

Word of the FATES



A Tribe  Sourcebook



Dream Pod 9

A Tribe 8 Sourcebook

Word of the FATES

Magdalen the Lover, Eva the Mother and Baba Yaga the Crone were the first of the Fatimas to appear to the people of Vimary, and the power that they hold reflects that seniority. They stand back and watch, and appear to many as silent observers compared to the antics of the others, but still waters run very deep indeed, and none of the three tribes are as simple as they appear.

Word of the Fates serves as both a sourcebook and a Player's guide for these three important tribes. Learn the secrets of their powers, rites and rituals; meet some of their most influential members; and get a glimpse into the darkness that they try and hide from their own selves. Word of the Fates is the second of the Wordbooks.

- Information on the daily life and habits of the three tribes
- Details of Synthesis powers, artifacts and legends of the Tribes
- Complete write-ups of the four totems revered by the Fates
- Four new Aspects used within the tribes

DP9-814

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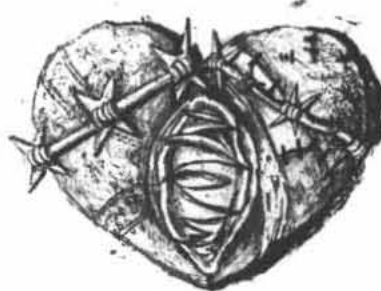
Dream Pod 9

ISBN: 1-896776-77-9



9 781896 776774

Printed in Canada



Conquest



First Interlude

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Special Thanks

From the Pod: To Steph, Josh and Phil for letting us play in your world.

From Chris: To Pat, Tim, Mom and Dad for unwavering support.

From David: Mickael Boda (inspiration), Daniel Krimmert and the brothers Chiu (friendship), Mimi and John Ford (tolerance), and the Hearth Menders: Sammy, Meggy, Maxi and Random (love).

From Jason: Special thanks to Tara, Robyn Kelman, Jim Cotsion, Craig Stanton and the real grannies: Joan of The Rocks, Annie of Voughal and Jacque of Dorset.

From Hilary: To Richard Morris, the light of my life; to The Usual Suspects, the bane of my existence; and to the Linderhill Moon Circle, otherwise known as Those Who Are Punching Bugs.

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Produced and Published by



Dream Pod 9

5000 d'Iberville, Suite 332

Montreal, QC

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H2H 2S6

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Stock # DP9-814

Legal Deposit: July 2000

Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec

National Library of Canada

ISBN 1-896776-77-9

First Printing

Printed in Canada

Chapter one: Introduction

The world tears itself from the womb
And spirals away into the brimming void.
Do not fear, do not weep.
We remain
And we know
That there is a time
For every purpose under heaven.
- Word of the Fates



Exploration

From the Pen of the Satin Scribe:

A good dance, that is a thing not to be missed. When the proud children of the Lover step onto the stage, it would serve you well to stop and attend. They watch us, in turn, as they dance; each step, each spin, each flutter of fabric in the wind is deliberate and planned; each glance from their half-closed eyes gauged to send even the most cynical of us into throes of the darkest passion. Even a misstep, a sour note in the moment, is turned into an exquisite failing that serves to strengthen the flames all the more.

The sons of Magdalen can see into the bottom of your soul, and Her daughters will twist your dreams until you can bear the thought of nothing else but their touch. They harvest our desires, and plant the seeds of a new reality. Be wary not to burn yourself at their fires, love, for you will never heal.

Obeisance

From the Lessons of Drifting Feather:

We must be strong; that is the first and fullest lesson of Eva. We, who live so distant from the warmth of Her abundance, must make do with what we can. To do that, to till the fields and train the beasts of burden and raise the children, we must have faith in ourselves as well as our Mother. The tribe must be a wall with no break, a tree whose roots penetrate through to the very center of the world. Deviance and dissonance have no place here; as an apple with a putrid core makes the meal inedible, so does the misshapen soul destroy everything that we have been trying to build.

Yes, I say 'we'. You and I are as much part of creation as Eva Herself. While She tends to Her will and Her children in Sanctuary and Bazaar, we do Her work in the outskirts and the villages. There is no sense in complaining when the wheat is ready to harvest and the swelling storm clouds appear on the horizon. The other Tribes turn to their Fatimas in times of trouble or sorrow; out here, between the land and the sky, we have no-one to truly turn to but ourselves. And so, we *must* be strong.

Realization

From the Dreams of the Daemonseeker:

We are the oldest of the Tribes, and at the same time the youngest; for with every night of dreaming, do we not end and begin anew? We are all creators and destroyers, weaving our endless cycles in a land with no beginning and no end. Yaga gives us this power, to explore and create as we see fit. She trusts us to find ourselves within Her eyes, and Her sharp caress serves to point us in directions that we would never have imagined.

We are tested, tried and judged in every moment of our lives. We excel because we are driven to excel, and we are a formidable tribe indeed. We swim through the world alone, but at the moment of our greatest trial, She pulls us to Her and She brings us home. We are truly loved.

Word of the Fates

The Word of the Fates is the second of the Wordbooks for the Tribe 8 roleplaying game. It details the world of the three oldest Tribes in the Nation: the tribes of Magdalen, Eva and Baba Yaga. This book expands upon material presented in the Tribe 8 Rulebook and Vimary, and gives Weavers essential material for incorporating the three tribes into cycles as both Player and Non-Player Characters.

The first three chapters show the world of Tribe 8 through the eyes of the members of the three tribes in question, and the last three give detailed information on how best to use this information within your game. The stories presented weave through and around each other, much as the three tribes of the Fates interact - in shadows and in silence.

Chapter two: Whispers in the Dark

The Tribe is all things:

A shoulder to cry on,

A keeper of secrets,

A lover's embrace.

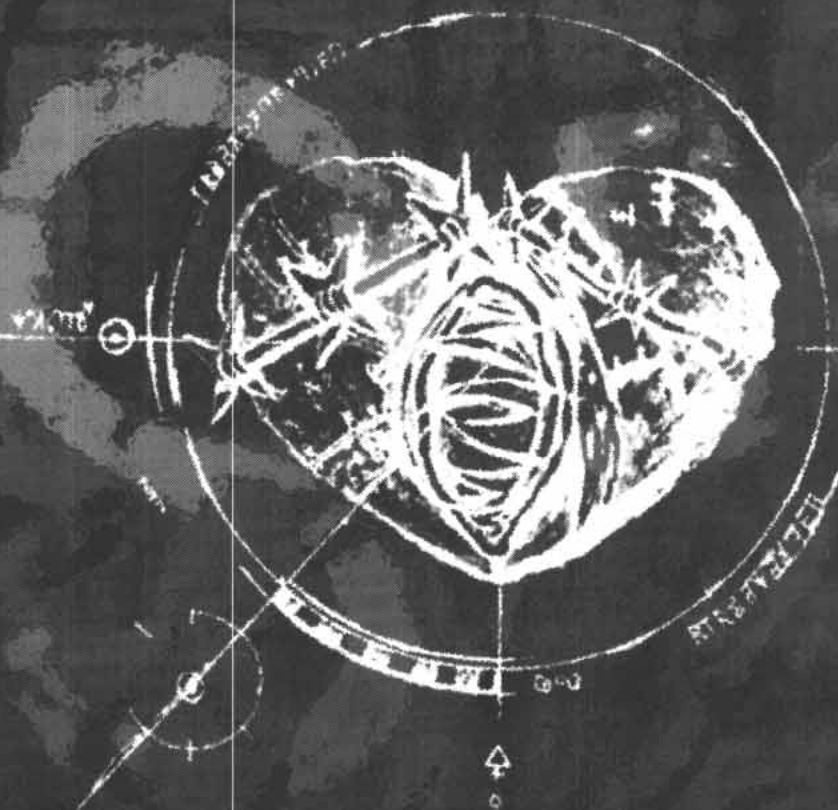
Our hearts burn with passion

To warm you through the coldest winter

And keep you from those who would invade our hearth

To take you from our arms.

- The Voyeurs' Honor Pledge



Laughter and Tears

From the recollections of Mareta Deanakin, Magdalite Concubine:

I looked down at my grandmother's face, peaceful and untroubled. Mistress Deana is... was a fine lover, privy to the secrets of the most hardened Joanite and the wildest Sheban. I'm proud to bear her name.

The Flesher passed his hand over my grandmother's eyes and turned to look at the Pellis Artisan next to him, who was already examining her knives. The sun reflected off the knife in her hand, casting a bright beam of light onto my grandmother's face. I sighed and bowed my head, and Anshar began to strike the funeral gong.

BONG! BONG! BONG!

I was hurled out of my reverie; Eban had dropped three plates of steaming potatoes. My head was pounding, and the noise didn't help. I looked into the goblet of wine in my hand, deep red and lined with sediment.

Anshar, sitting next to me, spoke: "Mareta, dwell not on the past. The future is ahead of you, and you have much to learn." He smiled and slid his hand up my thigh.

I batted his hand away. "There's time for that later."

Anshar lit up his irresistible smile, though his brow creased. "There is only now. You are young, but of age, and this is your first lesson. *There is only now.*" He paused. "Now, look around you; what do you see?"

A Sheban walked in from the streets of Bazaar, wearing a mask of disapproval, yet something in his face betrayed his lust. Anshar was looking at him too. "The Judge? See how he walks, confident in his power. He lords it over the Tribes; his word is law." Anshar grinned. "Make no mistake, young Mareta, it is we who hold his reins."

I shot a glance at Anshar, then at the Judge. Anshar spoke again: "We carry a heavy burden, my sweet, and I do not mean the lovers atop us. By the pleasures we dispense, we can bend even the will of the Fatimas' closest confidants... and where there is power, there are people who will do anything to control it. Does it surprise you that our poisons are deadlier than the Crone's touch, more subtle than a summer breeze?"

