallen Cells have spent years developing Aspects of their own, but so far they have had limited success. Most Aspects used by the Fallen are taught by people who were once Tribal priests and are now sharing the knowledge that they brought with them to Hom.

The **Tribe 8 Rulebook** lists two Aspects for each group, and a number of others have been presented in other books in the **Tribe 8** line. To ensure that Weavers have all the necessary material available to them, the Aspects published in books other than the main Rulebook have been reprinted in Appendix Two of this text, beginning on page 141.

NEW TRIBAL ASPECTS

Though the most common Aspects are listed in the main books and in the Tribal Wordbooks, there are other Aspects that have been developed by some of the secret societies on Vimary. Here are a few of those.



HABEAS CORPUS (TERASHEBANS, KNO. THRESHOLD 5)

The Blind Eyes teach this Aspect in order that they may discover lost or hidden evidence in difficult or complicated trials. By holding or touching an object or person strongly associated with the object to be found, the Blind Eye will feel the pull of the

sympathetic link between the two. The pull is urgent and once the Aspect has been invoked it is difficult to stop following the strands of association to the target, even if the way appears dangerous or impossible. The route there will not necessarily be straight or direct, and will often connect with other objects, people or places that resonate with the target. Sometimes these additional connections have proved beneficial to the investigating Judge as they better explain the associations between elements of the trial; usually they are only waystations on her journey towards the truth. The MoS determines how directly and quickly the Judge is able to find the item, as well as how much additional information she might pick up along the way.

MoS	Information Given
1	Vague and intermittent tug
2	Long and winding path
3	Relatively straightforward path, with only a few stops
4	Simple path stopping only once or twice
5	Clear and direct path



BINDING (ARTISANS OF SPIRIT, CRE. OPPOSED BY WIL)

The Aspect of Binding is the primary function of and known only to the twelve members of the Moon Circle Artisans of Spirit. Composed of Yagans, Evans and Tera Shebans, this circle binds minor spirits from the River of Dream into physical objects. The resulting product is touched with the power of the bound spirit, making it a more effective tool. These spirit-touched tools are used primarily by the Artisans themselves and a few of the elite among the Sisterhoods, and confer benefits ranging from bonuses to die rolls to minor boons (a sword that will never fall out of the wielder's hand, a reference book that will open to the desired page, a bag that does not grow heavier when filled).

The Artisans usually ask the permission of the spirit before binding it. Some spirits acquiesce due to pacts or other allegiances; some have already lost their freedom to the Fatimas or the Artisans themselves, and accept as a matter of course. Some few artifacts of the Artisans trap unwilling spirits, for those prove to make unwieldy, albeit very powerful, tools. On two occasions in their history, the Artisans have been presented with a captured Z'bri and have bound it into items: one a book and the other a sword. After their work was done, the Artisans watched as the artifacts were taken back by the Sisterhoods and never seen again.

WEAVER'S RESOURCES



NITROUS (MAGDALITES, WIL, OPPOSED BY WIL)

Nitrous is a highly-prized and deeply hidden Aspect among the Magdalite Concubines, allowing them to enter the dreams of another and interrogate them, extracting secrets and agendas from their victims. The Aspect can be used on any sleeping person within about ten clicks of the Concubine. When used, the Concubine finds herself within the subject's dreams, and 'asks' her questions by manipulating elements within the dream. Concubines using this Aspect can be either gentle and subtle, or whip the dream into nightmares. Answers gained through Nitrous are never straightforward, but are instead delivered in the language of Dream, using symbolism and images drawn from the subconscious of the subject to get a point across. The MoS determines how much information the Concubine is able to coax from the victim.

A Concubine can also step out of her victim's Dream Realm and into the River of Dream proper, but most go back through the Dream Realm in order to get back to their bodies. If the target wakes up while the Magdalite is still within her Dream Realm, the Concubine must wait until the subject sleeps again to re-emerge.

FALLEN ASPECTS

Though it is difficult for the Fallen to develop Aspects, it is not impossible. After years of sacrifice and research at least one Cell has created an Aspect of their own that is thus far unknown to the Tribals. Also, a Fallen Yagan has been teaching many Fallen an Aspect that she developed shortly before her Fall.

SHADOWSTEPPING (DOOMSAYERS; AGI, VARIABLE THRESHOLD)

Shadowstepping is the result of an incredible amount of research, both in study and in exhausting spirit quests, of a cell of Doomsayers known as the Haunts. It is the first Aspect developed, not by Fatimas, but by humans, and the Haunts tout it as proof that the Eighth Tribe will fulfill the Prophecy of Joshua. This Aspect allows the Haunts to step into one shadow and step out of another some distance away. The feat is simpler the less distance is crossed, but the Haunts have not yet found

8. Weaver's Resources

an upper limit to their Aspect. The only thing restricting them is the fact that the 'target' shadow must be either within line-of-sight or relatively well known. The Haunts therefore use the shadows around Temple and their own chambers in Hom most frequently.

Having achieved their goal, the Haunts are now at a loss for what to do with their success, and tensions between the members of the cell are increasing. The leader of the cell, Moriz, wants to keep the power to himself and his cellmates; his rival is Henri, who presses the cell to share the fruits of their labor with the rest of the Eighth Tribe. Yet another member, Moira, wants to test how far the Aspect can take her, and has begun to investigate the possibility of arranging an expedition into the Outlands. The fact that she plans to Shadowstep back to Hom, abandoning her companions in the wilderness, has either not occurred to her or does not bother her.

Threshold	Target Shadow
3	Direct line of Sight
4	A stone's throw away
5	Within walking distance
6	Within a day's walk
7	Within a few days' travel
8	Anywhere (untested, possible only in theory)
Modifier: -1	Familiar location

CELTIC CROSS (YAGANS AND DOOMSAYERS; PER. THRESH. 4)

While Fate normally allows Yagan Dreamers to see the future, some of the Mordreds have found ways to see a person's past. Celtic Cross was originally developed by a bright young Yagan who used the Aspect to gain intimate knowledge about too many elders and found herself cast out. The knowledge of it has thus spread across Hom more readily than through the Yagans. To use Celtic Cross a Dreamer engages in some sort of divinatory ritual, such as reading cards or tea leaves, and gains knowledge of the subject's past by the signs she sees therein. The degree of information she gains is determined by the MoS. A MoS of 1 allows her to see a single major event that is fairly public knowledge, where a MoS of 5 would give the Dreamer nearly complete biographical information on her target. The knowledge gained by Celtic Cross is often symbolic, and even complete information can be difficult to decipher. Note too that Celtic Cross differs from Treason in that Celtic Cross gives knowledge of past events, but not knowledge of how those events made the subject feel, or any bonus to use them to manipulate the subject.

LOST ASPECTS

When the Joshuans vanished into the wilderness and the Marians went into hiding they took with them the knowledge of their special ways and secret Aspects. The passing of years has stripped the memory of these Aspects from the minds of nearly everyone on Vimary. Few Tribals even remember that they existed, much less know how to use them. Only a select few Joshuan and Marian elders remember these old Aspects, and they are unlikely to share their knowledge without charging a great price.



MAGNUM (JOSHUANS; FIT, THRESHOLD 3)

The Aspect of Magnum allows a Dreamer to increase the duration and power of any physical force. Using Magnum a Joshuan can make spears, arrows and bullets fly farther and strike harder. She can also make fires burn hotter and longer, make avalanches roll faster, and so forth. Magnum can never create force from nothing; it only magnifies an existing force. Also, the force can only be increased, not diminished. The results of Magnum are almost always spectacular, and the sound of thunder often accompanies significant uses of the Aspect.

When Magnum is evoked the Dreamer rolls Synthesis with a Threshold of 3. Her MoS is then added to the effect of whatever force she is augmenting. In the case of weapons each point of MoS increases the range by 20% and the Damage Multiplier by 1 for a single attack. If using Magnum to enhance electricity or fire, then the MoS is added to the Intensity of the existing fire or electrical charge. A vehicle charged with Magnum gains an extra 10% to both speed and range per point of MoS.



BLESSING (MARIANS, PSY, VARIABLE THRESHOLD)

Blessing is one of the reasons why the Z'bri held a special hatred for the Marians, and why the Forgive's Tribe often came into conflict with the Yagans. Blessing allows a Marian to remove

corrupting or harmful spiritual effects from a person or place. It can remove the compulsion of a Z'bri Atmosphere, remove the effects of Aspects such as Curse of Dream, The Calling, or even Chaining. By calling on the powers of forgiveness and purity, the Dreamer is able to undo even the most terrible of curses. In addition to the taint being removed, the one who has been Blessed feels a cleansing of her soul, a sense of redemption and a new chance at life.

In order to remove a curse or taint, the Dreamer must beat a Threshold equal to the number on the chart below, or the MoS of the original curse (whichever is higher).

Threshold	Taint Removed
4	Atmosphere, minor curse
6	Significant curse, The Calling
9	Major Curse, Chaining

TECHNOSMITHING

The form of Synthesis practiced by the Keepers is known as Technosmithing. Though Technosmithing works on some of the same principles as Tribal Synthesis, it also has some very important differences. These differences come from the fact that the Keeper outlook on the nature of the universe makes their interaction with the River of Dream vastly different than that of the Tribals. Because the Keepers expect the world to work differently, in their hands it actually *does*.

Tribal Synthesis is based on intuition, upon a belief in an animistic and living universe that is ruled (or at least half formed from) the One Goddess. Technosmithing, on the other hand, is born of a reverence for the ways of the World Before, and on the scientific ideals of process, experimentation and repetition. Where Tribal Dreamers dip into the River of Dream and let the living power flow through their soul to form their dreams, Technosmiths experiment, tinker, find processes that work, document and memorize them, and gradually and with a great deal of trial and error find a way to interact with their legacy of technology.

Obviously Technosmithing is not the same as the sciences of the World Before, and most Keepers recognize that to some degree. How much they are willing to admit they have changed from the old ways, however, is a matter of personal interpretation. Some Technosmiths believe that the world has changed so much that there is a need for new sciences to study new possibilities.

Others, however, refuse to admit that anything has changed or that their formulas are any different than the calculations of their ancestors. The resulting schisms, coupled with the fact that some Keepers avoid Technosmithing completely, have kept the Keepers as a whole from coming up with any comprehensive, deep or spiritual relation with the River of Dream.

LEARNING TECHNOSMITHING

Only a few Keepers, perhaps one in twenty, have any skill with Technosmithing. Those that do normally know only the single formula that is the most relevant to their work. Remembrance is the most common formula, as many Keepers learn it without even realizing that it is "magical." The Keepers' deep and intent study of and obsession with the World Before allows them to use Remembrance to intuitively divine how an object works, and most never realize they are not just digging the information out of the depths of their own mind. The other formulas of Technosmithing must be deliberately learned, just as Tribal Aspects must be. Learning a Technosmithing formula requires some knowledge of science and a mechanistic outlook on the nature of the world that keeps most non-Keepers from being able to learn them. Though some Fallen have tried, so far no one other than a Keeper has been able to learn Technosmithing formulas.

Typically, formulas are taught through a combination of "book learning" and hands-on practice. A Keeper trying to learn a formula usually starts with arcane and difficult books of high-end scientific knowledge from the World Before that are only half understood (at best) by modern Keepers. This scientific knowledge becomes a mantra to the Keeper, a half-understood but devoutly believed process that, through the focus of her devotion, links her at a subconscious level to the River of Dream. Once a Keeper (or her teacher) thinks she has a handle on the 'scientific knowledge,' she then goes to work on actual fieldwork and technical operations. By testing, experimentation and plain old fiddling, the Keeper learns how to adjust the things she has learned to achieve new and dynamic results.

THEMES AND MOODS

The ideals and motivations, the very feel of Technosmithing and Keeper spirituality is quite different from that of the Tribes or their Synthesis. Thus it is important to remember the themes of Technosmithing when it is used in a game, in order to keep it differentiated from Synthesis or to keep it from being seen as just another 'magic power.' The following are some of the more important aspects to keep in mind.

HARMONIC DISTORTION

When Technosmiths divine the usefulness of a coat hanger or jury-rig a jeep, they seldom associate what they are doing with any preternatural force. In their minds, the outcomes of their actions are merely a matter of cause and effect. As a result, their lack of awareness of the River as an entity makes their use of it highly erratic and often hit-or-miss. At the same time, when they do manage to establish a connection with the River, that connection is very structured and carefully patterned. Because Tribal Characters have an innate spiritual relationship with The River of Dream, they are naturally at odds with the structured ways of the Smiths. Because of this, when using their arts in close proximity, Technosmiths and Tribals or Fallen often feel odd, and not a little uneasy. Some say it is a matter of the River

trying to warp to serve the needs of both, others maintain that it is merely psychological. Weavers introducing their PCs into an environment where Technosmiths are active can play up the strange feel of the River during these instances, challenging the notion that the River of Dream is the province of Tribal or Fallen Characters only.

SYNCRETISM

Weaving Technosmiths should not merely be a matter of transposing men and women from World Before into the landscape of Vimary and giving them dangerous toys to play with. Weavers should consider that pre-Fall Vimary had a rich and diverse ethnic and theological climate, and that the Keepers that survived were likely a cross section of its demographic. In their years of seclusion underground in escape from the rending presence of the Z'bri, the World Before differences of race, religion, language, class and politics dissolved into a syncretic blend of cultures.