I whipped around, shocked, and stared Anshar in the face. He must have read my mind, for he smiled and shook his head. "No, my little one, I did not kill your grandmother. *Somebody* did, and I feel that I must avenge her death; she would be teaching you now, but for her venomous lips. She taught me, before I fully came of age and entered the ranks of the Sirens, and so I repay her by passing on her knowledge. I daresay that I surpass her in some respects. No, Mareta, I do not boast."

Tears came to my eyes and Anshar caressed my cheek. "She was... *poisoned?*" My voice cracked and my stomach felt as if it had dropped out from under me.

"I fear so. While it is unusual that a Siren should teach a Concubine, it is not unheard of. I can keep an eye on you and shape you, too."

He chuckled. "I might possibly enjoy myself doing it."



Mareta Deanakin,
Magdalite Concubine

Like many Magdalites, Mareta grew up in the fields surrounding Xstasis, tended by Evans. As a child, she led a somewhat sheltered existence; she grew up ignorant of the machinations of Tribal life. This left her with a somewhat distorted view of the world; she often acts on her ideals rather than the reality before her. Mareta is determined to make the most of her new life as a Concubine; she looks to her childhood with fond memories, but realizes that she must focus on the present if she is to prosper. Adulthood has not dimmed her curious nature; she asks many questions, some of which - in hindsight - are better left unasked. She is starting to understand that some secrets do not want to be uncovered, but she still has trouble restraining herself.

Highlights: Impressionable, inquisitive, romantic

Attributes: APP +1, CRE +1, INF +1, PER +1, PSY +2, HEA 1, STA 30, LID 3, AD 3

Skills: Agriculture 1/0, Etiquette 1/+1, Grooming 1/+1, Human Perception 2/+2, Interrogation 2/+1, Investigation 1/0, Notice 2/+1, Read/Write (Tribal) 1/0

The Music of the Soul

From the diary of Eban, Magdalite youth:

I saw Mareta again today. *He* was with her. How could she bear to be in his presence, after what he's done? Does she even know? She deserves better than him!

I need to clear my mind — I need to focus. I'm getting overwrought. I can deal with this. A few deep breaths. Better.

I met Udo Serakin today. He's a Masker. He reckons that I might have what it takes to join the Guild — I just have to practice, that's all. He told me about a woodcarver in the Garden Quarter, who makes the best flutes that he's ever heard. I should chase it up. If I'm as good as Udo reckons, then the woodcarver might give me one of his flutes for free.

Yeah, right!

Udo also gave me a scrap of paper, something for me to remember. He said that his brother found it in a book, and thought that Udo should have it. And Udo gave it to me, said that I could use it. It said:

Music does not produce in the Heart anything which is not already there. Music arouses sensual desire in one whose inner self is attached to something other than the River of Dream, but one who is inwardly attached to the Goddess' love is moved, by hearing music, to do Her will.

I'm not sure what it means yet, but Udo tells me that I'll understand it in time. I'm beginning to think that there's more to the Maskers than just entertainment. There's something deeper in their dances and there's meaning in their songs.

This morning, an old man invited me to a party. His name is Kaba Jansey. His daughter, Alicia, has just had a child, and is being welcomed back into the Tribe. I told him that I was too young, but he said that it wouldn't really be a problem. Things are looking up. Only thirteen summers old and I'm already making friends in the Tribe. The party's on tomorrow night. I can't wait.

Sister Mother Virgin Whore

From the recollections of Mareta Deanakin, Magdalite Concubine:

I awoke slowly the next morning, my head pounding and my mouth like sand. As I considered swaying to my feet, I sincerely wondered whether Fleshers had distilled the wine I'd drunk last night; I certainly felt close to death that morning.

Suddenly, a flood of light stabbed at my eyes, the pain forcing my head back beneath the covers.

"Shut the door!" I hissed, as quietly as possible.

My blanket peeled back; Anshar stood there, grinning from ear to ear. "You would rather sleep in?" he boomed. I made a vain attempt to wrestle the blanket back over my head, but Anshar was insistent that I should rise.

"Come now," Anshar cried, throwing his arms wide (and grinning even wider), "it is a bright, sunny day outside! The crowds are thronging in the market place! Life is there to be lived!"

I never forgave him for that morning.

Harsh Lessons

From the lessons of Anshar Demori'on:

Perk up and smile a little! You will end up with only Terashebans as bedfellows!

Hmm, too early in the morning for humor, eh? Very well, let us be on our way. Where should we begin? How about here? Take my arm and I will help you to your feet. Now, we will just step outside. Stop grumbling! It is unbecoming!

Now, look above your door. Take a close look at the lintel. What do you see? A lintel. Yes, dear, very good. But what is on the lintel?

Oh, okay, I will tell you — nothing.

Thank you for the sentiment, little one, but I assure you that it is physically impossible. I should know — I have tried it more than once. Now, where was I? Yes, your door.

Every door in Xstasis tells a tale; the rose on the lintel tells of the services provided within. As you have no rose above your door, it tells visitors that what lies within is forbidden to them. As we are on the edge of Xstasis, bordering the fields, a knowledgeable person could tell that you are an apprentice. Further toward the center of Xstasis, unadorned doors mark the homes of more important Magdalites, ones who rarely consort with the members of other Tribes.

Come, it is time to depart. We have much to see.

See the **Vimary Sourcebook**, p. 39, for more on the rose-twined lintels of Xstasis.




**Kalina Tarakin,
Magdalite Voyeur**

Kalina is Dhara Ibenkin's favorite spy; everything that happens within the Tribe eventually reaches Dhara's ears through Kalina. Though Kalina covets the title of Voyeur Master that her father currently holds, she chooses not to use the information that she gathers to improve her position. Rather, she hopes to gain status through her faithful service to the Chamberlain. Kalina has a few skeletons in her own closet; her one-time betrothal to Anshar Demori'on is one. Anshar left her for a prettier face and Kalina wants revenge. She hopes to make his life as unpleasant as possible, then make him come crawling back to her. By that time, she hopes, she will have unearthed enough of his secrets to keep him on a short leash. Should Anshar have become Chamberlain by that time, then so much the better.

Highlights: Intense, manipulative, vindictive

Attributes: BLD +1, CRE +1, KNO +1, PER +2, WIL +2, HEA 1, STA 30, ULD 4, AD 5

Skills: Disguise 2/+1, Etiquette 1/0, Forgery 2/+1, Human Perception 2/0, Interrogation 3/+1, Intimidate 1/+1, Investigation 2/+2, Melee 1/0, Notice 2/+2, Sneak 2/0, Streetwise 2/0, Synthesis (Manifestation, Passion and Treason) 2



Butterflies

From the recollections of Mareta Deanakin, Magdalite Concubine:

I felt more than a bit queasy; I wasn't sure how much was hangover and how much was nerves. Anshar turned on his heel and strode further into Xstasis, languidly towing me behind. It seemed as if we walked twenty clicks before we lurched to a halt. We stood next to a cart, decorated with ribbon and smelling of wildflowers. I propped myself against the cart and prayed desperately to Magdalen to stop my head spinning.

Anshar struck up a conversation with the cart's owner, a short, cheerful Ecstatic. I didn't really catch what they were saying, but Anshar pulled a shining trinket from his pouch and exchanged it for a large phial from the cart. Anshar bid the Ecstatic a good day and led me to a quiet corner. I sat down and looked up at Anshar, blinking in the morning sun. He handed me the phial and motioned me to drink.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I have a Keeper friend, Ebling," he said, still grinning. "She calls this stuff dogshair, although I am pretty sure that there is none in it. It is a quaint term from the World Before, I think."

I swallowed the liquid, glancing suspiciously at him. The foul-tasting fluid brought tears to my eyes and burnt in my chest. I coughed and spluttered and reached out to Anshar for support.

"There, much better, yes?" He beamed at me; I was sure that he took entirely too much pleasure from the look on my face. "Now we can talk. I would have introduced you to my friend, Navin, but you were hardly in a sociable state. Some Ecstatics brew poisons, others perfumes, but Navin makes wine. A lot of work went into that potion I gave you, at least I hope so; the Medallion that I gave him was worth quite a bit."

As if on cue, my head began to clear. I still felt unsteady, but at least I could think enough to speak. "Poison?"

"Yes. Most Ecstatics have small stills in their homes, and this is where most poisons are brewed. That way, they can each keep their special recipes secret from one another. It is not unheard of for one Ecstatic to steal another's formulae. Occasionally, one will kill another to protect her secrets, often using the very poisons in dispute. Irony is nature's poetry.

"Larger apparatus are kept in the Ecstatic Guildhall. They use these to make wines from berries gathered from the vines around Xstasis, or those brought from Sanctuary or the Outlands. Some of the stronger drinks they create are brewed from honey, but those are often reserved for the more . . . how to put this . . . distinguished of palates. They also distill perfumes from roses and other flowers.

"Most valuable of all, however, is *Emori*, a drug that augments the users' wiles. It is in such great demand that there are few things that a single spoon of it cannot buy. Naturally, we have our uses for the drug, but most of it is traded to other Tribes. Of all the secrets that we keep, the recipe for *Emori* is one of the most closely guarded, for it provides prosperity beyond what we would otherwise have.

From a missive to Chamberlain Dhara Ibenkin:

Greetings and a good day to you, my
Lady.

The subject has become remiss in his duties in the past two days, due to the illness and death of his close friend, Deana Shelkin. To my knowledge, none of the Masters have petitioned him of late, preferring to keep their distance in his time of grief. How considerate they've become!

The subject has met with Deana's granddaughter, one Mareta Deanakin. I doubt that one so young could wield the influence that her grandmother once did; nonetheless, it's a possibility that I can't ignore. Preliminary research has shown her to be harmless, but I assure you that I will look further into the matter.

Forever your humble servant,

K.