In many ways, the Keepers exemplify the concept of the synthesis of everyday life. They strive to bridge the remnants of their forefathers' world to the one in which they live, to amass the remnants of civilization and information into a rational body of knowledge, to merge the ideals of science and spirituality. Players and PCs who believe the Keepers to be nothing more than scattered leftovers may benefit from situations that bring into sharp relief the ways that Keeper society creates unity in everyday life and the ways that Tribal society compartmentalizes it (Tribe, Clan, Family, Allegiance, etc.). For in reality, those used to life on Hom with its chaotic mass of outcasts will find more in common with the Keepers than with their birth society; both Keepers and Fallen are fundamentally concerned with finding their points of connection and convergence.

THE PHAGE OF REASON

The Keepers are a pragmatic people with access to a wealth of science and technology, as well as an untainted connection with their past that sets them apart from the savagery of Tribal culture; or so they believe. In truth, the confinement, close quarters and poor nourishment combined with a stultifying mixture of fear, rage and mourning took its toll on the generations living in the tunnels under the Z'bri encampments. Paranoia, phobias and personality disorders ran rampant within the hidden population, who could essentially be considered prisoners of war.

As much as the Keepers try to adhere to the reason of the past, the World Before's concept of the Universe no longer holds any water. In a world where science fiction suddenly becomes physical fact, the delineation of rational thought no longer applies. Weavers are encouraged to experiment with the psychology of Keepers and their practice of constructing rationalizations to substitute for a reason that is fundamentally flawed. Technosmiths in particular should find practical means or scientific theories to explain to themselves and others the strange feats that they are capable of performing.

DEUS EX SCIENTIA

The Fall did not leave behind the great minds of science, the formidable inventors, or the architects of technology; it left a hodgepodge of people cowering in fear in the shadow of the Beasts. Although these people were not entirely without acumen, a great many years passed while the camps grew and thrived. By the time this huddled mass of humanity had begun to recover from the death of the world they knew, the first winters had stolen many of their experienced teachers, scholars and skilled workers, and many of those that remained were more than a little unhinged. When it was realized that the scourge of the Beasts was not going to end quickly, what little remained of academic knowledge was handed to the younger generations with an almost fanatic directive. A torch was carried through the dark times to teach the children, to safeguard what remained of the old world, so that one day they could resurrect what once was. Subsequent generations did what they could, but without the benefit of the classroom knowledge was passed down sporadically and informally at best.

As in a game of broken telephone, knowledge diluted over time. Books of Science, Technology and Mathematics from the World Before were scavenged and added to the mix. The information within them, however, superseded the comprehension level of Keepers without any form of formal education. The students' minds were filled with obscure concepts and unintelligible words, but charged with the ardent belief that the knowledge was the key to future salvation; for many, the old texts became anagogic texts rather than reference books. Weavers will find that experimenting with Scientific and Technological Theology when introducing Characters to Technosmiths will encourage their PCs to reevaluate their own belief systems and stimulate spiritual exploration among the curious.

NEW TECHNOSMITHING FORMULAS

Though the three Formulas listed in the main book are by far the most common, they are not the only ones known to the Keepers. Some small groups, and sometimes just dedicated individuals, have learned more specialized formulas that allow them to continue their search for the knowledge of their ancestors. Presented here are a couple of the more interesting of these lesser-known Formulas.

INTERFACE (KNO, THRESHOLD 5)

The ancestors left behind a vast amount of knowledge on disks, drives and floppies. Many of the Keepers who work with computers have been frustrated that large amounts of this information is now unreadable, unusable, or brings the mysterious message, "FAT error" when accessed. The Brotherhood was the first to develop the Formula of Interface in response. Working off the intuitive knowledge that Remembrance brought, the Brotherhood learned to access computer records without needing a keyboard, monitor, or even a computer. A Keeper who knows this Formula is able to access information from any electronic storage medium simply by

analyzing and studying it. She can thus read directly from floppies, hard drives, and so forth. The MoS determines how much information is accessible, with an MoS of 1 giving a few small pieces of data (a kilobyte at the very most), and an MoS of 5 allowing everything on the disk — including data from damaged sectors — to be read.

HORIZON OF LIGHT (AGI, VARIABLE THRESHOLD)

At nearly the same time that Shadowstepping was developed on Hom, a young member of the Brotherhood who had acted as a liaison with Vimary developed this Formula that blurs the boundary between Synthesis and Technosmithing. After having read an ancient text describing the "optic superhighway" that "made distance obsolete" the young Keeper decided that there must be scientific principles behind the ability that he had seen in a few Fallen to move from one shadow to another without passing through the distance between. The young man then delved deep into the old records, yearning to find the secrets of the Horizon of Light. He succeeded, and vanished from off the face of Vimary. The other members of the Brotherhood reconstructed the formula from his copious notes, and now guard it with great secrecy.

Horizon of Light allows a Keeper to travel from point to point along what remains of the telecommunication grid. By touching a phone or computer that is still connected to the rest of the grid (being operational or powered is not necessary) and calling on the principles of uncertainty, instant communication and the Godform of the Planck-length, the Keeper is able to travel to any other point on the grid instantaneously. To the one traveling, the world blurs away in a horizon of white light, and then narrows to a tube, only to reform on the opposite end. The Threshold is determined by how far the Keeper is trying to travel, and the quality of the condition of the lines in between points. Note that in the world of Tribe 8 this is a highly variable thing, as most of the underground lines are in bad shape - above-ground lines have been almost universally destroyed — and connections can be lost or accidentally reestablished from moment to moment due to natural and unnatural interference.

Threshold	Distance
3	100 yards or less
4	1 mile
5	10 miles
7	100 miles
9	Anyplace (in theory only)
Condition of the Line	Modifier
Excellent (nearly untouched since the fall)	-1
Good (mild damage)	0
Fair (half cut through, drowned)	+1
Poor (almost completely destroyed)	+3
Blocked (cut completely)	Impossible

KEEPER RELIGION

Despite the fact that the Tribes often view the Keepers as heathens with no souls, the truth is that the Keepers are not without religion. Their religions differ from that of the Tribes, of course, and they tend to view Tribal faith as ridiculous or deluded, but that does not mean that faith and spirituality are any less important to the Keepers' hearts. There are several different religious practices to be found within the ranks of the Keepers, a few of which are listed here.

ATHEISTS

There is a significant portion of the Keepers that does not believe in any higher power at all. The strength of this atheism depends on the specific person or group. Some Keepers, mostly among the Derelicts, believe that there is no higher power at all — that the Fatimas and the Z'bri are some kind of aliens, descended from the depths of space to enslave humanity with their strange, but still scientifically and rationally explainable, powers. The atheistic Keepers are those most likely to shun any visible use of Technosmithing, assuming it to be tainted from the "psionic bodysnatching aliens." They are openly derisive of any talk of the One Goddess, calling it "voodoo" and "mumbo-jumbo."

AGNOSTICS

Many Keepers are not entirely sure what to make of their world. It is quite obvious that their ancestors didn't have all the facts about the world about them, with the Z'bri walking the night as demons and the Fatimas able to raise and lower small islands. Many of these Keepers thus develop an attitude of either indifference or a wait-and-see philosophy towards anything spiritual or supernatural. They will admit that they do not have the correct answers, but do not believe that anyone else does, either. In their eyes not even Synthesis is proof of any particular spiritual view, as the effects generated could have any number of explanations different than those assumed by the Tribals and Fallen.

REMNANTS

One of the things that some Keepers have kept from the past are the remains of religions from the World Before. None of the Keepers have true comprehension or context for the full theology or doctrine of the religions that were once practiced. Most belief systems, naturally, have gone through considerable mutation in the times of burning and hiding, adapting to deal with the views of other religions and the new reality of the Z'bri and the closing of the Fold. Still, there are Keepers who know the Bible, the Torah, the Koran and the I-Ching as well as they know their times-tables, and who still respect the ancient words and try to follow at least some of their teachings. Some of the Remnant religions' members are intolerant of Synthesis and Technosmithing, considering it to be some form of witchcraft or

demonic power, but some have adopted the more mystical traditions of their faiths and have incorporated many elements of Technosmithing into their practices and beliefs. The Brotherhood, a mixed group following a practice derived from a combination of Judeo-Christian elements, for example, has used a combination of Kabbalah and Physics to contact spirits of electricity, as well as machines that they believe are tied to the Sefirot.

MODERNISTS

The Modernists believe that the world has indeed changed drastically, and that the revelations of the new times are not to be ignored. They are a small faction within the Keepers, but one that is finding a growing voice as the Keepers come to have more to do with the Fallen. Many of the Modernists accept the idea of the One Goddess, even if they do not believe that Synthesis is directly tied to her will. Rather, they tend to see her as the single good force in the universe, the personification of everything true and worthy. They believe that it was their forefathers ignoring the One Goddess, and not their technology, that brought about the end of the World Before. As a result they make constant attempts to learn of the One's will, and use their scientific acumen to further her wishes and to live in harmony with her other children, the Tribals and Fallen.

TECHNO-FETISHISTS

This philosophy is most directly seen in destructive powers of the Machine-Monks, but many Keepers have some degree of religious fascination with technology and the remains of scientific knowledge that they have retained. At its lowest level this leads to the many Keepers who scour the world for the wrecks and artifacts of the World Before with the religious fervor of a crusader. Taken to an extreme, this view manifests in the Machine Monks, who believe that by grafting technological items to their body, and in rejecting the flesh in favor of the machine, they become more pure and worthy. Almost all true techno-fetishists are deeply hostile to the views of the Tribals and Fallen, and are the most likely to see them as worthless barbarians.



SUNDERING

The horrible power of the Seed that the Z'bri wield is known to demon and man alike as Sundering; this rending force is the chief source of the terror and perversion spread by the beasts. The Z'bri were not always what they have become; once, they contained the seeds of nobility, purity and hope. Their obsession with the flesh and the Seed, their need to destroy rather than create and their lack of control or balance once they poured into the physical world, led to their fall and their current state of damnation. In a vicious circle of destruction the Z'bri turned to the burning pleasure and pain of Sundering to try to recapture the true feelings they had once known. The effects of Sundering did give them a taste, but only a taste, and at the same time deadened their senses and ability to truly feel even further. Soon, almost all Z'bri fell into a cycle where they destroyed their *ability* to feel in an effort to feel, driving them deeper into their current state of madness.

Sundering is the antithesis of Synthesis. Where Synthesis works from the principles and power of the One Goddess, uniting, creating and joining, Sundering works off of the Seed and is based on destruction, separation and sensation. Sundering always works by destruction. Even when it appears to have created something, such as wings on a human, it has really done so by destroying part of the essence of the being and forcing it to become something else. A Dreamer who grows wings with Synthesis adds to herself, and creates something new. A Z'bri who grows wings on its Serf does so by destroying part of what the Serf is, and then reworking the crushed essence into a parody of something new. Sundering destroys both the subject and the wielder, tainting everything that it touches.

In a proper context, Sundering is part of the balance of the Great Architecture. After all, what is created must eventually be destroyed, or the world would overflow and swing out of balance. The problem with Sundering is that it is no longer part of any greater whole. Where the Old Arts of the Nomads united the concepts behind Sundering and Synthesis, and brought the ability to both destroy and create, the Sundering of the fallen Z'bri brings only destruction while it limits the potential of Synthesis to bring rebirth. Without the ability to maintain balance Sundering has become a mad thing, almost a force of its own that drives its wielders to consume everything before them in a mad orgy of desperation and pain.

SUNDERING AND THE RIVER OF DREAM

So deep is the taint of Sundering that the Z'bri themselves are no longer able to enter the River of Dream. Though some few individual Z'bri are striving to find ways to bring themselves into the River (see **Warrior Unbound**), the Z'bri as a whole are cut off from that place, giving them a sense of constant torment. Once creatures of spirit and aether, they are now tied so completely to the World of the Flesh that they cannot even reach the half-world of the River. There are a great number of Melanis who are doing everything in their power to find a way

around this limitation, but so far their efforts have either come to naught or created things that even the Melanis fear (such as Elatha, page 77).

Despite the fact that the Z'bri cannot directly touch the River, their taint still affects that realm. The taint of Sundering, the forced separation of Flesh and Spirit, is such that it seeps through the distance between worlds like a sick, oozing oil. The taint spreads through the area River of Dream 'near' the Z'bri's home, and twists and corrupts it. The areas of the River around a Z'bri are always sick. The spirits there are often mad and twisted, and the very air (or water) stings and seems to cling like an unclean stench. Any Dreamer in the River of Dream in an area where Sundering is often used must roll against the Atmosphere of the Z'bri who used the Sundering at a -1 penalty to their roll, due to the pervasive effects of the taint. This roll must be made even when the Z'bri is not present.

Certain areas in which Sundering is overused can become wastelands in which the River itself is either not present or barely present. These places are known as Shallows and are discussed on page 106.

SUNDERING AND SPIRITS

Though the Z'bri cannot touch the River directly, they are still creatures of spirit. They can thus still interact with spirits that are in the River about them. Though they cannot necessarily see the spirits, they know that they are present. When the Z'bri speaks, or if the spirit speaks to the Z'bri, one will be able to hear the other. Unfortunately for the spirits, the Z'bri's taint and corruption works on them as well as it does on humanity. Spirits can be twisted by a Z'bri's Atmosphere, and some Sundering Aspects — such as Chaining, The One Thought and The Calling — can be used on spirits as well as humans.

Though few Iv'chet have the power to corrupt or control many spirits, there are Lords who are perfectly capable of doing so. Some of the spirits are simply twisted and allowed to roam free, spreading their taint through the River. Others, however, are kept as slaves in much the same way as human Serfs. Lords differentiate the two by calling humans Serfs and enslaved spirits Helots. Helots are used to twist and torment the River, other spirits and the souls of enslaved humans, as well as to provide security and protection for the River around a Z'bri's home. Though any Z'bri can twist a spirit into a Helot with time, those with the Aspect Bottle the Jinn (page 129) are by far the best at it.

HUMANITY AND SUNDERING

Though most Tribals blithely assume that humanity naturally uses Synthesis and that only Z'bri can use Sundering, the truth is really quite different. Some humans, such as the Blood Silk (**Tribe 8 Companion**, p. 35) have found ways to manipulate

Sundering themselves. There is also the very singular case of Elatha, who is neither Z'bri nor human, and can wield both Synthesis and Sundering. (That Elatha wields both powers, but does not have mastery of the Old Arts, is a puzzle that even he cannot understand.) Those who know of this and have not been corrupted by it find this fact very troubling. There are some among the Fallen who have even started to wonder exactly what the relation between humanity, Z'bri and the Great Architecture really is. So far no one has found any answers that they are willing to accept.

Whatever the truth may be, it is obvious that any human who manages to gain even tangential control of Sundering goes completely mad in very short order. The direct and painfully intense stimulation of Sundering, and the connection to the Seed that it brings, is more than any human psyche has thus far shown capable of bearing. All of the things, both subtle and gross, which separate man from Beast, break down in the wielder's mind, and soon the Sundering wielder is nearly a Z'bri herself.

THEME AND MOOD

Weaving the Z'bri and Sundering is a difficult task. It is all too easy to let it become a matter of dripping fluids and Psyche rolls. Really conveying the horror and deep-seated wrongness of Sundering is a difficult thing and requires that the Weaver and Players alike focus more on the themes and moods of Sundering than upon its mechanical aspects. Even more than Synthesis, Sundering is an alien, mysterious and inexplicable force. It should never be allowed to become commonplace or familiar. Here is an analysis of various themes and moods that can help a Weaver keep Sundering both disturbing and spiritual.

TERROR AND HORROR

Terror and Horror are not quite the same thing, but they are both essential factors to incorporate when weaving Sundering. Terror is a state of intense fear, and comes from a root word meaning "to flee." Terror is the point at which the Characters are frightened enough that they have to respond, but still have hope that they can save themselves. Most uses of Sundering in game inspire terror, as the supernatural power manifested is capable of killing, enslaving and warping a Character beyond recognition. Horror is a step up from terror. Horror is a painful and intense fear that offers no hope of release or redemption.

Creating a sense of either terror or horror requires a great deal of cooperation between Players and Weavers. It is very difficult to inspire an intense mood, and very easy to ruin it. Players should avoid cracking jokes or resorting to silliness in order to release the tension. The Weaver, in return, should be careful not to push Players beyond their comfort zone. Everyone enjoys being scared, but after a point it is not fun anymore. Open and clear communication needs to be maintained in order to help everyone enjoy the fear.

VIOLATION

Key to establishing a tone of terror or horror is the theme of violation. Sundering is a violation in many ways; it violates the natural order, and is (as currently used) inherently wrong. The use of this power, as well as the very presence of a Z'bri, makes the world go wrong. Where Sundering is used the dead rise, and the living die. Spirits are twisted, and the very nature of reality seems to go mad. Sundering, however, does not end with metaphysical violation — it is also about personal violation. Sundering strips control of body, mind and soul away from its victims, and that is the true essence of its horror. A Weaver need not resort to lurid descriptions of running blood or pulsing orifices in order to establish the horrible tone of helpless violation. A Z'bri need not use Appeasement to turn a Character into a roach in order to demonstrate its power.

The key to using violation is to remain subtle. No one wants to have their Character destroyed utterly, and over the top fluid-fests grow stale quickly. The tone can be established by much smaller measures. When a Melanis steals a Character's memory of their Fall, leaving her unsure of why she has Fallen or what happened to her family, that Character has been more deeply violated then if she had been killed. When a Sangis removes a Character's mouth so that she cannot even scream, the resulting trauma can be worse than rape. Direct encounters in which a Z'bri unleashes the full force of its Sundering should remain rare. Let the subtle horrors work on the PCs: let them know that they can be hurt. That will increase the tension more than a rampant use of gore.

DESTRUCTION

Of course in an epic campaign there will come a time at which the Characters will face a Z'bri head-on. When this happens it is important to keep the tone of the previous Sundering uses in play. Just because the Characters are finally facing down a Melanis lord does not mean that it suddenly stops being shadowy and leaps into combat. What the Z'bri does at that point is unleash the full power of its Sundering, and the result is destruction. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the Z'bri are powerful and that Sundering is deadly dangerous. The subtle violations of close encounters are just the radiation of that power; when a powerful Z'bri is faced head on, however, that power becomes a nuclear blast. The sheer power of a Z'bri is horrifying in its own right.



8. Weaver's Resources

Of course simply killing Characters off is not the way to convey the terror of the situation. Having the destruction only partly affect them, while affecting those they love and care about fully, is one way of conveying the sheer destructive power of Sundering. Having the Z'bri incapacitate the Characters without killing them, quite obviously leaving them alive to continue the 'fun' some other time, is another.

MYSTERY

Synthesis is mysterious and moving by its nature. Sundering is even more so. Characters can wield Synthesis, and may become familiar enough with it to feel comfortable (if not completely safe). Sundering, on the other hand, is the tool of the enemy. No human being ever sees enough of Sundering to really understand it without going mad. Weavers should thus keep most uses of Sundering 'off screen,' or at least partly concealed. That which is not known is often more horrifying than that which is. PCs who know that a Sangis is trying to use Soul Stealing on them may be terrified, but they at least know what is going on. It is more effective to describe the feeling of the loss of control, the creeping presence of a twisted mind in one's body, the disconnection of one's soul — because then the Characters do not know what it is that is attacking them, or what method it is using. The unknown and the mysterious, that which we cannot see, is at the heart of the innate human fear of the dark.

SEPARATION

At its heart Sundering is about separation. It rends apart the spirit and the body, as well as the mind and the heart. The toll this takes on both the wielders and the victims of Sundering is a telling point. Those marked with Sundering, men with the effects of Appeasement still on their bodies, women with their memories stolen by Melanis, are often separated from those around them. Even when the destruction and terror is over, the lingering effects of Sundering come to the fore. Very few on Hom or Vimary are willing to associate with those marked by Sundering, leaving Characters thus marked completely ostracized. A person who has had part of her memories or personality stolen will feel alone in a crowd, and old loves and hates become strangers. The victims of Sundering are quickly alienated from — or killed by — their fellow men, and that is perhaps the worst violation of all.

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

Of course the Z'bri who use Sundering suffer the same alienation and separation that their victims do. They are spirits cut off from the Spirit, beings of air and motion confined to mud and stillness, much like their victims. There is the final horror of Sundering — for all its terrible and alien nature, it is not completely unfamiliar. The Seed lives in the hearts of men as much as it lives in the hearts of the Beasts. The Z'bri are not really as different from humanity as most want to believe, and many who come to know the Beasts come to see their own face reflected in a distorted mirror.

How a Weaver uses this element of Sundering and the Z'bri is going to depend very much on the needs of her cycle. At one end of the spectrum the Z'bri can be used as a mirror for all the darkness in a Character's heart. In this scenario defeating the Z'bri becomes symbolic of destroying the Character's inner demons. At the other end of the spectrum, a Character who sees her own good traits trapped and dying inside of a Z'bri may want to save the Z'bri, to free the demon from the hell in which it has trapped itself. The latter course is very difficult, but can lead to a powerful story within a cycle. Though they have fallen, the Z'bri may not be beyond redemption. In fact their redemption may be humanity's only hope. Which leaves the question — how can one get close enough to a demon to save them without losing one's own soul?

HEARTSTONES

A dying Z'bri Lord able to concentrate for a few moments is capable of performing a powerful ritual, the last vestige of the Old Arts still available to Z'bri — the creation of a Heartstone. The ritual is so dangerous and draining that once begun it must end with the death of the Lord; there is no other possibility. Nonetheless, a dying Lord will do everything in their power to be able to complete the ritual, which takes only the space of a few heartbeats despite the massive amounts of power involved.

The reason that the ritual is so important, and so dangerous, is that it creates what is essentially a pocket universe within the Physical that acts as a sepulcher and resting place for the Lord's soul. The Heartstone is the physical equivalent of a Dream-realm, the little bit of the pocket universe that overlaps the World of the Flesh. In this pocket world the Z'bri Lord's spirit finds rest and sleep. There are some rumors among Z'bri that a Lord can eventually wake from that sleep, and use the Heartstone like a seed to raise themselves back to life — but no known Lord, not even Tibor, has ever done so.

In addition to acting as a resting place for the Z'bri's soul, the Heartstone is a natural gateway between worlds. As it overlaps the World of the Flesh, it also overlaps the River of Dream in many locations, and some of the Heartstones of the greatest Lords are whispered to overlap the World of the Spirit, possibly making a bridge across the Fold.

It is possible to use a Heartstone as a back door into distant places of the River, even into other orbs, but the trick of doing so is known only to a few. There are some among the Melanis who know how to use the Heartstones of their fellow Z'bri to enter some secondary Orbs, but even with a Heartstone they cannot freely enter the River of Dream. A few Tribal priests and priestesses have experimented with Heartstones, and it is said that the Fatimas are able to use them as well — though none has ever been seen doing so. The only humans who are fully able to use Heartstones are the Guides, and they teach the art only to their most talented students.

Even if a person were able to somehow unlock the secret of entering a Heartstone, using it is still a vastly difficult and dangerous matter. The inside of a Heartstone is a world created by a mad and dying Z'bri Lord, and can be a hell in heaven or a

heaven in hell. It is always a place where appearance and reality have only the most casual of relationships, and finding one's way in, about, or out is more difficult than navigating any physical maze. In addition there is the very real danger of the Lord itself — as its sleep is not always quiet, and in a universe of their own devising even the most fleeting dreamed malice can destroy any intruder who is not very powerful and very wise.

NEW ASPECTS AND ATMOSPHERE RULES

The difficulties to resist the Z'bri Atmospheres given in the **Tribe 8 Rulebook** (pages 180 - 183) are the base difficulties for resisting the power of a single Iv'chet. Powerful Lords have a more powerful Atmosphere, and large groups of Z'bri together create a cumulative effect that makes it much harder to resist their taint. While it is difficult to resist the perversions of a single Sangis, resisting the Baron in his court full of Sangis is nearly impossible. The tables below can be used by Weavers to increase the Threshold of Atmosphere resistance rolls. Note: only the *highest ranking* Z'bri present adds their rank modifier to the Threshold.

ATMOSPHERE THRESHOLD MODIFIERS

Number of Z'bri	Change to Threshold
1 - 2	0
2 - 5	+1
5 - 10	+2
10+	+3
Rank of Z'bri	Change to Threshold
Iv'chet	0
Minor Lord (A duke, etc)	+1
Great Lord (The Baron, Prince of a House)	+2

If a Character fails to resist the Atmosphere, then her MoF determines how badly the Atmosphere affects her. A general table is given below. (For more specific information about each House please see **Horrors of the Z'bri**, pages 95 - 96)

ATMOSPHERE EFFECTS

MoF	Effect
1	Minor, subtle aberrations
2	Noticeable but subtle aberration
3	Significant aberration
4	Major, easily noticeable aberration.
5	Compulsive, major, uncontrollable aberration
6	Total surrender, complete lack of control

BOTTLE THE JINN (MELANIS; WIL, OPPOSED BY PSY, THRESHOLD 6)


A variant of the dreaded Chaining Aspect, Bottle the Jinn allows a Melanis to link a human soul (or ghost) or a spirit to an item. The difference between Bottle the Jinn and Chaining is that the being's mind and soul are not fused into the item — only their volition and free will. The process is quite lengthy and takes days, but when completed the Melanis strips control from the spirit being bound and ties it to an object. From that point on whoever holds the object may compel service from the spirit or soul so bound. By gripping the item tightly the wielder may force the spirit or soul to do their bidding. The spirit is fully aware of what is happening, but can do nothing to stop itself from acting unless the object is taken from the wielder's grasp. If the "bottle" is ever broken the spirit/soul must make a PSY test with a Threshold of 5. If it succeeds, the spirit is free; if it fails the spirit goes mad. A fumble results in the destruction of the spirit.

INFERNO (KOLERIS; FIT, OP- POSED BY FIT, THRESHOLD 5)

This Aspect allows the Koleris who wield it to use the power of destruction to bring fire. By concentrating for one turn the Koleris is able to make any target (human, spirit, animal, or inanimate) spontaneously combust. The fire created does an initial damage of MoS x 10, and then becomes a normal fire with an intensity equal to the MoS +2.