"Are you feeling better now? We should leave soon. The butterfly that flits from flower to flower is less easily caught in the net."

I opened my mouth to question his last comment, then thought better of it. Anshar obviously loved to sound cryptic. He also loved the sound of his own voice, and I would learn more from him by not pestering him with questions.

I hauled myself to my feet and followed Anshar to a more crowded part of Xstasis. The scent of roses hung heavily in the air, and vines wove themselves across the façades of many homes in a rainbow of colors. People of many Tribes teemed about, entering and leaving various doors. This, I knew, would be my home when my training was complete. Here, the **Concubines** plied their trade.

Anshar stopped briefly to take his bearings. "The place is a maze," he said. "It changes from week to week. When people come to Xstasis to lose themselves, they can literally do so." He paused for a moment. "Perhaps it is more like a spider's web."

With that, we wandered toward my grandmother's chambers, often doubling back; it seemed as if we were going around in circles. Somehow we found our way to her door and quietly entered.

Little Death

The room felt cold and strange, devoid of life. I used to visit my grandmother in my youth, and all that I felt was love. Now it was gone, cushions and drapes strewn about like a field of corpses. Where once there was laughter, there was now only silence.

Anshar pulled a cushion to the center of the room and sat down. He sighed and spoke: "Deana, your grandmother, was a great friend to me in my early days. I am sure that she would be proud of you, though you still have much to learn."

I sat beside him. "She's gone. I think that I can accept that. I just miss her voice. I miss her laugh. I miss her life."

Anshar turned to face me, looking deep into my eyes. "That is one thing that you will learn, as a Magdalite and especially as a Concubine: love never lasts. Whether it is a lover, some Joanite wandered in from Duskfall or even a cherished relative, tomorrow they will be gone."

It was the only time that I'd ever seen Anshar like this; normally, his cheerful façade was impenetrable. "What are you saying?" I asked, more than a little worried. "That I should learn not to love?"

Anshar smiled, but I could tell that it was fake; he was probably trying to reassure me. "This is the face of Magdalen that the other Tribes see," he said, sweeping his arm around the quarters. "They come to us for solace, for passion and for relief from the drudgery of their daily lives. Some of them understand how essential the release that the Concubines provide really is. Others deride the Tribe of Magdalen as parasites and whores. In a way, both are true. In either case, the Concubines fill a void." He gave a sly wink; he'd slipped from deep sorrow into a jovial double-entendre with a grace that would've impressed Dahlia herself.

Nonetheless, I was deeply troubled by what he'd said. What are the Magdalites without love?

From a missive to Kalina Tarakin, Magdalite Voyeur:

I have received your most recent report, and I must say that I am disappointed that your investigations have not yet borne fruit. To this end, I have assigned additional resources to your line of inquiry. The bearer of this message will aid you; others will contact you shortly.

As long as that Beast-spawned traitor continues to threaten my position, it is imperative that you collect as much useful evidence as is humanly possible. He must not be allowed to exert undue influence on Magdalen or the Council of Masters.

Do not fail me.

D.



Udo Serakin,
Magdalite Masker

To most, Udo seems ambitious, vain and impulsive, but this is not truly the case. Udo's private and public personalities differ greatly; his loud clothes and wide arm movements belie an introspective and attentive student of human behavior. He spends a great deal of time closely observing himself and those around him, hoping that one day the faces that he dons will be more convincing than his own. He lives multiple lives, on stage and off. Four summers ago, his twin brother Seamus was cast from the Tribe; this event weighs heavily on his mind. Secretly, Udo fears that his own jests offended someone in power, and that his brother was exiled in a case of mistaken identity.

Highlights: Eccentric, flamboyant, hedonistic

Attributes: AGI +1, APP +1, CRE +2, FIT +1, INF +1, KNO +1, PSY +1, HEA 1, STA 30, ULD 6, AD 3

Skills: Acrobatics 2/+1, Craft (Couture) 1/+2, Dance 3/+1, Grooming 2/+1, Hand-to-Hand 3/+1, Human Perception 3/+1, Lore (Magdalite) 2/+1, Music 1/+1, Sleight-of-Hand 1/+1, Theatrics 2/+1

Anshar pulled a package from his robe. He opened it carefully, scooping out a small handful of crushed green and brown leaves, which he put into his pipe. He laid the pipe in his lap, fished out his tinderbox and started to strike. Once it was lit, he put the pipe to his lips and inhaled deeply.

"Let me tell you more of our Tribe," he said, blowing acrid smoke. He offered me the pipe, and as I started to smoke, he coughed and spoke once more. "To outsiders, the Concubines are about sex and little more. This is only what lies on the surface. We are the spies of the Nation, and many things are whispered to lovers in the heat of passion. Many people freely say things in the arms of another that they would never reveal to a Diplomat; it is the Concubines' job to wrest such secrets from their lips." He waved his hand, motioning for me to return his pipe. He took another draft and paused to think. He seemed to take forever; the drug was already taking effect.

"The Diplomats have their uses, mind you," he said. "Many a Sheban deems himself too important to visit a Concubine, so his secrets must be learned in other ways. The Shebans often require our services as spies, and whilst we spy on their enemies, we spy on them as well. Often, what somebody wants to know will tell you what she knows already. The Diplomats also make forays into Squat lands; although they are foul and uncultured, the Squats can tell us things that happen beyond the walls of Vimary."

"They visit the Z'bri as well, don't they?" I asked.

Anshar continued as if he had not heard my question. "Then there are other Guilds. I have already mentioned the Ecstatics; I should deal with the Maskers next.

"In many ways, the Maskers have the easiest lives of any of us. They live simply to amuse Our Lady, holding dances and plays for Her pleasure. Nonetheless, competition is fierce, and occasionally, someone is killed in a fit of jealousy. The favor of Magdalen is a precious thing indeed, little one, and much blood is spilled to gain it.

"We must move; the Maskers will have risen by now. They'll be practicing their acts."

Dancing, Dancing for My Lady's Love

From the lessons of Anshar Demori'on:

Good morning, Udo; I trust that the night has kept you well. I would like you to meet my student, Mareta. Mareta, this is Udo Serakin, one of the finest entertainers in all of Vimary.

Udo, would it displease you if we were to watch you and your friends perform?

Ah, many thanks. Forget that we are here and carry on as you were. Before you start, though, would you mind returning my amulet? Many thanks, again; you are getting slow in your old age, I think.

Now, my little one, watch closely. To the unenlightened eye, the Maskers' dances appear to be mere whimsy, a tale of joy in motion. They flit and flaunt themselves, all for the enjoyment of those who watch.

Yes, I am sure that they *would* leave the Dahlians for dead — but I will get to that shortly.

Look at Udo's dance. His arms sweep through the air with the utmost grace. He flips without effort. Imagine that you were fighting him, though. He parries and strikes with a single movement of his arm; now he strikes again. He flips out of the way of a blow and kicks as he rights himself. His hands thrust downward in a feint, then upwards. Imagine that your head was between Udo's hands just then, as they twisted.

It looks like a dance, but is, in truth, a lethal art. The Maskers serve a dual purpose; they live to please Magdalen, but they also preserve traditional methods of assassination. We are a Tribe of false appearances; what seems more harmless than a simple dance?

Of course, the Maskers engage in more mundane pursuits; they sing and hold plays for Magdalen and the Tribe's enjoyment, but there is always a double meaning to their acts. Many of their songs seem bawdy in comparison to those sung by the other Tribes, but they all hold a deeper message for those who know how to listen. Magdalen is, after all, one of the Fates, and Her words are as often judgments as frivolous comments.

The Dawn of Spring

Udo and his troupe are not merely practicing for Magdalen's sake, mind you. Every year, starting on the first day of spring, we hold the Festival of Choice, a time of wild abandon. Vows made in the previous year are dissolved; spouses reaffirm their love or seek out new mates. Occasionally, fights break out as one Magdalite seeks to impress her secret love and steal him from another's arms. It is during this time that Emori is in greatest demand, for it improves one's chances of capturing a mate.

Some of us have polygamous relationships or gather in Lovers' Circles. Lovers' Circles are polygamous, too, but a large number of men and women join the group. By custom, the current members must unanimously agree to accept a new member, although in practice some coercion can occur, leading to friction that is only relieved when one or more members leave.

It is not uncommon for a Magdalite to spend time without a mate, instead choosing to lead a life of casual affairs or not participating in sex outside of their duties. A few even choose a life of chastity, but they are not well regarded within the Tribe, for they deny the Gift that the Lover has given us.

The celebration and competition continues for a week. It is also during this time that the Tribe accepts those, like yourself, who have recently come of age as full members. The first year of adulthood is a year of freedom; the debutantes are not allowed to take spouses until the next Festival of Choice.

Most other Tribals believe that we hold parties at the drop of a hat, but this is not necessarily true; all of our celebrations have a serious reason. We feast the coming of age, the return of a new mother, personal victories and, of course, the Festival of Liberation. The Sirens hold an important place in the Liberation, for they lured many of the Beasts to their doom.

Fates and Furies

From the recollections of Mareta Deanakin, Magdalite Concubine:

"How did you become a Siren?" I asked.

"I do not mean to boast," Anshar replied, "but it is usually only the most beautiful of the Tribe that are chosen to serve Magdalen. Often, good looks run in families, so there are families that predominantly produce Sirens; the Ibenkin family is one. However, I come from a family of Diplomats; nonetheless, I was judged appealing enough to the eye to serve Our Lady personally. This happens with other Guilds as well; those who are judged to be exceptionally talented in the ways of another Guild are chosen to follow a path that differs from that of their families.

"The Sirens do not merely act as Magdalen's servants; we pass Her words and edicts to other members of the Tribe and ensure that personal rivalries do not threaten harmony in our relationships. Sometimes, we must do unpleasant things to preserve the atmosphere of love and trust, but that is part of our duty.

"Other Guilds aid us in our task. The **Bloodied Roses** carry out some of the more unpleasant tasks, dispatching those who threaten the Tribe. They learn the arts of unarmed combat from the Maskers and other methods of killing from the Yagan Fleshers. I do not envy their lives; they are sometimes called upon to deal with people close to them. Those few outside the Tribe that know of them mistake them for some sort of secret police, but they usually only carry out orders from above. They sometimes act of their own accord, but this is comparatively rare; nonetheless, a member of the Order of the Bloodied Rose who presents a good reason for acting on her own initiative is seldom punished.

"The **Voyeurs** gather information within the Tribe itself and pass it along to those who require it. The Voyeurs are always watching. They have a great deal of power within the Tribe, for the information that they possess is often embarrassing or compromising in some way; they are not above using blackmail to further their ends. They report directly to the Masters — whom I will cover shortly — or to individual Sirens, but they have been known to leave incriminating evidence wherever they feel that it is most likely to be found.

"They can use the material gathered in their inquiries to order the Bloodied Roses to deal with a problem, but they more often pass information on to their superiors so that they do not have to deal with the consequences, should something go awry. They do not kill others themselves; they are notorious for their unwillingness to get their hands dirty. This is another reason why they are so powerful; it is difficult to point the finger directly at a Voyeur.

"The final Guild is the most secret — the **Guild of Gatherers**. The Gatherers operate almost solely in the Outlands, far beyond the eyes of Tera Sheba. To most, they are simply the ones who leave Our Lady's breast for brief periods to gather the herbs and berries for the Ecstasies' potions.

"At the beginning of their adult lives, the Gatherers spend time learning the ways of agriculture from the Evans. Whilst they do collect plants and other raw materials in the Outlands, their other tasks are more important. They maintain sites that are sacred to the Tribe, such as the Jardin, and disguise themselves as Squats to uncover the barbarians' secrets. The Diplomats *do* send emissaries to the Squat tribes, but their presence is all too often obvious; the Gatherers mingle amongst the Squats as hidden equals, and thereby learn things denied to their Diplomat sisters."

"Why are the Gatherers such a closely-held secret, then?" I asked. "The other Fatimas send their children into the Outlands, too, don't they?"

Anshar smiled. "The other Fatimas send only outcasts beyond Vimary; the poor fools are beyond their Ladies' love. There is no shame in being a Gatherer, and the Gatherers are accepted back into Magdalen's embrace when they return. The other Fatimas, Tera Sheba in particular, see the Outlands as a place beyond their love and protection, so they condemn criminals to its expanses. To allow them back into the tribe would be unthinkable to them. When the Gatherers return, Magdalen's love is greater than before, if such a thing is possible."

I nodded. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder, then?"

Anshar nodded in return.

See the **Vimary Sourcebook**, p. 99, for more on the Order of the Bloodied Rose.

The Hand in the Glove

Udo finished his dance and strode toward us. His face was a mask of smile and sweat; his ordeal had obviously taken a lot out of him. He sat down beside me and spoke: "I noticed that you were talking about the Guilds before. I hope that Anshar wasn't scaring you with his tales of intrigue."

Anshar glanced at him. "There was no intrigue, only the truth."

Udo looked back at him with a look of mock indignation. "No intrigue? What's life without the old cloak and dagger? Have you told her about the **Masters** yet?"

"I was getting to that." Anshar was clearly annoyed at Udo's intrusion.

"Well, I know that you love the sound of your own voice, Anshar, but let me give it a rest." Udo turned to face me, ignoring Anshar's sour expression. "Anshar'd like to believe that the Sirens run the show, but it's really the Masters who're responsible for the day-to-day things. There're seven of 'em, one for each Guild, save the Sirens." He paused to thumb his nose and poke his tongue out at Anshar.

Anshar waved his hand dismissively, turned away and muttered, "At least you have that part right. Continue."

Udo did. "The head of each Guild sits on the Masters' Council. The Masters gather together information and act on it in their best interests. Occasionally, this coincides with the best interests of the Tribe, so things don't go too badly.

"Anyway, **Leah Sevkin**, the Concubine, is a real fine lady, the only level head of the lot. Say, you're not a Sevkin, are you, Mareta? You've got that Sevkin butt."

I shook my head, a little embarrassed. "No, but I *am* a Concubine. I'm a Deanakin."

"Not bad, not bad at all. Deana was a fine old dame, too. Where was I?" Udo cleared his throat. "The Concubines gather some useful information from their customers; it filters down to Leah, who provides it to the Masters.

"**Angelique Renkin** heads the Ecstatics; she's not bad either, a real wild woman. You should try some of her special brews; they'll blow your head clean off. My old pal, **Xavier Yavith**, represents us Maskers. The man has talent, I'll give him that, but he'd better watch out — Udo Serakin is about to enter stage right." Udo swung his arms back and forth in a little dance as he sat.

"Then they get creepy," he continued. "**Armatha Hevkin** is the head of the Diplomats — a distant cousin of Anshar's or something like that. She's classy, but you can tell that a heart of steel beats beneath those breasts of hers. She gives the Masters information from outside the Tribe — from the other Tribes, Keepers, Z'bri, Squats, even the Fallen — but she holds stuff back, just in case.

"**Layla Cardikin** is another one. She scares the crap outta me. She doesn't deal in information as such, but in assassination; when you feel the dagger in your back, you can be sure that her hand is somewhere behind it. **Jonas Tarakin** isn't much better. He's the head of the Voyeurs, and he got there by knowing whose buttons to push, and where those buttons were. Not a nice man at all. He's as cold as the Great River in winter and just as bitter. The Voyeurs got their name 'cause they get their jollies from watching everyone else; perhaps that's the only thing that turns Jonas on.

"Dhara Ibenkin seems to have a hold over him, though; the Sirens don't have a seat on the Masters' Council, but they use the Voyeurs to make their presence felt. Jonas is in Dhara's pocket, all right, and his daughter, Kalina, is her pet Voyeur. Unless the Voyeurs have their own reasons for protecting you, everything that they see goes straight to our Siren buddies first, and the Masters second.



Jonas Tarakin,
Voyeur Master

Jonas appears to be complacent, unmotivated and incompetent; most Magdalites therefore believe him to be cunning, intelligent and dangerous. Sadly, first appearances are closer to the truth. In a family of brilliant spies, Jonas is the exception; he was chosen for his loyalty to Dhara Ibenkin and not for his ability. He says things before thinking about them; fortunately for Jonas, most people are too frightened of him to react. He enjoys his position and the power it brings, but is aware that the Chamberlain could replace him at any time. He is not above asking his daughter Kalina to fake evidence against potential competitors, yet he is blind to the possibility that she may one day take his place.

Highlights: Arrogant, heavy-handed, petty

Attributes: AGI -1, APP -1, BLD +3,
FIT -1, INF +1, KNO -1, PER +1,
STR 1, STA 45, ULD 8, AD 8

Skills: Dreaming 1/0, Hand-to-Hand 1/-1, Intimidate 3/+3, Law (Magdalite) 1/-1, Leadership 2/+1, Lore (Magdalite) 1/-1, Melee 1/-1, Read/Write (Tribal) 1/-1, Theatrics 2/+1



Roma Bela'on, Gatherer Mistress

Let the other Masters bicker and play their games; Roma Bela'on does not care. She has been entrusted with the Tribe's most secret task: leadership of the Guild of Gatherers. She takes pleasure in this simple fact, knowing that despite the ebb and flow of power in the Council, she will always be in Magdalen's favor, so long as Roma does Her bidding. However, Magdalen is only Roma's second love; she is in fact a Wreathed Marian. She uses her position to aid her Marian sisters and to further her dream that the Fallen may once again be accepted as children of the Goddess. Were her true allegiances to be discovered, the Council of Masters would erupt in a furor; nonetheless, she knows the Masters better than they know themselves and is more than capable of keeping herself safe from them.

Highlights: Courteous, serene, watchful

Attributes: APP +1, CRE +2, INF +2, KNO +1, PSY +2, WIL +1, HEA 1, STA 30, ULD 3, AD 3

Eminences: Conflict and Recognition

Skills: Boating 1/0, Dreaming 3/+2, Etiquette 2/+1, Healing 2/+1, Herbalism 2/+1, Human Perception 4/+2, Leadership 1/+1, Lore (Fallen) 1/+1, Lore (Magdalite) 2/+1, Lore (Marian) 2/+1, Lore (Squat) 1/+1, Lore (Tribal) 2/+1, Navigation (Land) 1/+2, Mythology 1/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Teaching 2/+2, Synthesis (Clairvoyance and Treason) 3

"The seventh Master is a strange one. **Roma Bela'on** is the Gatherer Mistress. She keeps to herself - she's been in the same Lovers' Circle for years — and sides with the Diplomats. I guess that she needs the information that the Diplomats provide, or else more Gatherers would go missing when they go to gather their herbs.

"She's quiet and unambitious. She often sits through meetings without saying a word. When she *does* speak, her words are taken with great value, but she prefers to lie low. This makes her one of the most dangerous of all the Masters, I reckon. You can never tell what she's thinking, or what she wants.

"That's the lot. How'd I go, Anshar?"

Anshar turned back to face us. "Better than I expected. There is one thing that I should mention, though; the Masters are not necessarily the most powerful members of their Guilds, nor is everyone so titled necessarily on the Council. Mistress Deana was so-named out of respect.

"There are a number of powerbrokers within each Guild, and it is *they* who decide on the face that is exposed to the rest of Vimary. Many ambitious Magdalites crave the attention that a Master receives, but it is the powerbrokers that hold all the cards. Sometimes, powers outside a Guild determine its leaders; Leah Sevkin, Layla Cardikin and Jonas Tarakin all owe their seats to the machinations of other Guilds. Armatha Hevkin is a power in her own right."