TRANSMIGRATION (FLEMIS; INF, OPPOSED BY WIL, THRESHOLD 6)

Transmigration sits in the step between Chaining and Soul Stealing. Using this Aspect a Flemis is able to switch the souls between two human bodies. Unlike Chaining this does not destroy the mind of the victim, and unlike Soul Stealing it does not grant the Z'bri any inherent control. It does, however, allow the Z'bri to move the souls of their favorite Serfs from body to body, very effectively disguising them, and allows them to place unbroken spirits in the already appeased bodies of their Serfs. The Z'bri cannot just cast one soul out; the souls must be swapped between bodies. The transmigration lasts for (MoS/2) weeks before the souls return to their original bodies.


 RITUAL

Ritual is possibly the single most important aspect of spirituality that there is. In a world ripe with Synthesis and Dreaming, with spirits and living goddesses who walk among their people, it is easy to overlook the important role of ritual. This, however, is a mistake. Synthesis produces an effect, and that is all. Ritual - especially shared group ritual — produces meaning, culture, unity, hope and truth. The most powerful uses of Synthesis can raise or lower a small island. The most powerful uses of ritual can form a Nation.

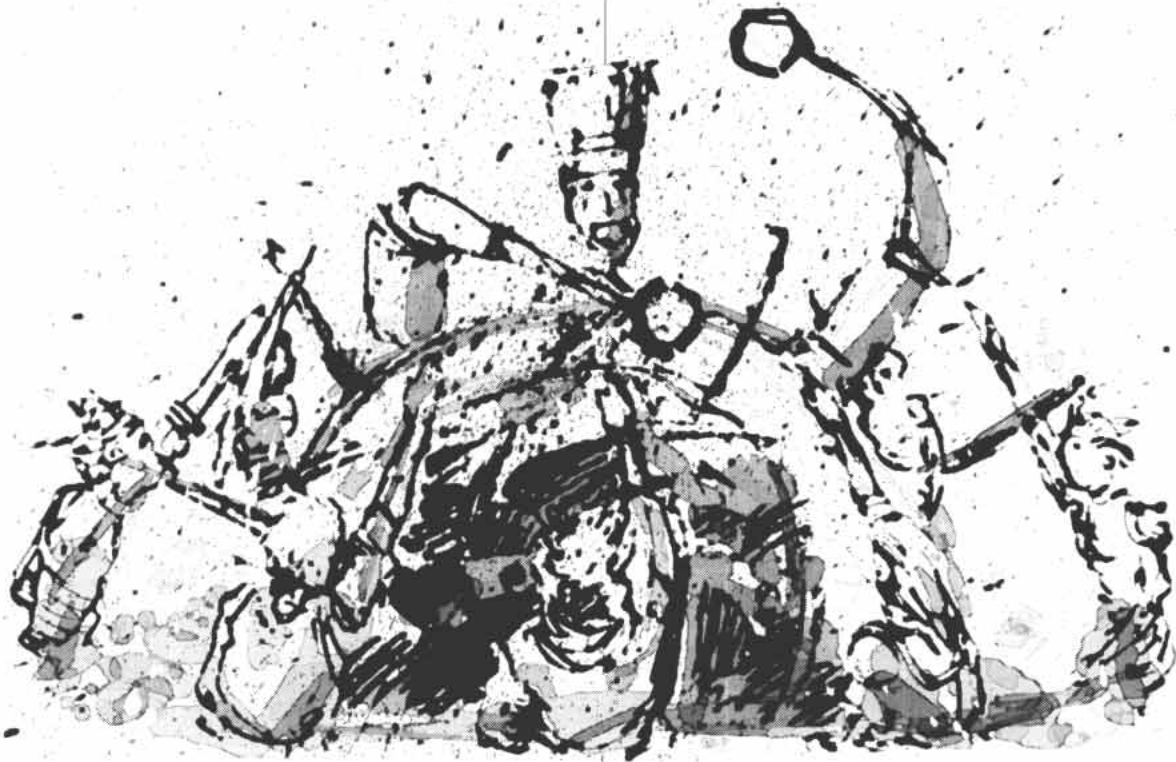
When the Agnites put on the great ritual at the Festival of Rebirth they are not creating "magic." They are essentially creating themselves and their relation to the universe in which they live. When an Evan gives up her life in a Grove in return for a healthy crop, she is not just hoping to bring extra food to her family's table. Rather, she is giving up her life for the continuation of her way of life, with the hope that from her sacrifice something greater can be born. It is in ritual that meaning is found, and in that meaning societies and cultures are formed.

The Fallen often look to the Tribes and think that it is their numbers, or the presence of the Fatimas, that give them their greatest strength. This, however, is not true. It is the shared rituals of life, the ceremonies filled with meaning and tradition, that make the Seven Tribes into a Nation; it is from the repeated festivals, rituals and prayers that they draw their unity and strength. When the Fallen look at themselves they often think

that their greatest weakness is a lack of military strength, or a lack of direction. The truth is that their greatest weakness is that they have no widely shared rituals; they have no center of meaning that would make them a people.

So important is ritual to the nature of meaning and understanding that both priestesses of the Fatimas and Squat shamans have speculated that ritual and its strength of meaning and structure are what make the Great Architecture stand or fall. According to them the failure of stability in the current world is that the rituals are not performed enough, or by enough people. Many Yagan Old Ones have said that if all people were under their direction, performing the correct rituals, that everything in the universe could be brought back to center and that all the broken things could be healed. While the Yagans are not correct, there is a hidden truth in their words. To every person in the **Tribe 8** universe their understanding, their place in the world, is largely determined by their rituals and the ceremonies that surround their life. Even the Fallen are defined by a Tribal Ritual — the one that cast them out.

It is thus important for Weavers and Players to not neglect the role of ritual in their campaigns or in the lives of their Characters. A little bit of thought can let Players come up with dozens of minor rituals that their Characters might use. For the Weaver's part, showing the emotional power of the festivals, ceremonies and rituals of the Tribes is a simple matter of letting the Characters see the way that their old families and loved ones come together after a ritual, and bringing forward the sense of disconnection that should follow a Fall.



RIEUAL SYNTHESIS

Perhaps one person in a hundred has the ability to wield Conjunctional Synthesis, making it a potent but rare power. On the other hand every person in the Tribes has the ability to learn to use Ritual Synthesis, and about one person in ten has some specific training in its use. As a result of this imbalance, most Tribals see more Ritual Synthesis in daily life than they do Conjunctional. To most, Conjunctional Synthesis is a special and sacred power that is wielded by the sisterhoods for the good of the whole nation and the anagogic purposes of the Fatimas. Ritual Synthesis, on the other hand, is something that every member of the Nation has participated in on countless occasions during their lives. Every family of Evans performs their own little planting and harvesting Ritual every spring and fall, doing their bit to help the great uses of Life by the Shamans.

For Squats, Ritual Synthesis is even more important. It is their only ability to use Synthesis, and so is of prime importance to both their spirituality and survival. Most Squat bands have a single medicine man who is able to lead them in Ritual Synthesis, with the Eminence that he is able to replicate depending on his temperament and that of his band. Most of these medicine men's ability to create Synthesis effects is fairly limited and is used only in emergencies to bring minor aid or relief. The medicine men of larger tribes, such as the Riders With Spirits and the Novohuron, on the other hand, are often extremely skilled and have years of study and dedication behind them. When combined with the hundreds of participants and dozens of rituals that they are able to enact, their power can become considerable. A medicine man like Stone of the Riders With Spirits can summon up Ritual power that would shock even the greatest Tribal priestess.

MINOR RITUALS

The daily lives of the Tribals, the Fallen and especially the Squats are filled with dozens of minor rituals. These are not the grand ceremonies of an entire Tribe or Nation, nor the powerful workings of Ritual Synthesis. Rather they are the little bits of life that give stability and meaning, which connect the practitioner to their world through habit, ceremony, and repetition.

Almost anything can become a minor ritual, if it is done for long enough in a formal way and if there is true and sincere belief invested in it. Almost all Fallen Cells end up creating many of these little rituals to help them live together and to fill the hole left by their fall from the Tribes. The Tribals use these minor rituals too, varying them from family to family and clan to clan to help give a sense of family identity that makes them unique while still being a loyal part of the Nation.

The possible lists of such rituals are endless. There are rituals for hunting, for planting crops, for the harvest of crops, for splitting a family that has grown too large for their home, for building a new home, for protection from nightmares before sleep, for wishing others luck and for asking for aid from the spirit of a sword or bow. Player and Weavers are encouraged to create their own minor rituals for their PCs and NPCs, using the little

rituals that they use in their own lives as the seeds of inspiration for what their Characters might do to bring meaning and a little bit of hope to their lives.

Though it is not necessary for every minor ritual to have a game effect, they can at the Weaver's discretion, give a +1 to a single roll related to the ritual. Whether this is a gift from the spirits, a dose of good karma, a psychological bonus for following the proper ways, or a mechanical nod to good roleplaying does not really matter. What is important is that Characters use the rituals that give their life meaning, so the bonus only comes if the ritual is truly meaningful to the Character and is something that is part of her spiritual life.

TRIBAL RITUAL

The Tribes have many great rituals, ceremonies and festivals that fill their lives and give them place, purpose and meaning. The greatest and best known of these are the Liberation and Rebirth festivals, along with the various coming of age and marriage festivals that all the Tribes practice. These great rituals give the Tribes their sense of place and it is not accident that they are personally attended and overseen by the Fatimas.

In addition to the many public rituals of the Tribes, all the Tribes have smaller rituals of their own. The Evans, especially, have minor rituals of life that every Evan performs in the morning, noon and night of every day of their lives. Tribal life is ringed about with repetition and symbolism, a constant reminder of the place of the Fatima and the One Goddess in their life. In addition to these rituals of life, there are also several secret or semi-secret rituals that the Tribes practice to try and gain some measure of personal control over their lives. Two of these secret rituals are listed below, and are intended to serve as inspiration for a Weaver to create more.

THE RITUAL OF THE LONG WICK

When a child is born to two Mordred parents, the father lights a torch or candle as the child is being born. As soon as the child breaches fully the flame is snuffed and the torch or candle is hidden away, often locked in a chest. The Mordreds believe that so long as the candle or torch remains unburnt then the child will have good health and will not be killed by any accident or disease. However, if the candle or torch is found and burnt by an enemy, then the child will suffer from a curse that will wither one of their limbs or make them prone to ill luck. It is an unfortunate fact that this ritual seems to really hold power, for some parents burn their candle as part of casting their child out — resulting in curses and mangled limbs among Fallen Yagans.

REPENT TO THE FIR

This ritual is practiced by both the Joanites and the Evans, both of whom have a great deal of respect (and no little fear) for the woods of Vimary. Whenever a member of one of these Tribes has to cut down any kind of Fir tree, which are known to have bitter and vengeful spirits, the woodcutters immediately fetch a chicken and cut off its head on the stump of the fir with the same ax that they used to fell the tree. By paying the tree a price in blood, they appease its spirit so that it will not haunt them or harm them in their dreams. Those who do not perform this ritual are sometimes found dead in their sleep.

SERF RITUAL

In lives of short and ugly brutality the Serfs are perhaps the lowest ebb of humanity. Their desperation, however, has led them to developing a gruesome set of rituals intended to help them survive their brutal world. Most Squat rituals are designed to appease either their Z'bri lords or the twisted Helots that serve them. Almost all of their rituals involve human sacrifice and the desecration of the bodies of their fellows. Unfortunately for the Serfs few of their rituals have any real power, as the Z'bri have stamped out any who could threaten their dominance. The best most Serf rituals can accomplish is to gain the favor of their Lords, thus letting them live a wretched time longer. Below are some of the more important Serf rituals.

RIDDING THE HURT

In this ancient ritual, started during the time of the Camps, the family (such as it is) of a sick Serf takes clippings of the family member's hair and nails and then melts them into the center of a ball formed of brains, bone marrow and wax. The ball is carefully wrapped in a scrap of cloth or flesh to keep it from disintegrating, and is then left in the sun for at least three days. The ripe ball is then taken and hurled with a sling at a member of another family, or an unfortunate Squat or Tribal who comes too near Serf lands. The Serfs then believe that the illness is taken from their family member and given to the one hit with the ball. The truth, however, is that the ill person rarely recovers — though the person struck does often become ill from the diseases carried in the ball of decomposing remains.

KING OF THE WOOD

This ritual of the Serfs who serve the Koleris was actually instituted by their Lords, many years ago. In this ritual enactment any Serf who is brave and strong enough to escape the Serf fields may go to a clearing just north of the Seven Fingers and there break a branch from a yew tree that grows there. He must then face the guardian of the grove, known as the King of the Wood, in single combat armed with only his branch. If he kills the old King of the Wood then he takes his place, and has the right to live free in the grove for so long as he is able to kill all those who come against him. The Koleris leave the King alone, as he gives them amusement.