See the **Vimary Sourcebook**, pp 98-99, for more on the Masters.

Tarred with Different Brushes

Anshar cleared his throat. "The *intrigues*" — he glanced at Udo — "of the Masters are not the end of it. Each Magdalite has her own views, and her opinions differ greatly, depending on who is asking. There are four broad outlooks, although I must warn you that it is safer to judge a Magdalite by her actions than her words.

"The first is by far the most common. They believe that the Tribes' destiny lies in the subtle guidance of the Grand Council. They push for a renewal of the Joanite Crusade and harsh treatment of the Fallen; they see the Fallen as a stain on our destiny, a stain that must be cleansed if we are to survive.

"The second group are more extreme: they prefer direct action, such as assassination and blackmail, to achieve their goals. More than a few Terashebans have died or fallen from favor when their views have hindered the ambitions of these people. They are exceedingly dangerous and meet in secret; they have many enemies and are frequently used as scapegoats by the other factions. They call themselves the **Dentata**.

"The third group, small in number, believe that only by fostering both unity and diversity will the Tribes survive. They value the other Tribes' opinions and place their faith in the leadership of Tera Sheba; most other Magdalites see them as naïve. They live in service to the Nation, seeking to preserve the Tribes as a whole, without advancing the Magdalites' cause beyond the Grand Council's directives.

"The last group consider themselves the most compassionate. They claim that we can only prosper through tolerance; in particular, they hope that the Tribes will once again accept the Fallen. They send missionaries into Hom to convince its residents that the Goddess has not forgotten them and that the Fatimas still love them. Consequently, members of the group are hated by most Fallen and many within their own Tribe.

"Rumor has it that many of the founding members of this last group were once children of Mary, and continued their ways after joining our Tribe. I know for a fact that many of the spies sent into Hom claim to profess their beliefs; the Fallen trust them even less for this reason.

"None of these groups are particularly inclined to trust the Squats, although some Gatherers feel some sort of kinship with them. Most Magdalites are ambivalent toward the Keepers, although more than a few trade with them for particularly interesting items."

I rested my hand lightly on Anshar's forearm. "Who do *you* support?" I asked.

"That all depends," he replied, smiling. "Who is asking?"

The Clientele

Anshar was like that; he never answered personal questions directly if he could answer them with another question. I still had questions, but I decided to approach things from a different direction. "You've told me about the Magdalites; what about the other Tribes?" I asked. "Who are our enemies; who are our friends?"

Anshar smiled again. "We have no enemies. We have no friends. There are only tools and recalcitrant tools. Some are sharp and some are blunt; they are tools nonetheless.

"The **Yagans** came first, so perhaps I should deal with them first. They hold their secrets close to their hearts, secrets hard-earned in dealings with the dead. Spirits can see things that even Voyeurs cannot; hence, the Yagans are dangerous. Their Fleshers are masters of death, not unlike the Bloodied Rose, but they act on the Crone's orders. She is as unknowable as She is ancient; it is better to watch Her Tribe and learn, than to act against them and risk having our skeletons burst forth from our closets to devour us.

"The **Evans** have an interesting relationship with our Tribe. They rear our young until they are of an age to interact with the Tribe, and seek only the good of the Nation as a whole. What, I might ask you, is good? The Evans are driven by conscience, and we are often driven to unconscionable acts. Some of Eva's children believe that our promiscuity flies in the face of the Mother's gift, that we corrupt our bodies by not bearing many children. Let them think what they will; others understand the role that we must play.

"The Mother loves us all as Her children; Her love is complete but cloying. The Evans would seek to guide us, but they must learn to let go; their sentimentality is as deadly as the Fleshers' barbs.

"The **Terasheban**s sit uneasily on their thrones, unable to distinguish law from justice. They tolerate us for the information we supply, and claim that they find their humanity in our arms, but they would sacrifice us in a minute were it not for the secrets that we hold. They cannot control us, and we are therefore a threat to them.

"In a way, we *do* give them their humanity; we use our wiles to influence their decisions and coax them into doing what is right. Were it not for our guidance, the Nation would crumble beneath Terasheban despotism and we would be little better than the Squats.

"Have you ever watched a Yagan family eat on a feast day? They bring a lamb into their home, introduce it to their children and let them play with it. When the children have made friends with the lamb, they take the unsuspecting lamb and slaughter it for the feast.

2. Word of Magdalen

"The **Joanites** are like the lamb, in a way; they feel that they are loved and respected by everybody. As soon as they let their guard down, those around the Warriors of Joan turn on them and betray them out of hand. Theirs is a life of pain and blades, but they are blind to the edges poised behind them. They found their only joy in their Crusade, yet even this is denied to them. Somehow, they still believe that the children around them are their friends and they walk meekly beneath their Terasheban yoke. Perhaps this will change, perhaps not.

"The **Dahlia**s are fools and tricksters, or so they would have you believe; certainly, many of them seem to fit that bill. There is a proverb — that many fish live in the deeps — which I believe applies in this case. Their pranks may seem harmless enough, but the Dahlians always have deeper motives at heart. They would have us believe that they merely hope to encourage new modes of thought, but this, too, is a falsehood. They are as much a Tribe of false appearances as our own, but where we stand for the preservation of the Nation, Dahlia's tricksters act only in the interests of madness, chaos and destruction.

"We have little to do with the **Agnites**. We occasionally leave children with them, and those children are adopted into Agnes' Tribe. Beyond that, they are useless to us; they are simply too young to play big peoples' games.

"Lastly, of course, are the **Magdalites**, our own Tribe. They are our greatest enemies, and the most dangerous of all."

Anshar rose and rubbed the feeling back into his legs, bowed to Udo and extended his hand to help me to my feet. "I must apologize," he said, "but we should leave. There is much to do, and I confess that I am beginning to get hungry. A good day to you, Udo."

"And to you, Anshar," Udo replied. He winked at me and added, "Come back sometime. There's so much that I still have to show you."



The Untouchables

As we walked out into the street, Anshar turned to me. "I know what your next question will be; I decided to leave because the subject may upset poor Udo. We will find a place to eat and talk further."

A few minutes later, we had found comfortable seats and a hot meal. Anshar continued: "You wish to speak of the **Fallen**. Udo's brother, Seamus, was once a Masker, too, although he often took on the role of Concubine for his own amusement. He was cast from the Tribe four summers ago. Udo misses his brother dearly."

"What was his crime?" I asked, concerned for Udo.

"Nobody knows. Presumably, it was something so heinous that exile was the only alternative; perhaps the Masters did not want his spirit to taint the River of Dream. He seemed nice enough when I knew him, but as I have said, appearances can be deceiving. I believe that he now lives somewhere in Hom, writing plays for a Fallen audience."

"What's Hom like?"

"I do not know; I have never been there. There is much to be said in that it is inhabited by the Fallen; the place must be a sad parody of what we have built here in Vimary. There are many artists in Vimary, whose thoughts were too radical for Tribal minds, but there are also many that were cast out for more violent crimes. Hom is a cesspit.

"The Fallen's main leader is a man named Deus, a great poet formerly of our Tribe. He was Magdalen's lover; for some reason, he displeased Our Lady and he fled to Hom. Many of our Tribe remember him well, and more than a few still long for him. How the mighty have Fallen; he is now reduced to scribbling his words on ruins and living in the shadows. Still, Deus is a decent man; were the others in Hom of such stock, there may be some hope for the Fallen. Alas, they are not.

"I should tell you of the **Keepers** as well. They cling to fragments of the World Before, hoping to find solace in the past. Unfortunately, the very past that they seek to rebuild is the same that summoned the Beasts to us. The Keepers will ultimately fail in their endeavors.

"Nonetheless, they do find some interesting toys in the ruins. Do you remember that I mentioned a friend named Ebling? Some of her wares have given me entire nights of pleasure. The past holds many secrets; some are pleasurable, some are painful, and some are both." Anshar grinned wickedly.

"What about the Squats?" I asked.

"The **Squats** are like the Fallen, in that they live outside the Goddess' grace; neither wield the arts of Synthesis as we do. They make the occasional trinket, but have no real art or culture. They are parasites; they raid our settlements every winter for food, because they have not learned the art of agriculture. They are, in truth, little better than animals.



Seamus Serakin, "Fallen" Playwright

Few Magdalites remember Seamus; his older brother Udo always overshadowed him. While Udo concentrated on honing his performance, Seamus read and wrote obsessively. It was this obsession that sealed his fate. Late one night, he was summoned to stand before the Council of Masters. They told him that his inquiries into drama from the World Before had been deemed blasphemous; he would be exiled in the morning. However, there was an escape clause; he could one day return to Xstasis if he chose to act as the Magdalites' spy in Hom. Seamus took their offer and continued his writing amongst the Fallen. He is well respected there, writing plays for his new audience; he also trades with the Keepers that visit, exchanging his services as a translator for books from the World Before. He is starting to doubt that he will ever return home and is strongly considering going native.

Highlights: Anal, cynical, sarcastic

Attributes: APP +1, CRE +2, INF +1, KNO +2, PER +1, STA 25, ULD 5, AD 4

Skills: Disguise 1/+2, Hand-to-Hand 2/0, Human Perception 2/0, Investigation 2/+1, Lore (Fallen) 2/+2, Lore (Magdalite and the World Before) 1/+2, Melee 1/0, Notice 2/+1, Read/Write (Fanzay) 1/+2, Read/Write (Gaelish and Tribal) 2/+2, Speak (Fanzay) 1/+2, Speak (Gaelish) 2/+2, Streetwise 2/+1, Theatrics 1/+1

2. Word of Magdalen

"Some Magdalites fantasize about being carried off by a burly, rugged Squat and living out their lives as a wild man's mate. A Squat is as likely to eat a Magdalite as to mate with one; even when they *do* mate, it is hardly likely to be romantic or even consensual. What is worse, they are slavers; a month of rape by a succession of Squats is enough to quash any fantasy. It is a far kinder fate to end up on a Squat's plate than in his bed.