SQUAT RITUALS

Of all the peoples of the **Tribe 8** world it is the Squats who use ritual the most, and who use the most varied rituals. Lacking Synthesis in any Conjunctional form, it is Squats who use ritual for all of their needs as well as for meaning and comfort. An endless round of rituals and superstitions surround Squat life, bringing meaning and comfort to their lives. While the Tribals can turn to their Fatimas and Keepers to the World Before, the Squats have only themselves and the spirits that they can speak with to give their world focus and stability. As a result most of Squat life becomes very ritualized, as a defense mechanism against a world that really and truly has gone mad.

Much of Squat ritual has to do with spirits. Through ritual forms and ritualized summons, pacts and dreams, Squats appeal, bribe, bargain with and occasionally trick and trap spirits to help them in their lives. Where Tribals would use Life, or at least Life-based Ritual Synthesis, to help their crops grow, Squats pray to the spirits of the field and of the sky, offering sacrifices and ritual payments in return for a good harvest. As a result the Squat's life is very dependent on the good will of the spirits, and so they are careful to do nothing that even has the possibility of displeasing the spirits. This leads to an increase in superstition, most of which Tribals and Keepers alike mock. The Squats, however, take them very seriously and anyone wishing their good will had best take them seriously as well.

Though most Squats are nearly helpless before the Tribal and Fallen control of Synthesis there are a few (very few) elder shamans and medicine men who could surprise the Tribes with their power. Though they do not have the direct ability to cause effects as Tribals do, these holy men have pacts with vast numbers of often potent spirits who will aid the medicine man against interlopers. Arrogant Tribals going too far into Squat lands may find to their dismay that the very forces of nature can be roused against them.

As noted above Squats are often quite adept at Ritual Synthesis, and Squat shamans with Ritual skills of 3 and even 4 are not uncommon. The truth, however, is that these holy men and their powerful rituals make up fewer than 1 in every 100 Squats. Most Squats are content with minor rituals, of which even Squat children may know hundreds. Some sample Squat rituals are given below.

THE HORSE RITUAL

This is one of the greatest rituals of the Riders With Spirits, and is performed only when a new chief is selected by the whole of the Tribe — an event that happens only about once a decade. When the new chief is elected by his people he goes among the horses of the assembled tribe and finds the one that is the most beautiful, powerful and that bears the most marks of the noble spirits of the Four Winds. This horse is then fed well all night, and in the morning is whipped and sent out to run free.

For one year the chosen horse runs free and wild, followed by a small band of warriors who watch and chart its progress and protect it from harm. Any accident that befalls the horse is seen as the worst possible luck, and the chieftain to whom the horse belonged is not expected to live long. After a year the horse is brought back to the center of the tribe. There it is fed well, and then sacrificed with a sharp knife and burnt so that its flesh may appease the spirits. The warriors then tell the people where the horse wandered in its year of freedom. Until the chief dies and a new chief is elected, the land covered by the horse's wandering is the territory of the Squats, a territory that they consider to be theirs by divine right. They will leave the territory only to raid or trade, and will greet any unwelcome incursions into their land with lethal force. Any Rider warrior fighting to defend this sacred land gets a +1 on all her combat rolls.

THE FIRE OF NEED

Another ritual performed by the Riders With Spirits is the Fire of Need. This ritual is performed when illness spreads among the Riders' horses, the lifeblood of their tribes. First all fires and lights in the entire camp are extinguished, so that not even a single spark remains. The medicine man of the tribe then strikes a spark off of a piece of iron, usually a spear tip, and sets fire to a sheaf of grass. The grass is then used to set fire to two bonfires built around two poles of ash wood, and the bonfires are allowed to burn until there is nothing left but embers and smoke. At that point all the horses in the camp are gathered together and driven over the embers and through the smoke, while all the members of the tribe chant prayers to the spirits that their "brothers and sisters" may be spared from disease.

GIFTS TO THE ANCESTORS

The Squats of Boarhead's federation practice this ritual at the end of every week. Each family elects one member to spend the week carving a block of maple wood into a replica of something valuable. What the carving is of depends on the purpose for which it is made. Someone wanting success in farming might make an ear of corn; someone needing success in war might make a bow.

At the end of the week the family then treks together to the nearest body of water and builds a small fire at its side. They call out to their ancestors, naming as many as they can remember (which is usually quite a few) and asking them to take their offering in return for aid. They then burn the carving and scatter its ashes upon the water.

Though the benefits are not truly tangible, the Squats are sure it helps them. In fact it helps their ancestors, as their ghosts are often able to keep themselves from falling into the Sea of the Lost due to the attention given them by the living. In return they do everything that ghosts can do to help their descendants, including sending dream visions, guidance and even attempting to affect the physical world.

SPIRITS

Tribe 8 is a game with a high traffic in ghosts and spirits. These enigmatic entities populate the world with an immanent sense of mysticism and the otherworldly. It is the recognition of their existence that is perhaps the single greatest difference between the World Before and the current world of Tribe 8.

At the same time, however, spirits can be the most difficult facet to include in a game, comprising inscrutable agendas, exotic requirements and completely alien minds. It is the very unknowable aspect of spirits and their world that lends Tribe 8 its sense of mystery and the unknown.

PERSPECTIVES

The nature of spirits is for the most part unknown, leading to wildly varied assumptions and relationships with the Spiritual World. Squats accept spirits as a matter of course as exemplars of the natural world, the animating forces within river, tree and mountain. Spirits guide and shepherd all things, from stones and grass to game and humanity. Their guidance is both essential and costly, for the Squat tribes would die without the assistance they receive, and willingly make sacrifices and do their bidding to maintain their favor.

In the Nation, such a reliance on the miscellaneous spirits of the world is looked on as unnecessary and laughable. The Tribes have their Fatimas, and need no other help. Spirits are thought of as the dreams of animals, plants and other landmarks rather than the authorities and rulers of the natural world. To the Tribes, spirits are beneath the Sisters, and many believe that as the spirits do the bidding of the Fatimas, they are their natural underlings, minions and even pets.

A few of the more powerful and wise spirits have attracted their own, secondary following among the Tribes, and these are known as Totems. The veneration of Totems is never allowed to supercede the worship of the Fatimas, an arrangement that does not seem to bother the Totems in the least.

Having been abandoned by the Fatimas, the Fallen generally come to regard the spirits in one of two ways. The minority regards spirits as accomplices and partners in crime who allowed and assisted the Sisters to enslave humanity. Most, however, consider spirits independent and relatively unbiased witnesses to the perversion of the Fatimas, and as potential resources for both information and very real aid.

Until recently the Fallen had little to offer the spirits and knew few of the invisible host. As times change, however, the Eighth Tribe has become acquainted with more spirits and has developed a greater understanding of their world. While no spirit could be considered a Totem to the Fallen as a whole, some have established close bonds with individuals on Hom, and others have become the focal point of rituals and invocations.

As their understanding grows, the Fallen have begun to question the Nation's dismissive portrayal of the spirits. Herites and Doomslayers lead the forefront of this inquiry, currying their favor through vision quests, gifts and sacrifices. The spirits have replied with both disturbing and liberating revelations. Many insinuate that the spirits outdate the Fatimas and imply that they are more than simply the dreams of plants and animals.

Most admit to a sense of responsibility and stewardship, ranging from protecting the animals whose form they take to nurturing and furthering the cause of specific ideals or concepts. The Fallen have even encountered spirits openly disdainful of both the Sisters' mission and their power, which may be the most disturbing of all.

NUMINOLOGY

The spiritual world is not something easily divisible into separate categories. Spirits' very nature of change and possibility routinely break down any distinctions created by human schema. That said, the denizens of the spiritual world can be roughly divided into three kinds, based on their origin. These kinds are not exclusive from each other and a great deal of crossover occurs. Moreover, few spirits obviously fall into any category from the Player Characters' perspective: spirits are canny and enigmatic, and are unlikely to act so plainly as to be easily categorized.

The genesis of **conceptual spirits** is perhaps the most complex. The forces that populate the Spiritual Orb are the origins of values and concepts in the World of Flesh, and come to humanity and the rest of the world through the River of Dream. Contact with the Physical Orb changes and shapes these forces of potential, giving them form and name, creating something greater than its parts. The animating power of such a spirit is derived from the World of Spirit, but the World of Flesh's contribution is more than just a mask under which the "true" spirit hides.

The shape impressed on the spirit gives it focus and definition, channeling the raw power of the spiritual force into a form that can effectively bring that potential to bear on the real world. The fact that this form also makes the spirit more comprehensible to humanity is only a fortunate byproduct. For instance, the force that inspired the values of wisdom and keen discrimination bleeds through into the River and is met by humanity's cultural foundation that used the owl as a symbol of wisdom. The force is shaped by this conception, and becomes the Great Owl.

Animals and plants dream differently than humanity; they do not create personalized dream-realms or maintain individual anima. Instead, dreaming animals manifest in the River of Dream by participating in collectives known as **nature spirits**. One such spirit may comprise all the dreaming animals of a particular species or may be as few as one pack or hive.

Plants exist in a state of half-dream, and exist in both the World of Flesh and the River of Dream. Nature spirits tend to be less powerful than conceptual spirits, and their focus more specific. Where conceptual spirits further the virtues and traits they value, nature spirits defend their members and their environment and only occasionally forward their own values in humanity. Nature spirits will often serve conceptual spirits who share their shape; Winter Wolf runs with a pack of wolf spirits composed of wolf dreams.

Ghosts exist as the souls of the dead who have not yet passed across the Fold. Tribal dead are guided to the afterlife by Baba Yaga and her priestesses, but may linger among the living before starting their journey beyond. The souls of nearly everyone else wander without guidance; most are unable to navigate the River of Dream and are swept out into the Sea of the Lost. Some become attached to objects, places, or people they knew in life, haunting them and forever trying to regain the joy they knew before death.

A very few adept in Dream can resist the pull of the Sea and maintain their existence in the River or in the World of Flesh. These are perhaps the most frightening of all, as they are also the most powerful of ghosts. The motives and agendas of these and other ghosts are highly variable. Most begin with good or at least sensible intentions, but the tide slowly erodes their humanity and sensibilities, until they become at heart as much an abomination as their continued existence.

The divisions between the three categories are porous, allowing for some spirits to qualify as both at once or change from one to another. The core values of a nature spirit may come to dominate its personality to the point where the dream-spirit makes contact with the spiritual force behind its chosen virtues. Contrarily, a conceptual spirit might lose its connection to the Spiritual Orb as the Fold buckles and strains to separate the two worlds. Such a spirit might simply cease to exist, or continue on in an impoverished form, easily mistaken for a nature spirit or even as a ghost. Ghosts themselves might find an ideal to strive for and develop into a part of a conceptual spirit, or they may take up a symbiotic relationship with the surrounding environment, and slowly become something of a nature spirit.

THEMES AND MOODS

As with all things spiritual, it is the Themes and Moods around a spirit that determine what it is. While in the physical world theme is an abstract thing, with spirits it becomes central, because many spirits are to some degree a living theme, the embodiment of a mood.

PURPOSE

The core element of any spirit is the purpose the spirit will fill in the cycle. This should serve as the baseline for any action concerning it, and should be relatively solid in the Weaver's mind before play begins. Everything about the spirit: its type, appearance, demeanor, statistics and personality should complement the purpose of the spirit and ensure that it will fulfill its role in the cycle as a whole.

OTHERWORLDLINESS

Encounters with spirits are amazing things, where the Character makes contact with the otherworldly, with something from beyond humanity's comprehension. Dreamers may visit the River of Dream, but spirits live there, and are imbued with the power of Dream and possibility. In addition, spirits tend to slightly distort reality around them, bending it to their natures.

In the presence of Teddy, one of the Totems of the Agnites, the air becomes comfortably warm and carries the barest hint of children's laughter from far away. Characters encountering a spirit never come away from the experience unchanged — they feel the core nature of the spirit down to their very souls and are either astounded with awe or overcome with repulsion.

PERSONALITY

Spirits in **Tribe 8** are a combination of forces. They all have an archetypal spiritual basis, but are further formed and molded by their interactions with humanity. At their base all spirits are archetypal forms, beings that reflect something about the nature of the universe and humanity's interaction with it. Thus spirits will all have personalities that fit their type. Storm spirits are grand and imposing, bone spirits alien and entropic, and so forth. These types make it easy for Weavers to create a spirit on the spur of the moment, simply starting with a type and letting the Characters' first interactions focus on the personality of the type.

Spirits however, also take shape from the forces of dream and human belief. This leads to spirits developing vibrant personalities, including memories, agendas and opinions of their own. A spirit's personality will determine what honor it will expect from humanity and how generous it will be in return. It should include the spirit's hopes, values, and goals as well as its own needs and desires, fleshing out the spirit and making it a full-fledged character in the game. The personality of the individual spirit is built upon this archetypal base, but allows for variation and personalization — making spirits both individual and primal.

SYMBOLISM

Perhaps the most elusive element of spirits is their connection to symbols. Since the River of Dream and everything submerged in it is shaped by the beliefs and culture of humanity, spirits themselves take on the form and visage of folk tales, legends and myth. More than just masks, however, these forms impress upon spirits habits, desires and traits of this world, and help determine their actions. The spirit of healing that takes on the form of a bear, known to the Evans as a healing totem, will also take on other aspects of the bear. The spirit will become intimidating, powerful and protective of those it considers its 'young'.

THE OTHER

Spirits are vast, great, and powerful, but also fundamentally different than humanity, and often seem strange and inscrutable. The scope of their interest is both greater and more focused, since they are universal spirits concerned with only a sliver of reality. This difference manifests itself in an air of distraction and disconnection from the 'real world' of the Characters. Spirits may emphasize and even insist upon actions that seem insignificant to humanity, with little explanation given. Their demands may be strange or nonsensical, and they rarely take obstacles or difficulties into account the same way humans do.

HONOR

Spirits rely on the honor tendered to them, and respond in kind with inspiration, advice and assistance. Spirits, especially conceptual or nature spirits, usually require the humans they encounter to show their respect in tangible terms. What every spirit expects is slightly different, but following the dictates of hospitality, such as thanking the spirit for the audience, listening when spoken to and only speaking when prompted, are the most common. Some may expect token gifts such as breadcrumbs or greenweed; others may require a sacrifice be made in their honor. Once the spirit has been given honor, it will interact with supplicants favorably; those who do not meet the requirements and expectations of the spirit will be ignored, or worse, subject to attacks, hauntings and curses.

SYSTEMS

Characters will interact with spirits in most **Tribe 8** cycles and in some few they will come in direct or indirect conflict with them. A well-prepared Weaver will have descriptions and statistics prepared for the spirits she plans to use. Translating something as otherworldly as a spirit into game mechanics can be difficult, and Weavers are recommended to use game statistics more as guidelines than hard and fast rules on what a spirit can and cannot do. In general, Weavers should refrain from limiting themselves to point totals and instead assign numbers that 'feel' right.

ATTRIBUTES

Spirits do not possess physical Attributes; instead, each Attribute does double duty within the River of Dream. Many of these Attributes take on a different cast when applied to spirits, and these details are noted below, along with the alternate uses for each. It is also worth noting that spirits are not limited by human maximums on Attributes, and many spirits have scores well beyond anything the best human could ever hope for. Most spirits will have scores between -5 and +5, but powerful spirits can go well into double digits.

Creativity (Agility)

While many spirits are too closely associated with their concept or distracted by fighting the tides of the Sea, some others possess a canny intelligence that allowed them to synthesize and adapt to changing conditions. Because Creativity also translates into Agility, hidebound spirits often appear slow in reflexes as well as in thought. The quick-witted, on the other hand, are quick on their feet, as well. The slowest of spirits may take ages to be able to change or respond, lost in their dreaming depths. Their Creativity could be well into the negatives, going as low as -10. The best of spirits, however, are creatures of dream and are unhindered by the heavy bodies of mortality, and can be far more versatile and quick than any human.

Influence (Appearance)

Influence represents the intrinsic attraction of the spirit, and is reflected in its appearance as well as its manners. Many spirits possess a magnetic charisma that awes and compels worship; others, however, are so repulsive that speaking with them for any length of time requires a firm resolve.

Knowledge

Most spirits possess knowledge in an intrinsically different way than humans; few learn what they know, but understand the world because they are part of it. It is through their connection to the greater world that they know it so well. Few spirits, however, are ignorant, and their Knowledge scores are often high. With ages and millennia to learn, there is little to limit the body of knowing that they can accumulate.

Perception

Spirits run the gamut of alertness, from the keen-eyed Great Owl to a specter so distracted by its own angst it must be bodily shaken to notice others. Very wise and seeing spirits may easily have a +5, while a troubled ghost may have as low as a -2.

Psyche (Fitness)

Most spirits encountered in the River of Dream possess above-average Psyches, as to a great extent a spirit is composed of their psyche alone. Some few, notably ghosts, may be twisted or insane, and will have a difficult time navigating the River. As Psyche measures the fitness of one's emotional self, it also doubles as the fitness of a spirit's ephemeral body. Spirits who are wise and well grounded in the River of Dream are reflected as lean, fit and well composed. The old and powerful among the

spirits have truly massive Psyche scores, and even common spirits often have a +2 or better.

Willpower (Strength and Build)

A spirit's resolve translates directly to its ability to affect its environment and its own endurance of might, thought and character. This trait indicates the raw power of the spirit, and therefore may be wildly variable depending on the individual spirit. The spirits of a burrow of sleeping mice may have Willpower of -2, while Mountain (one of the greatest of spirits) has a +20.

Instinct (Agility and Appearance)

Some spirits possess minds more akin to animals than man, and are driven by impulse over thought. This does not make the spirit ignorant or any less intelligent, but merely denotes a different focus and process of thought. These spirits possess an Instinct Attribute instead of Knowledge, Influence and Creativity, and therefore it also serves as its Agility and Appearance scores. For these spirits, this Attribute denotes many things, and can be summed up as the core anima of the spirit: it is the strength of its definition in the River of Dream.

Secondary Traits

Secondary traits such as Strength, Health, Stamina and Damage are calculated as normal for human Dreamers. Please see the **Tribe 8 Rulebook**, page 162.

SKILLS

Spirits are most likely to know the Skills associated with their character; the spirit that blesses the crops will possess Agriculture to some degree, and the spirit of the falcon would certainly be Skilled in hunting. Ghosts will have some of the Skills they had in life, although the Sea wears away at even this, and as their psyches and memories disappear, their abilities in life fade as well.

Nearly all spirits possess the Dreaming Skill, as it is this Skill that allows them to interact with their environment, the River of Dream. Many spirits also possess Loes associated with their sphere of influence, and are often consulted for advice on the many things that they know.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Many spirits possess special abilities that transcend what is normally possible in the World of the Flesh. When creating new special abilities, the Weaver need not worry needlessly over specific game mechanics. Most of these abilities work automatically, and only require a roll to determine the strength of the effect. When these abilities are used in play, they serve to emphasize the spirit's actions or personality, or to forward the plot of the cycle. The important aspect of each special ability is that it matches the spirit's purpose and sphere of influence.

MANIFESTATION

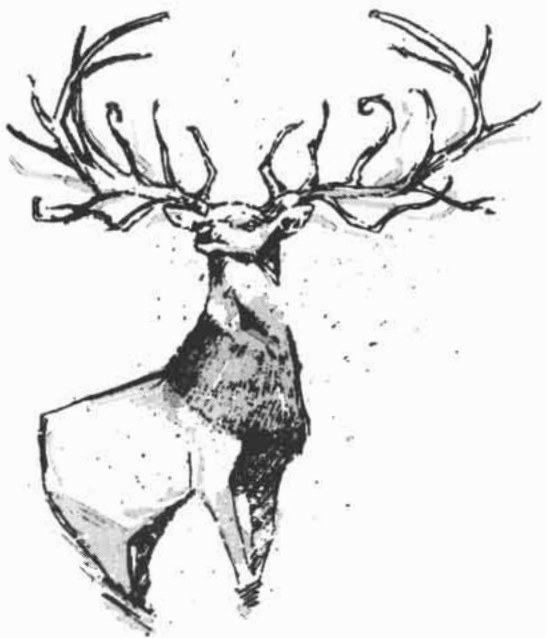
One common though varied special ability is the ability to manifest in the World of Flesh. Any spirit can walk amongst the living within the confines of a Gully, but outside of these special places more is required. Few spirits can walk freely in the Physical Orb; most can only appear as insubstantial apparitions. Many spirits with animal forms can possess or even create from nothing a representative member of their species. Others can only enter the World of Flesh by possessing a corpse, animating the dead body with their own spirit.



8. Weaver's Resources

SAMPLE SPIRITS

Example spirits follow below to illustrate spirit statistics, and for immediate use in any Cycle.



TWENTY POINTS

Lean and majestic, Twenty Points is also hardy and strong, capable of existing despite adversity and balancing the need to hide with the need to stand and fight. Taking the form of a powerful elk buck, Twenty Points roams the forests and wilderness in and around Vimary. He is hard to find and even more difficult to encounter, as sighting the spirit across a meadow is far more common than any sort of interview. Sometimes just the presence of his calm strength is enough; other times Fallen try to curry his favor in exchange for prudent advice.

Highlights Subdued, stoic, wise.

Attributes INS +4, PER +3, PSY +3

Skills Combat Sense 3/+3, Hand-to-Hand 2/+4, Survival 3/+4. Butt (x15 damage), Stride (Twenty Points can flee a dangerous scene at incredible speed).



SLUAGA, BONE SPIRIT

As part of their death rites, Yagans often remove, clean, and preserve one bone from the bodies of the dead who were acknowledged as wise in life. The soul of the dead person is collected by Baba Yaga, but all of her knowledge and understanding is bound to the chosen bone. This accumulation of wisdom forms a bone spirit. Bone Spirits possess little volition except for a few who were especially strong-willed in life. Most roam through Mortuary mumbling through their stores of information: they are essentially walking spiritual libraries. Bone Spirits are bound to the bone they were created around, and never wander far from it. The Yagan Bonecrafters maintain archives of bones and their attendant spirits in underground passages riddling the Great Hill.

Sluaga is one of the few Bone Spirits still retaining some sense of identity in life, when he was a High Judge in the first days of the Nation. Then he was a prominent man with many adherents, ready to lead the Tribes in forging a new world, until he was felled by a Magdalite assassin. He has come to understand the limitations of his new condition and despises them. The constraint that earns his greatest rage is his tie to the bone — a rib — hidden within the tunnels of the Bonecrafters. He longs for nothing more than the freedom to walk the earth and collect followers to do his bidding once again.

Highlights Regal, eldritch, decrepit

Attributes INF +2, KNO +3, PER -2, WIL +1

Skills Dreaming 2/0, Human Perception 1/0, Law 2/+3, Leadership 2/+2, Lore (Fatimas, Vimary, Sunken City) 3/+3. Total Recall (can perfectly narrate scenes he witnessed in life).



EGG STEALER THE FERRET

As both a survivor and a lore hound, Egg Stealer has a well-known reputation — and not all of it is good. This slick spirit collects and hoards shiny trinkets of knowledge, and does not seem to have any conception of privacy. Many Tera Shebans and Yagans erect wards to keep this sly thing away from their secrets. Those who do him service, however, he rewards with a bit of his treasure trove. Since Egg Stealer has only an imperfect understanding of humans, such gifts are erratic: sometimes he will tell you a secret; other times he will give you a nice shiny CD.

Highlights Hyperactive, excited, curious (to an obsessive degree)

Attributes CRE +2, INF +1, KNO +4, PER +4, PSY -2

Skills Acrobatics 2/+2, Combat Sense 1/+4, Dodge 3/+2, Lore (Many) 4/+4, Notice 3/+3, Sneak 3/+2. Twinkle of an Eye (Egg Stealer can disappear completely when he is out of line of sight).



WILL-O-WISPS

These haunting lights are known to float just on the horizon, prompting many to leave the safety of their homes and campfires to investigate. Such hapless individuals are usually led on a wild goose chase as the Will-o-Wisp continues to draw them further into the darkness and further away from safety. The Will-o-Wisp may tempt its followers into a swamp or off a precipice, but being cut off from home and hearth is usually enough to doom the fool who pursues the lights: other dangers of Vimary's nights will do the rest. Tales tell of Z'bri making use of Will-o-Wisps to draw Tribals and Fallen away from safety and into their clutches; other accounts maintain that captured Will-o-Wisps assist in divinations and other uses of Dream.

Highlights Enigmatic, silent

Skills Enchanting Light (viewers of the Will-o-Wisp's light must make a WIL roll at Threshold 5 to avoid investigating and following), Manifest (a Will-o-Wisp can manifest in the Physical Orb).

OPTIONAL PERKS AND FLAWS

There are many permutations to the River, and many different ways in which humanity interacts with it. In order to help Players gain an extra bit of control over their Characters and open up possibilities for different Character types, some extra Perks and Flaws are presented below for use with the optional system from the *Tribe 8 Rulebook* (pages 194-204).

PERKS

The following Perks give Characters an advantage in spiritual and dreaming matters, making them more versatile. Almost all spiritual gifts, however, have an intrinsic downside.

Blessed of the One Goddess

Innate Cost: 3

A Character who is blessed of the One Goddess is heavily touched by the positive, joining side of the Great Architecture. As a result, she is highly resistant to the emanations and corruption of the Seed. A Character with this merit rolls at +1 to resist all Z'bri atmospheres and Sundering effects. In addition, Z'bri always roll at -1 to affect the blessed one.

Hermetic Synthesis

Acquired Cost: 3

A Hermetic Dreamer is one who is able to use Synthesis in a ritual and repetitive manner. Hermetic Dreamers are able to use ritual and ceremony to great benefit, using the stability and structure to help focus and channel their power. Hermetic Dreamers gain an additional +1 from any use of ritual or ceremonial tools. The down side, however, is that the focused and controlled way of looking at the River makes the Dreamer lose some flexibility, and increases the penalties of micro-trancing to -3. This Perk is incompatible with the Intuitive Synthesis Perk.

Intuitive Synthesis

Innate Cost: 5

Intuitive Characters have a great talent for spur of the moment improvisation and interaction with the River of Dream. As a result, they are able to channel and weave the power of the River more quickly than most Dreamers. Intuitive Dreamers lower the penalties for fast-trance and micro-trance Synthesis by 1 (to 0/-1 respectively). The downside of this intuitive control is that the Dreamer's fast and loose style makes ritual use more difficult for her, and reduces the benefits of rituals and group ceremonies by -1 each. This Perk is incompatible with the Hermetic Synthesis Perk.