"I am afraid that I must leave you now. I must attend to other business."

With that, he dropped a trinket on the table and left. I still wanted to ask him about the Serfs and their Z'bri masters, but my questions would have to wait.

Unconscionable Acts

From the memories of Anshar Demori'on:

Mareta asked many questions; she had not yet learned the value of discretion.

I wandered to my chambers near the heart of Xstasis, hoping to relax a little before my other engagements; the petitioners and powerbrokers would have to wait. Unfortunately, one was waiting — just inside my chamber door.

The stranger was a man, of average height, with dark blond hair and light brown eyes. His face bore no distinguishing marks; ironically, his very anonymity betrayed him as a Voyeur. He nodded in greeting and spoke. "Good day, Anshar," he said. "I have news for you."

I sat on a cushion and motioned for the stranger to do so; he simply stood. "I hope that it is //important// news," I told him.

He nodded again. "A woman from Xstasis, one Avera Nattakin, has witnessed something that may be of interest to the Tribe."

"Oh, and that is...?"

"She has seen the death of an Evan woman in Westholm. Nattakin saw this in a dream; a pair of Yagans entered the River of Dream to *dispense* with her."

"How?" More importantly, what did this have to do with me and why should I care about some Evan in Westholm?

"We do not know," the stranger replied, "but it would make a most *useful* tool for the Order of the Bloodied Rose, would it not? The ability to slay one's enemies from the River of Dream — think of it Anshar, we would be unstoppable!"

I was still suspicious; the stranger had not given a name. Could this be part of some elaborate entrapment? "Yes," I stated simply, unsure of the answer he was after. "Why did you come to me?"

"Because you hold the goals of the Tribe in the highest esteem. Dhara Ibenkin is too close to Magdalen; she fails to understand how things truly are in Vimary. You, on the other hand, are still worldly; you, Anshar, understand our objectives. You can bear what needs to be done in the Lover's name." He pulled up his sleeve; branded onto his arm was a tattoo of a fanged mouth, skewed vertical. The mark faded as I watched; it was the mark of the Dentata.

I looked into his eyes; they were like those of a corpse. He stood and waited for a response. After a moment's thought, I answered him. "Do what needs to be done to discover the Yagans' methods."

He nodded in acknowledgement. "And what of Avera Nattakin?" he asked.

"Leave her. She may still be useful. I know the woman — she is a drunkard and half crazy. No one will believe a word that she utters."

The stranger nodded again. I suspected that he was anxious at my request that Avera Nattakin live, but he did not show it. He simply turned and left.

A shiver ran up my spine; I wondered how many others were watching. Many eyes could be hiding beneath the shield of Dream. No matter; Avera Nattakin would die before the next winter — she was too close to the truth.

Inner Light and Inner Shadow

From the secret musings of Anshar Demori'on:

The truth — what *is* the truth? I have lived so many lies that I no longer know what the truth is. We seek it in the River of Dream. We seek it in visions of ecstasy. We seek it because Our Lady has commanded it. We strive for the clarity required to recognize the truth when it manifests before us.

Those brief moments of clarity are moments of perfection; all becomes apparent in their fleeting glory. Then the clarity disappears, shrouded by the Goddess' hand. We witness only the merest suggestions of the truth, like whispers in the darkness. We never see the truth in its entirety, so we strive for clarity once more, a fatal addiction that we are powerless to end. Magdalen knows this, I am sure, yet she commands us into its embrace, as she once commanded the Sirens to embrace the Z'bri.

Enough of this; I have work to do. I will call in a favor for young Mareta. I hope that she will be pleased with my gift.



A Pleasant Distraction

From the recollections of Mareta Deanakin:

That night, there was a huge party. Alicia Something-or-other had just come back from having a son, and everyone was there to welcome her back with open arms. Her friends and family invited people off the street to celebrate.

There were even a few revelers from other Tribes; they must've thought that we were all insane. A group of Evans huddled in one corner, seemingly frightened by the whirling Magdalites around them. A couple of Joanites stood at the gathering's edge, wanting to join in, but too embarrassed to really enjoy themselves. A lonely Yagan sat on his own at a table, trying to offer a drink to any young woman that walked past; the passersby looked at him as if he was offering them the sharp end of a dagger.

I summoned all my courage and walked up to him. He smiled weakly; he was as afraid of me as I was of him. He motioned for me to sit beside him. I introduced myself.

"I'm Aden," he said. He was the youngest Yagan that I'd ever seen, not much older than I was. "I probably shouldn't be here, but I heard all the noise and I wanted to know what was making it."

"What are you drinking?" I asked.

"Ale," he replied.

"If you can still remember what it is, then you probably haven't drunk enough of it. This is a party!"

He laughed nervously. "Are you people always like this?" he asked, his arm sweeping to indicate the gathering around us.

"No," I said, smiling. "Sometimes, we sleep."

He laughed again, slightly less nervously than before. He was loosening up. He lifted his mug to his lips and took a mouthful, his eyes still focused on my face. Are all Yagans so uptight?

"I'll be back in a moment," I told him. "I'll just get something to drink." I stood up and wandered off to find some wine. After that, the night dissolved into an intoxicated blur.



Glances Across a Crowded Room

From the diary of Eban, young Magdalite:

The Janseys' party was all that I'd expected and more. It seemed like the entire Tribe was there. I don't think that I've ever seen so many people. I heard someone say that the Chamberlain herself was there, though I didn't see her. *He* wasn't, and that's all that matters.

I literally bumped into Udo. He was as jovial as ever, and he asked me whether I'd thought about the scrap of paper that he'd given me. I told him that I had, but still hadn't made that much sense of it yet. He told me to stop thinking so hard. I asked him what he meant by that. Udo just shrugged and threw his arm around my shoulders. He dragged me through the crowd to meet the members of his troupe.

Xavier Yavith — the Master of the Guild of Masks! — was sitting there with them.

They all beckoned me over to sit with them, but Udo put up his hand. He asked me to pull out my flute and play them a tune or two. What could I do? Soon, they were all dancing to my music — *my music!* — and it was obvious that they were enjoying themselves. I finally had to pause, out of breath. Xavier complimented me on my talent, and told me that I would be made more than welcome in the Guild when I came of age. I was speechless.

Udo had wandered off by this stage, and I felt a little nervous at the center of the group's attention. I excused myself and went looking for Kaba Jansey, our host.

Kaba was lounging between two chesty Concubine women, both only about half his age. When he saw me, he shoed them off and patted the seat next to him. He beamed at me, proudly displaying a mouthful of broken teeth. He started to talk. I'll try and remember what he said word for word.

"You're a bright lad, Eban. Everyone seems to be enjoying themselves, don't they? Now, can you tell me why?"

I shrugged. "It's a great party, sir. You've outdone yourself."

He smiled again. "Flattery will get you everywhere, Eban, but that's not why they're having so much fun. There are a few who don't join in, and it's because they're too self-conscious or, rather, not conscious of their selves."



Kaba Jansey, retired
Bloodied Rose

Kaba could hardly be more different from the image of the typical Bloodied Rose; he is anything but inconspicuous and is as jovial a person as can be found in the tribe. It is precisely for these reasons that he was so successful as an assassin — he is the last person that anyone would suspect. He carried out his duties without the slightest qualm; as far as he was concerned, he was protecting the safety of friends and family. His opinions won him many friends in the Dentata, and he is still held in high esteem despite his retirement. Through his connections and sheer good fortune, Kaba has become one of the wealthiest citizens of Vimary. He is generous to a fault, but does not make the extent of his wealth well-known when he can avoid it. As far as most people know, he is simply "Uncle Kaba", always ready with a smile and a helping hand.

Highlights: Friendly, generous, loud,
self-satisfied

Attributes: AGI +1, APP -1, BLD +2,
CRE +1, FIT +1, INF +3, KNO +1,
PER +1, PSY +2, STR 2, HEA 1, STA
40, UD 9, AD 9

Skills: Combat Sense 2/0, Dance 1/0,
Dodge 2/0, Dreaming 2/+2,
Etiquette 1/+3, Hand-to-Hand 2/0,
Human Perception 3/+2, Leadership
2/+3, Lore (Magdalite) 3/+1, Melee
2/0, Mythology 2/+1, Notice 1/+1,
Ritual 1/+1, Seduction 1/-1,
Streetwise 2/+3, Teaching 2/+1,
Synthesis (Passion) 2

I obviously looked as confused by the statement as I felt. "Take that Yagan over there, for instance." He pointed to a young Yagan man, sitting at a table and chatting with a young Concubine — Mareta!

Kaba's cloak had fallen from his arm as he pointed the pair out. He quickly covered it, but I noticed two tattoos on his arm — a rose, dripping in blood, and a strange tattoo that looked like a fanged mouth. He seemed annoyed that the marks had been exposed, so I pretended not to see them.

"That Yagan simply isn't having a good time," he continued. "Any lesser host would take that as a deadly insult, but I can be more tolerant of such things, because I understand why. Most others in the Nation think that we throw ourselves into these gatherings with wild abandon, but it only seems that way. Once you've come to know your own body, you can control it without thinking. All that effort that you've wasted by keeping it on a tight leash can be spent on more important things. Like parties." He drained his mug of ale and threw it on a pile of about twenty others that sat behind the couch.

"The same thing goes for your mind. The mind and the body are the same thing, Eban. Once you know yourself, you needn't worry, because nothing can ever go wrong. So, Eban, why are these people enjoying themselves?"

I nodded. "Because they know themselves," I replied confidently.

He laughed, a loud, booming sound that came from the depths of his belly. "Wrong! Never think that you know all of the answers, Eban. You never will. No one ever does, not even that Demori'on character that you're constantly stalking."

My jaw nearly hit the floor. "How?" was all that I could say.

"There are no secrets in the Tribe of Magdalen, Eban. Don't worry, all will be taken care of in due time. By the way, you still haven't given me a response. Why are all these people enjoying themselves?"

I was still a little stunned. "I don't know," I answered.

He laughed again. "Ah, much better! You're starting to learn! Well, to answer the question, there are four things that a person needs — passion, community, pleasure and contemplation. Let me tell you a story.

"Long ago, the world was a much smaller place. Many more people lived in Vimary than live here today — they built the ruins that we now live amongst. It was a glorious time, but also a sad one, for the people of the World Before had lost their ability to dream. It was a spiritually dead time. Our ancestors lived in a superficial world of tedium, alienation and self-denial. They longed for the very things that I mentioned before.

"Then the Z'bri came to answer their prayers. The Koleris brought with them passion, the Flemis brought community, the Sangis brought pleasure and the Melanis brought contemplation. At first, there was hope, but the Z'bri quickly betrayed their would-be beneficiaries. The Beasts became enslaved by their followers' flesh. The flesh came to control them, the very opposite of what we Magdalites strive to do. That's what makes us different from the Z'bri.

"Now, look around you. The people who enjoy themselves are free from inhibition, so they can express their passions freely. They're here with their friends, so they have community. I've provided them with the finest of everything, so they experience pleasure. They have everything that they need, so they're happy."

"But what about contemplation?" I asked.

Kaba laughed again, even louder than before. "You're a sharp lad, Eban. Contemplation, you ask? There'll be enough contemplation in the morning!" He slapped me on the back. "Sorry to leave you, but I'm off to find myself a woman!"

He hauled himself off into the throng, leaving me to gaze at Mareta and ponder his words. I'm starting to understand the writing on Udo's scrap of paper.

Don't just enjoy the music, it says. Become the music, and you need never doubt again.

Beyond that, I haven't a clue.

The Heart of Ecstasy

From the recollections of Mareta Deanakin:

I slept heavily, drunk from the party of the night before. Eban's staring eyes burnt in my mind, so full of concern. What did I sense in those eyes? Was it love? Was Eban even there? I couldn't remember. What had happened the night before? There was no Yagan-shaped lump with me in bed, that was for sure. Pity, he was kind of cute.

Anshar appeared at my door early in the morning, sweating as if he had just run a hundred clicks. He was smiling even more broadly than usual, an almost blinding array of pearly white teeth. "I have a surprise for you," he said.

I was still a little groggy, and more than a little suspicious. "It's not one of Ebling's toys, is it?"

Still smiling, Anshar replied, "I can get you one if you like. No, I have arranged an audience for you — an audience with Magdalen Herself!" He was shaking with excitement. "Hurry, gather your things; time is short."

"Where are we meeting Her?" I asked, struggling from beneath my blankets.

"You are meeting Her in the Castle itself. Now, hurry, you are wasting time."

"You're not coming with me?" I was almost in a state of panic; I wouldn't know what to do, nor what to say to Her.

"It is a private audience. Do not worry, you will be fine." Anshar's voice was low and level; he was trying to calm me, but his posture was hardly reassuring. He stood like a cat, ready to pounce.



The Chamber of Silence

I hastily dressed and tried to appear my best in the short time that Anshar allowed me. He led the way to the Castle, through the already-growing crowds and the mazes of Xstasis; I had trouble keeping up with him, distracted by the need to straighten my clothes and adjust my hair.

Finally, we arrived, and wove our way through the Castle's labyrinthine corridors. Everywhere, there were effigies of Magdalen, some of marble or alabaster, others of wire or broken glass. Hordes of well-groomed cats scurried away as we hurtled through the halls. Suddenly, we found ourselves in an anteroom; rows of Magdalites sat or stood by the walls, awaiting admittance to Magdalen's private chamber.

Anshar bowed to a number of Sirens gathered about the doors at the end of the room and then turned toward me. "I will wait here for you." He was still shaking. I shook as much as he did.

The doors opened quietly, revealing blackness beyond. I hesitated, but the expectant looks from the people around forced me inside. Beyond the light cast by the doorway, I could see nothing. I inched forward; behind me the door swung closed, as silent as death.

I stumbled into the darkness; my hand found a wall, as cool and smooth as silk beneath my fingers. I followed the wall for a little, and its texture began to feel more like stucco. Further on, the wall was covered with smooth lumps and nodules. Every few steps the texture changed, each a new and interesting experience. I continued along the wall with my arm outstretched; I lost all sense of time.

THUD!

I walked into something hard and smooth. Clutching my aching shoulder with one hand and feeling the new surface with the other, I found a handle; it was another door. I twisted the handle and pushed; soft light flooded over me. Behind me stretched a long, straight corridor. Before me was the Chamber of Silence. I took a deep breath and stepped in.

The air was warm, clear and fragrant. Light streamed in from frosted skylights above. Everything was white, the walls, the floor and the few cushions scattered around. There was surprisingly little clutter; I'd expected sumptuous wall hangings, fine furniture and a hoard of gold and jewels, yet barely any were to be seen.

In the center of the room knelt Magdalen Herself, leaning on a large cushion. I'd heard stories of the Fatimas' glory, how those around them were overcome by their splendor and could not help but honor their magnificence and majesty. I felt none of this; no aura cowed me into worship. She knelt before me, looking intently into my eyes, as if waiting for something. "I — my name is M-Mareta Deanakin," I stuttered.

She didn't respond at all, but sat there quietly, still looking at me.

"Ah, Anshar Demori'on arranged my audience with You," I said. "I am truly honored that You should wish to see me."

Again, Magdalen sat watching me, silently and expectantly.

"Nice place you have here." I was running out of things to say to Her; what do you say to a Fatima that She doesn't already know? I gave up and sat before Her; She nodded slightly. We sat facing each other and looked into each other's eyes for a moment.

I was confused; what did She expect of me? Magdalen emanated no aura of power, but I was overcome nonetheless; She knelt there, naked, waiting for me, an embodiment of the Goddess, but I was unable to fulfil Her wishes. I started to cry.

Magdalen extended Her arms to embrace me; I leaned forward, putting my arms around Her frame, and She cradled me as I wept. She felt warm and soft. Her hand tenderly stroked my hair. I felt Her love.

We held each other forever, lost in each other's warmth. Finally, I stood, and still looking into Her eyes, I let my dress fall to the floor. Magdalen's face was a beacon of compassion and kindness; She accepted me as I was. Despite the beauty and illusion that surrounds our Tribe, Magdalen loves truth most of all.

I knelt before Her again; Her arms curled around me once more. I closed my eyes and our lips touched softly. The ecstasy began, and Magdalen showed me everything. I saw the Camps and how my ancestors had suffered at their Z'bri masters' hands. I saw Magdalen's birth in the Rose of the Flesh and the joy and the hope that Her coming brought. I saw Her weep as She sent Her most beloved to tempt the Beasts with their flesh, crowned with withered roses and never to return. I saw Her sorrow as Her Brother Joshua fell, locked in a deadly embrace with Tibor. I felt Her love for all Her people. I saw a succession of faces, some of which I knew and many that I did not.

Of all the riches that they brought Her, She wanted only the greatest — love.

Her left hand tightened on my back; Her right reached to cup my breast. Our lips remained locked, and we were the only two souls in the world.

Longing

Anshar greeted me with a knowing smile. We sat by the Castle's entrance and Anshar lit his pipe. We waited for a moment in silence, and then finally he spoke. "Did She say anything to you?"

"No," I replied, finding it hard to utter words once more. "She said nothing. Words would just get in the way."

Anshar nodded.

"I looked into Her eyes, and I could *feel* Her love. I looked into Her eyes, Anshar. How could Deus leave Her, after looking into Her eyes?"

Anshar took my hand and reached into his pouch; he placed something in my hand. It was a shard of mirrored glass. I looked into its depths, and Her eyes looked back out at me. My face whipped around to meet Anshar's.

He nodded again. "First, you must love yourself, before you can love others." He looked like a cat after a full bowl of cream.

"I wish I were still in Her arms, Anshar. I felt safe. I felt needed. I felt wanted."

"Therein lies the danger, young Mareta. Come, I want you to see something." He rose quickly to his feet and offered his hand to help me to mine. We walked to the edge of Xstasis, to a corner that I'd never been to before.

The air was a chorus of odors, none of them pleasant. We entered a room marked with a black rose; inside lay a dozen people, all branded with the marks of our tribe. They propped themselves up against the walls, some drinking from bottles, some smoking foul-smelling pipes and others cutting their flesh and dripping strange liquids into the wounds.

Anshar's nose wrinkled. "I am told that this place is a mirror of Ile Perdue, the cancerous heart of Hom. For some here, there is hope that they may one day return to humanity; others will be lost, and will seek their end amongst the Fallen."

Old food, broken bottles, excrement and other jetsam sat in a decomposing heap in one corner of the room. "How?" I asked; it was all that I could say.

"Remember what I told you, young Mareta: There is only now. These people have forgotten that; they live in the past. They try to forget the present; unfortunately, the present does not forget them."

Anshar turned to leave. I meant to follow him, but a lone figure in one corner beckoned me over. It was an old woman, tightly clenching a clay bottle in her gnarled fist.

Living in the Past

From the words of Avera Nattakin, forgotten Magdalite:

Pretty young thing, you are. You remind me of someone. Let me think...

Deana Shelkin! That's it! You're not her daughter, are you?

Granddaughter, eh? She's head of the family now? She's a smart one, that grandmother of yours.

She died? Hmm. I'm sorry, dear. I didn't know.

What are you doing wandering around with the likes of him? Name's Anhow or Dambar or something. . . Anshar! That's his name! Better keep an eye on him. That one's marked.