Patron Spirit

Acquired Cost: 2-6 points

The Character is blessed with the attentions of a spiritual benefactor who watches over, advises and may even help or

defend the Character in the World of Flesh. Ancestor Spirits, Totems and the ghosts of family or old cell members are all appropriate. Spiritual help may range from simple advice and information (2-3 points, 4 or more if the spirit has access to a great deal of obscure information) to help in the physical world (4-6 points). The blessing of spirits may manifest in many ways, such as adherents of Winter Wolf never having to worry about wolf attacks, or a servant of Great Owl being able to discern the truth simply by watching someone speak. Such additional blessings increase the cost of this Perk by one or more. Most Spirit Patrons place requirements on the Character; some may expect to be honored with gifts and sacrifices while others need the Character's help to simply stay alive.

FLAWS

The following spiritual Flaws affect the Character's ability to interact with the River of Dream in various ways. Players are encouraged to talk with their Weaver before taking any of these Flaws, as they may interfere with the Weaver's plans for a cycle.

Non-Dreamer

Innate Cost: 7

Characters who are "non Dreamers" are almost completely unconnected to the River of Dream. Generally only Squats are so disconnected, and any Tribal with the Flaw would be considered sub-human and beyond the Goddess' love. In addition to the heavy social onus that this Flaw brings, the Character is also unable to ever use any type of Synthesis or Eminence and counts as a Squat when targeted by the Synthesis of others (giving them a +1 to their roll). Non-Dreamer is incompatible with the Hermetic Dreamer, Intuitive Dreamer, Spiritual Balance, Spiritual Siren, or Blessed of the One Goddess Perks.

Partial Dreamer

Innate Cost: -2/0 for Keepers

Characters who are "partial Dreamers" have only one Eminence. For some reason, perhaps because of a weakness in her soul, or because of a lack of belief that goes heart deep, the Character only connects to the River of Dream at a single point. This could also be the case if the Character has Fallen and not yet taken up her second Eminence; in that case, another Flaw must be taken, or the points paid back through XP, before the Character can receive her Fallen Eminence. She may still use Conjunctional Synthesis as normal, but only has a single Eminence with which to work. (Note that all Keepers are considered Partial Dreamers by default, and gain no bonus from this Flaw.)

Spiritual Stigma

Innate/Acquired Cost: -3

A Character with a spiritual stigma is offensive to spirits. Either she is naturally unbalanced in a way that offends spirits, or she has been marked by the anger or fear of spirits for sins she has committed. Whenever using the Dreaming skill to call, negotiate

with, or fight spirits, the Character is at a -2 to all rolls. The possible upside of this Flaw is that unwanted spirits may simply avoid the Character. Spiritual Stigma is incompatible with the Perk Spiritual Siren.

Tenuous Dreamer

Innate Cost -5/-2 for Keepers

Characters who are "tenuous Dreamers" are incapable of using Conjunctional Synthesis or the power of Eminence. They still may choose a single Eminence under which they may do Ritual Synthesis (**Tribe 8 Rulebook**, page 174), but they cannot use the Eminence to gain bonuses to rolls or to cast Conjunctional Synthesis. Keepers who take this Flaw can only ever learn a single Formula.

Touched by the Seed

Acquired Cost: -4

A Character who is touched by the Seed is very close to the violent and destructive side of nature. Because of this, she has difficulty resisting the manifestations of the Seed in Sundering, and rolls to resist all Sundering effects at -1. In addition, some of the spiritually sensitive among the Tribals will react negatively to the Character, and may accuse her of being tainted by the Z'bri. Touched by the Seed is incompatible with the Blessed of the One Goddess Perk.

ASPECTS OLD AND NEW

There have been a number of Aspects, both Tribal and Z'bri, which have appeared in previous books in the **Tribe 8** game line. For ease of reference, we have included here (in alphabetical order) basic descriptions of the Aspects which do not appear in the core Rulebook.

Body Severing: Flemis Aspect (INF, Threshold 8); Horrors of the Z'bri, p. 93

Used on a group, Body Severing detaches the minds from each body and lets a Collective form, able to control all bodies through cooperation. This allows a group of people to act as one, or one body to provide experiences for the Collective. Body Severing ultimately destroys its subjects: each victim must make a WIL test (Threshold 4) every hour while in the Hive Mind or go irrevocably insane. Fortunately, if the victim stays sane, they may make an additional WIL test (Threshold 6) to reenter their body and remove themselves from the Collective. Willing victims get no opportunity to resist the Aspect, but unwilling victims roll a WIL test, opposed by the Z'bri's Margin of Success. Only those failing the Opposed test are Severed. The specific effects of Body Severing should be roleplayed by the affected victims, or the cunning Weaver.

The Burning: Koleris Aspect (STR, Threshold 5); Horrors of the Z'bri, p. 92

The Aspect allows the Koleris to use her reserves of energy to grab a second wind, causing her to fight on with renewed energy and vigor regardless of her wounds. If successful, the Margin of Success is added to all combat-related rolls for a number of turns equal to the Sundering Skill Level of the Z'bri. As a side effect, the Z'bri's body burns hot to the touch, and has been known to ignite extremely flammable material (such as dry parchment or spilled oil). Once the effect is over, the Z'bri's body ignites, causing 1d6 Flesh Wounds to itself.

The Calling: Sangis Aspect (PSY, Threshold 5); Horrors of the Z'bri, p. 91

When a Sangis comes into contact with a human being, she can plant a small portion of her essence within that person. The seed is planted through a kiss, requiring skin-to-skin contact. After that 'deposit' has been made, the Sangis maintains a low-level empathic link with her victim, strong enough to convey the knowledge of the victim's death. A Sangis may have only one seed planted at any given time, but the connection can be severed at will. When the Sangis wishes, she may recall her current victim to her side; the victim will blindly cross any obstacle to reach her master. A WIL roll is required to break free of the compulsion once the call has been sent out, at a Threshold of 4. The seed can be sensed, but only by those with a Synthesis skill of 3 or above.

Clairvoyance: Marian Aspect (PER, Threshold 4); T8 Companion, p. 86

By purifying themselves, Marians can attune their perception to the River of Dream and see over great distances to spy upon a chosen individual. Clairvoyance requires the use of a dedicated seeing pool and some sort of ritual link to the target, but can benefit from the bonuses for group rituals listed on page 165 of the **Tribe 8 Rulebook** (only the ritual leader need have the Aspect). Clairvoyance Fumbles automatically cause separation (see *Lost Equilibrium*, **T8 Rulebook**, p. 166). The MoS of the roll determines distance and clarity of the vision (the dreamer may split her MoS between the two as she sees fit).

The Curse of Freedom: Flemis Aspect (WIL, Threshold 6); Horrors of the Z'bri, p. 91

Rarely used, the Aspect of the Curse of Freedom causes a genuine fear among all within the Flemis Mind. When the Curse of Freedom is used, the Flemis is forcibly ejected from the Hive Mind and given merely a single body in which to survive. The Curse is based on WIL against a Threshold of 6. The Margin of Success is then rolled against by the victim, using a WIL Attribute test. Interestingly, use of this Sundering ability on any non-Flemis, human or Z'bri, completely nullifies any mind control acting upon the target, and the target receives a +2 to any WIL tests for an entire day to resist any such attempts.

Dahlia's Doorway: Dahlian Aspect (AGI, Variable Threshold); Word of the Dancers, p. 77

This Aspect grants the dreamer the ability to make a temporary hole through any barrier. The Threshold depends upon the thickness of the area that must be passed through. The size and duration of the hole are based on the MoS, though the Dreamer can make the hole smaller than maximum, if desired. Note that a Dreamer can close the hole whenever she likes. A person or object inside the hole is not crushed by the hole closing; rather, she is ejected onto the side closest to her when the hole is closed.

Dance of Masks: Dahlian Aspect (INF, Threshold 5); Word of the Dancers, p. 77

The Dance of Masks allows a Dreamer the ability to take on the look, mannerisms and voice of a person trusted by a single target. Whenever anyone looks upon the Dreamer, they see and hear the target's trusted person. The Dreamer cannot choose who she will look like; that is decided by the first target of the Aspect. Once the 'mask' is in place, however, the Dreamer immediately knows who she looks like and gains an intuitive grasp of the correct mannerisms. The Player should keep track of the result of her roll, as whenever the PC comes into contact with a new Character, or gives others reason to be suspicious (Weaver's discretion), those she meets may roll their PER against the MoS in order to penetrate the illusion.

Euthanize: Evan Aspect (WIL, vs. Target's PSY); Word of the Fates, p. 112

A very rare Aspect only open to those who have been adopted by the White Viper. Few outside of the Tal'on Clan or the Shamanic Lodge even know about this Aspect, and both groups are happy with it that way. Euthanize allows the user to make an attack directly against a target's soul. The user must hold the target's attention during the attack, either through eye contact or some physical means. The MoS determines the level of damage: MoS of 1-3 results in a Flesh Wound; MoS 4-5 results in a Deep Wound; and a MoS of 6+ causes a fatal wound.

Hide'n'Seek: Agnite Aspect (AGI, Variable Threshold); Word of the Dancers, p. 92

This Aspect helps the Dreamer hide in situations where such actions would normally be impossible. The Dreamer is able to use impossibly small cover to fully hide herself. A Dreamer the size of an average adult could use Hide'n'Seek to hide behind a single book as though it were a large bookshelf, or a sapling as easily as a full grown oak. Note that Hide'n'Seek does not grant the Dreamer invisibility, nor does it make her soundless; silent movement still requires Sneak rolls. The Dreamer gets a bonus equal to the Aspect's MoS to all Sneak rolls, and is able to make Sneak rolls in situations in which stealth would normally be impossible (such as sneaking from pebble to pebble across an empty courtyard in full daylight). The Threshold depends upon how small a cover the Dreamer wishes to be able to use.

Holding: Koleris Aspect (WIL, vs. Target's WIL); Horrors of the Z'bri, p. 92

Though the action-obsessed Koleris prefer an opponent that fights back, they have been known to find it useful or pleasurable to prevent their intended victims from running away. The Aspect of Holding allows a Z'bri to completely paralyze an opponent with a single glance. An Opposed WIL test is made between the combatants; if successful for the Z'bri, the other party is unable to take any action (but otherwise remains fully conscious) for a number of turns equal to the Margin of Success.

Inspiration: Melanis Aspect (KNO, Threshold 5); Horrors of the Z'bri, p. 92

Because it has few obvious effects, the Aspect of Inspiration long remained hidden. In retrospect, it is obvious that the knowledge-obsessed Melanis would develop rituals and Sundering abilities designed to boost their capacity to acquire new knowledge. This Aspect allows the Z'bri using it to draw on outside energy and life force to enhance their KNO or CRE Attribute by +1 for a number of turns equal to their Margin of Success.

Luck: Aspect of the Followers of Hare (PSY, Threshold 5); Word of the Dancers, p. 92

The Dreamer can grant herself or another a temporary period of unusually good luck. The effects are usually not noticeable, and can easily be attributed to circumstance, and so it is common for Dreamers with this Aspect to keep their power to themselves and use it quietly for those they like. For a time period based on the Synthesis MoS chart (Tribe 8 Rulebook, p. 165) the recipient of Luck gains a bonus on their rolls: extra 5s rolled add +1 to the total, just as a 6 would normally. Thus a roll of 6, 5, 5 on three dice would have a final total of 8 (6, +1 for a 5, +1 for a 5). A roll of 5, 5 would have a final total of 6 (5, +1 for an extra 5). Because it is tied in to Hare's Moon Magic, Luck can only be used on any one person once for every full cycle of the moon (about 28 days).

Manifestation: Magdalite Aspect (CRE, Variable Threshold); Word of the Fates, p. 97

Manifestation allows the Dreamer to take on the form of another. The appearance, voice, gait, mannerisms and other attributes of the person that they intend to imitate are duplicated. The Threshold depends on how familiar the Dreamer is with the person to be impersonated; if the roll fails, then no change occurs. The same Thresholds are used when the Dreamer encounters somebody who knew the person impersonated; the viewer must make a PER test using the Threshold appropriate to their knowledge of the person.

Manifestation can also be used to create the appearance of a fictitious character. In this case, the Threshold is 5, plus 2 per point of APP difference between the dreamer and her Manifested character. Attempting to pierce this kind of Manifestation is much more difficult (Threshold 8). Minor changes are also possible; the Dentata use Manifestation in this way to disguise the tattoo that marks their allegiance. It is much easier to make these changes; the Threshold is 4 for this application.

Perspective: Sangis Aspect (PER, vs. Target's PER); Horrors of the Z'bri, p. 91

Triggered by touch, the victim's sense of aesthetics is switched around. Everything that they once thought was beautiful they now perceive as ugly, everything that once revolted them they now see as desirable. The level of attraction/repulsion to any specific thing is equal to the level of the previous emotion. An opposing PER roll is made, with the duration of the change one day for every point of Margin of Success. A Fumble on the part of the victim causes the effect to last for an entire month.

Piggyback: Evan Aspect (PSY, vs. Target's INS or CRE); Word of the Fates, p. 112

Piggyback allows a Dreamer to travel through the River of Dream by 'grabbing' onto a spirit and following where it leads, communing with the spirit throughout the travel. To grab a spirit, the Dreamer must enter into a Dream and into the River of Dream. From there she can look about her immediate environs to see if there is a spirit nearby that she can attach herself to (PER, Threshold 4). If there is a likely candidate, the Evan rolls her PSY opposed by the target's INS or CRE. If the Evan gets a MoS of 1 or better, then her psyche has grabbed the spirit and will follow where the spirit leads. Any MoS above 1 reduces the Threshold of subsequent rolls involving the Piggyback. Besides giving occasional suggestions as to direction (INF opposed by WIL) the Evan has little say in where the spirit travels (or even if it travels) and may not move or interact with the River of Dream on her own. During the Piggyback the Evan's spirit is invisible, subsumed within the spirit that she travels with. To end the Piggyback, the Evan must wake, in which case she immediately returns to her sleeping body.

Rage: Joshuan Aspect (WIL, Threshold 3); T8 Companion, p. 85

Rage augments a Dreamer's body, especially against Z'bri Sundering. The Dreamer can call upon this Aspect when combating any supernatural forces or at a time when wounded by any assailant. If the roll fails (MoF 1+), the Dreamer enters a berserk rage where her STR and HEA are increased by 1, all wound penalties are ignored and she will attack anyone who is supernatural or armed, unless she rolls WIL with a Threshold of 6. If the initial roll is successful, the Rage MoS is added to STR (and thus Damage) and HEA attributes (Stamina and System Shock), for a number of minutes equal to MoS. It also offsets any wound penalties and effects. For example, an MoS of 3 would reduce wound penalties of -4 to just -1 for that time. If attacked by a Sundering Aspect (Animation for example), the Dreamer strikes back automatically. The Z'bri receives an electrical attack (see *Tribe 8 Rulebook*, pp. 153-154) at an Intensity double the Rage MoS. For purposes of damage, this counts as an electrical weapon attack. Rage may be activated in response to Z'bri Sundering before any damage or Z'bri controlled action is applied (say from Exsanguination) to the dreamer. If the Z'bri is injured, penalties apply immediately to this Sundering attack, before any effect or damage is applied.

Righteousness: Child of Lilith, Joanite, Joshuan and Jacker Aspect (PSY, Threshold 4); Broken Pact, p. 71

During the uprising in the camps, there was born a need for spiritual purity, a moral cleansing to rid humanity of the filth they had been tainted and oppressed by. Righteousness allows the Dreamer to receive a bonus in response to any Sundering Aspect used on her while she is awake and aware of Z'bri nearby. The Dreamer rolls her PSY versus a Threshold of 4; the MoS applies as a bonus to any resistance or defensive rolls she must make. Furthermore, when physically attacking Z'bri or being attacked by them, this bonus can be applied to Resistance rolls against Atmosphere and defensive actions like parries or dodges. The Dreamer cannot use any other Synthesis Aspects in the same round she uses Righteousness, and any other Synthesis effects end when this Aspect is used.

It is up to the Weaver whether or not the PCs learn of the Aspect of Righteousness and/or obtain it. As a general guideline, PCs who have shown themselves to be devoted to wiping out the Z'bri should be able to learn Righteousness as part of the martial and mediation practices that the Templars are teaching. The other qualifiers a Weaver may wish to impose are that the Character concerned has not harmed a Joshuan or, if she has done so, has sought forgiveness. Those Characters with WIL or PSY at +1 or better are more likely to manifest this Aspect, and usually will not manifest it if these Attributes are negative. It is also possible for it to manifest itself in a PC during the battle with the Z'bri, possibly to help save her in her darkest hour.

Shaping: Melanis Aspect (CRE, Variable Threshold); Horrors of the Z'bri, p. 91

The Shaping ritual forces a thing or pile of raw material to shape itself into a form desired by the Melanis. For example, a pile of bones will merge to form a cage or blade, or a human begins to change shape to twist into a beast. The material to be shaped is placed at the center of the room, within an intricately drawn symbol. The Melanis artisan must oversee the entire process, keeping focus to direct the evolution of the material being shaped. The larger or more complex the object being Shaped, the higher the Threshold. Each point of Margin of Success reduces the time required by one hour; if more than one artisan works on the piece, each tests separately against the Threshold. If successful, its Margin of Success cumulatively reduces the time required.

Winter's Cloak: Aspect of the Guild of the Winter Wolf (WIL Threshold 3); Word of the Pillars, errata

Winter's Cloak is an Aspect learned by members of the Winter Wolf. No one outside of the Winter Wolves is allowed to learn this Aspect, as it is a defining element of a Wolf Guildsman. Winter's Cloak is a survival ability that grants the Dreamer the capability of traveling and surviving under extremely cold and hostile conditions. The wielder of the Aspect, upon making a WIL roll vs. 3, will be able to withstand freezing temperatures for a number of hours equal to the Margin of Success. Winter's Cloak also allows the dreamer to cross difficult terrain, including: frozen lakes, deep snow, icy rivers and wind ravaged peaks, with an ease that mimics that of a wolf. Players with this Aspect do not suffer wound modifiers while under its effect; a new roll, however, cannot be made until the previous use of the Aspect has "worn off."

Appendix

A		G		Rituals, Fatimal Aid in	117
Abonom	106	Ghosts	54, 134	Rituals, Groups and	117
Agnite Synthesis	20, 112	Goddess, The One	100	Rituals, Minor	131
Agnostics	125	Great Architecture, The	108	Rituals, Serf	132
Alisha	6	Great Owl, The	90	Rituals, Squat	133
Anchors	105	Grey, Maire	33	Rituals, Tribal	131
Anima, Eminence of	11	Group Rituals	117	Rituals, Tools and	117
Archetype, Theme of	104	Gryphon's Gate, Orb of	110	River of Dream, The	103
Architecture, The Great	108	Guides, The	102	River of Dream, Cosmography of	104
Ashen Tale, the	17	Gullies	104	Riders-With-Spirits	61
Aspects	120	H		S	
Aspects, Lost	122	Habeas Corpus, Aspect of	51, 120	Scribe of Stars	95
Aspects, Old	141-142	Harmonic Distortion, Theme of	123	Scriber, Elias	37
Aspects, New: Nation	120	Heartstones	128	Sea of the Lost	78, 109
Aspects, New: Z'bri	129	Herite Synthesis	41, 114	Seed, The	100
Aspects and Dreaming	108	Hide'n'Seek, Aspect of	142	Sensuality, Eminence of	113
Atheists	125	Holding, Aspect of	142	Separation, Theme of	128
Atmosphere, Z'bri	129	Honor, Theme of	136	Shadow, Eminence of	114
B		Hooded Falcon's Aerie	105	Shadowstepping, Aspect of	121
Bartholomew the Child	36	Horizon of Light, Formula of	124	Shallows	106
Binding, Aspect of	120	Horror, Theme of	127	Shamans, training of	14-15
Blessing, Aspect of	122	Humanity and Z'bri	80, 101	Shaping, Aspect of	142
Blind Eyes, The	11	Humanity and Sundering	126-127	Sheban Synthesis	10-13, 113
Body Severing, Aspect of	141	I		Shores, The	106
Bone Spirt	26	Illusion, Eminence of	112	Sluaga, Bone Spirt	138
Bottle the Jinn, Aspect of	129	Inferno, Aspect of	129	Solar Sphere, Orb of	110
Bravery, Eminence of	115	Inspiration, Aspect of	142	Song of Stars	90
Burning, Aspect of	141	Inspiration, Eminence of	112	Souls	11
C		Interface, Formula of	124	Spirits	24-26, 134-139
Calling, Aspect of	141	J		Spirits, Attributes for	136
Capriciousness, Eminence of	112	Jacker Synthesis	42, 115	Spirits, Conceptual	134
Celtic Cross, Aspect of	121	Japhth'on, Elias	12	Spirits, Nature	134
Ceremonial Tools	117	Joanite Synthesis	15-16, 113	Spirits, Skills for	137
Change, Theme of	104	Joshuan Synthesis	114	Spirits and Sundering	126
Child of Lilith Synthesis	114	Joshua's Face, Orb of	110	Spirituality	99, 111
Circle of Spirit	106	K		Squats	61
Clairvoyance, Aspect of	141	Keepers	52-53	Stone, Servant of Mountain	63
Combat and Dreaming	108	Knight of Stars	92	Subjectivity, Theme of	103
Conflict, Eminence of	113	L		Subtlety, Theme of	111
Conjunctural Synthesis	116	Lashim	46	Sundering	126
Conviction, Eminence of	115	Laws of Dream	10	Sundering, Dream and	74, 126
Cosmography	104	Life, Eminence of	112	Sundering, Humanity and	126-127
Cov'on, Maire	14	Lightbringer Synthesis	42, 115	Sundering, Spirits and	126
Culling, Evan	13	Little River	68	Symbolism	99
D		Luck, Aspect of	142	Symbolism, Theme of	136
Dahlian Synthesis	18, 112	M		Sympathy, Principle of	11
Dahlia's Doorway, Aspect of	141	Machine Monks	125	Syncretism, Theme of	123
Dan'on, Marcus	9	Magdalite Synthesis	21, 113	Synthesis	110
Dance of Masks, Aspect of	141	Magnum, Aspect of	122	Synthesis, Agnite	20, 112
Danger, Theme of	111	Maire Cov'on	14	Synthesis, Child of Lilith	114
Death, Eminence of	114	Maire Grey	33	Synthesis, Conjunctural	116
Debora Thaikin Thaim'on	26	Manifestation, Aspect of	142	Synthesis, Dahlian	18, 112
Dens	105	Marcus Dan'on	9	Synthesis, Doomsayer	40, 114
Description, Theme of	111	Marian Synthesis	115	Synthesis, Evan	14-15, 112
Destiny, Theme of	100	Micro-Trances	117	Synthesis, Fallen	39
Destruction, Theme of	127	Modernists	125	Synthesis, Herite	41, 114
Devotion, Eminence of	113	Motion, Eminence of	112	Synthesis, Jacker	42, 115
Distraction, Rituals and	118	Mountain	65	Synthesis, Joanite	15-16, 113
Doomsayer Synthesis	40, 114	Mystery, Eminence of	114	Synthesis, Joshuan	114
Dream, Laws of	10	Mystery, Theme of	128	Synthesis, Lightbringer	42, 115
Dream, Sundering and	74	N		Synthesis, Magdalite	21, 113
Dream, Z'bri and	74	Name	11	Synthesis, Marian	115
Dream Harrowers, The	101	Nitrous, Aspect of	121	Synthesis, Ritual	131
Dream Travel, Aspect of	108	Nomads, Theories of	49-51	Synthesis, Sheban	10-13, 113
Dream-Realms	107	Numinology	134	Synthesis, Yagan	17, 114
Dreaming	106	O		T	
Dreaming, Combat and	108	Omens	100	Techno-Fetishists	125
Dreams, Weaver's Tips	100	Orb, Gryphon's Gate	110	Technosmithing	122
Dreamquill, The	12	Orb, Institute	110	Technosmithing, Formulas of	124
Dualism, Theme of	100	Orb, Joshua's Face	110	Terror, Theme of	127
E		Orb, Physical	108-109	Thaim'on, Debora Thaikin	26
Eddies	106	Orb, Solar Sphere	110	Thomas Uhan'on	15
Egg Stealer	139	Orb, Spiritual	108-109	Thomas, Jacker	35
Elatha	77	Orbs	110	Transmigration, Aspect of	129
Elias Japhth'on	12	Orbs, Journey to	87-89	Truth, Eminence of	113
Elias Scriber	37	Other, Theme of	136	Twenty Points	138
Eminence	116	Otherworldliness, Theme of	135	U	
Empathy, Eminence of	112	P		Uhan'on, Thomas	15
Equilibrium	118	Perks	140	Uncertainty, Theme of	100
Equilibrium, Loss of	22, 118-119	Personality, Theme of	135	Unity, Eminence of	115
Evan Synthesis	14-15, 112	Perspective, Aspect of	142	V	
F		Phage of Reason	123	Vengeance, Eminence of	114, 115
Faces, The	10	Piggyback, Aspect of	108, 142	Violation, Theme of	127
Fallen Synthesis	39-43	Possibility, Theme of	104	W	
Falling Water	14	Purity, Eminence of	115	Wanderer, The	38, 95
Fast Trances	117	Purpose, Theme of	135	Will-o-Wisps	139
Fate, Eminence of	114	R		Winter's Cloak, Aspect of	142
Fatimal Aid	117	Rage, Aspect of	142	Wisdom, Eminence of	113
Ferrymen, The	43	Recognition, Eminence of	115	World Before, End of	59-60
Flaws	140	Remnants	125	Y	
Fold, the	78, 109	Rhanto, Wall of Fire	73	Yagan Synthesis	17, 114
Fold, Closing of	78	Righteousness, Aspect of	142	Z	
Force, Eminence of	114	Ritual	117, 130-133	Z'bri Atmosphere	129
Freedom, Eminence of	114	Ritual Synthesis	131	Z'bri and Dream	74
Fury, Eminence of	113	Rituals, Distractions During	118	Z'bri and Humanity	80, 101