What, you don't know about Anshar? Well, I guess he wouldn't go around telling everyone. His pappy was a Serf. Some Diplomat picked him up and stole him back here. His name was Giron — Giron Demori'on. Nice young lad, he was, couldn't hardly tell he grew up among the Beasts. Then again, I guess that they're all nice until they bite you.

Oh, Giron seemed nice enough, but when he took a partner, a poor lass named Abi Velkin, he changed. Used to beat her black and blue, and she was too scared to leave him. Then came Anshar — I hear he didn't fare much better. I hear that Giron used to practice a few of the tricks he learned at the Z'bri's knees on the both of them.

Poor Abi died when their son was only a few summers old, all the better for her. That only made Giron worse; Anshar copped it twice as bad. No wonder Anshar killed his pappy; can't say I wouldn't have done the same. How he did it at his age, I'll never know; perhaps that's how his reputation started.

Sheba's beard! He's looking at me! I've said too much. Run along, dear.

Got a bottle for a parched old lady, love?

Childhoods Past, Innocence Forgotten

From the recollections of Mareta Deanakin:

It'd been a long day; I'd experienced both the heights and the depths that the Magdalites had to offer. I was exhausted, both physically and mentally. I begged Anshar to be allowed to return home to rest. Fortunately, he agreed.

We held each other and kissed each other's cheeks. I think that Anshar was a little surprised by my show of affection. His omnipresent smile faltered for a moment, before returning in its full glory.

Turning away, I left for the comfort of home; Anshar said that he had things to do, and would meet me again in the morning.

From a missive to Chamberlain Dhara Ibenkin:

Greetings and a good day to you,
My Lady.

The subject (still in the company of the Deanakin child) has paid a visit to the Slums. No doubt you've heard the rumors surrounding Avera Nattakin - perhaps the subject seeks Nattakin's knowledge for himself? If Nattakin does possess the Yagans' secrets of killing, imagine the havoc that the subject could wreak! He'd be able to purge the Masters and even the Sirens with total impunity!

I'm sure that you realize just how disturbing this possibility is to me.

I've dispatched resources to determine the subject's actions in the Slums and with whom he talked. I'll keep you informed.

Forever your humble servant,

K.

The Crèche in the Fields

I knew now why Anshar was always so hesitant to speak of the Z'bri. The Beasts were responsible for a painful part of his past. He'd lived with his family as he grew up; in contrast, I grew up in the fields around Xstasis.

The fields were quiet in comparison to the bustle of Magdalen's maze. We lived in shacks, our small houses gathered in circles with a hearth at the center. An Evan couple lived with us, acting as parents to us all, bringing us up and teaching us to till the fields; they now live in the village of Sundown, raising children of their own.

We grew enough to eat, and occasionally, we had enough to sell in Bazaar; even then, we bought baubles and perfumes instead of tools or food. We spent many of our days sowing and harvesting crops with Vidor Wind-Writer, our Evan "father;" at night, he'd read his poems and stories to us by firelight. Our "mother," Teela Malkin, baked bread from the tubers and grains we collected. Most of the time, however, we talked and played, dreaming of the days when our Tribe would let us play "big peoples' games" in Xstasis itself.

I met Eban in our crèche. He's two summers younger than me, but that's never stopped him from flirting. He was always the first with the witty line or the one that found new places to play; he's a lot quieter now. Perhaps he wanted to get my attention while I was at the crèche. Perhaps he misses me. Time will tell; he's only a couple of summers from joining the Tribe. He lives amongst the adult members from our crèche, moving from home to home as he feels the need.

Every morning and again in the evening, a Joanite would visit us, just to check that we were all right. Wild animals rarely came this far into Tribal territory, but I heard once that a wolf had crept into a crèche one night and killed everyone. Fortunately, our crèche never witnessed such a tragedy. It didn't stop us from telling stories about it around the hearth, though.

I still find myself dreaming of the old days; they were carefree and easy. We all loved each other, honestly and without pretense; we suffered none of the complexities of adult life in the Tribe. Anshar constantly warns me about the dangers of the past, but sometimes I prefer the simple life that we led in the crèche. You could always tell where you stood.

A Siren's Chores

From the memories of Anshar Demori'on:

That evening, a small mountain of paper lay waiting on my table. Such things were best dealt with quickly; they had a way of harrying and hounding until they were attended to. One person's problems quickly came to encompass the entire Tribe.

Among the usual trade manifests and daily reports were a number of anonymous missives; it seemed that the Dentata now deigned to allow me to clean up after them. A secret war was brewing, the letters claimed, between the Yagans and members of our own Tribe. The Yagans objected to the Bloodied Roses' actions of late, claiming that the Roses had no mandate to assassinate outside the ranks of the Magdalites. I sighed.

A simple territory dispute; four dead, two wounded, in the last week. It mattered little that the Bloodied Roses had assured the Yagans that Magdalite interests and those of the Nation were one and the same; the bodies kept piling up. This was going to be a bloody conflict; our interests were probably better served by backing down and lying low for a while.

Beneath these reports, I spied another letter. It was written on parchment of the finest quality, in a hand whose lettering flowed across the page with utmost grace. I looked to the bottom of the letter to discern who had written it.

Jonas Tarakin. It was not his usual indecipherable scrawl. He must have had a scribe pen it for him; that was unfortunate. He had allowed too many eyes to view his missive. The secret thoughts of the Voyeur Master would be public knowledge by this stage; the thought amused me.

My Dearest Anshar, the first line read. The fat fool was after something.

We've had our differences in the past, but I'm willing to put them aside and start over. I need a favor. What a surprise.

Two days ago, it continued, the Shaman Broken Foot had the gall to insult me in public! I was telling a friend about what a Siren once told me, that new souls were formed by their parents' union, and Broken Foot came up to us and started correcting me. He reckoned that they were formed directly from the flow of life or something, and just wouldn't shut up. I don't really care what the Evans believe, but they have no right to go around breaking up conversations so they can preach!

This Broken Foot has to be dealt with. I asked Layla Cardikin to do something, but she said that it wasn't her job to protect my reputation. I know you have some friends in the Bloodied Rose. Can you look into it for me? These Evans need to be taught some respect!

What to do? I agreed with Layla Cardikin; if Jonas was stupid enough to get himself into trouble, then he should find his own way out. On the other hand, granting Jonas such a favor could prove most lucrative; politics is all about indulging the petty whims of the powerful, and then prospering from their gratitude.

One last death before I asked Layla to rein in her Guild-fellows; Broken Foot would trouble us no more.

I shook my head. Jonas had gone to the trouble of using a scribe so as to make his request seem as attractive as possible, yet he had not asked his scribe to couch the letter in language that was readable. His words had given me a headache.

*I needed rest. What was the phrase that Seamus so liked to use? *To sleep, perchance to dream?**

Young Demorion

From the dreams of Anshar Demorion:

Only a few summers old. Crying. Where's mother?

Mother's dead, remember?

He's here — I can smell him. He's drunk again. Drunk on that distilled wine of his. He's had a bad day. My breath is shallow. I don't want him to find me. Go away.

"Anshar, you little shit," he bellows, "get out here! Do you *really* want me to come get you?"

I climb out from under my bed. He hits my face with the back of his hand. I'm bleeding. He grabs my hair, forcing me to meet his eyes. I don't want to look.

"Look at me, child," he says. "Do I look stupid to you?"

"N-n-no, father," I stammer. He raises his hand. I cringe.

"Well, that Dahlian slut, Thiva, seems to think so." He pauses. The silences are the worst — you never know what he'll do next. "I ask her about that stupid prank in the Court Hall, sheep trampling every Sheban in sight, and she reckons she doesn't know anything about it. Bitch doesn't want to know. Thaim'on should do his own dirty work. He's got enough spies of his own."

He tosses me backwards; I land in a crumpled heap. I begin to cry again.

"What's your problem, precious?" he sneers. "You think that you've got it bad. How do you think that I felt when I was a child? You think that the Z'bri are honey and roses?" He grabs my hair again and hurls me face-first onto the bed. With his other hand, he pulls up my tunic and loosens his belt. "Oh, this is sweet pleasure, compared to what I had to go through."

No. Not again. Father, don't. No. Please.

His grip on my hair slackens. He drops heavily to the floor. I'm still crying, my face buried in my blanket. I don't want to look up.

"It's okay." A woman's voice, unfamiliar. "He's dead."

Slowly, I peer up from the blanket. A young woman crouches over my father, wiping her dagger on a cloth. "He's gone," she says. "He can't hurt you."

"Who are you?" I ask, sniffing.

"My name's Deana. Don't worry; you're safe now."

Father's eyes are wide open, staring. His mouth lies partly open. His throat is . . . gone. Blood everywhere. I recoil. Deana reaches for me. I don't know what to do. She killed my father.

"I can take care of you," Deana says. "Quickly, we have to go."

Slowly, I take her hand. We leave.



Beyond Rapture

From the recollections of Mareta Deanakin:

Anshar was late; I was glad of the chance to sleep in. When he finally did arrive, I was a little shocked. His normally pristine appearance had gone; his hair was disheveled and his eyes were rubbed raw. When he saw me, he rushed forward and held me so tightly that I could barely breathe.

"What's wrong?" I asked. Anshar was silent.

After a while, he let go. He smiled at me, but it was a pale imitation of its former glory. He tried to speak, hoarsely at first, but he cleared his throat. "Thank you," he said.

Anshar stepped back and looked around. "One day, soon," he said, straightening his hair, "you will have much larger quarters, a place truly befitting a Concubine."

I was still concerned for him. "Anshar," I said — he cut me off with a wave of his hand. I knew this gesture; it meant that we would speak no more of what had just happened.

Dreams of the Future

From the lessons of Anshar Demori'on:

I have told you much of our Tribe: its structure, its beliefs and even a little of its Masters. What I have not told you is what this is all for; where does our future lie?

There are some that would have you believe that we act of our own free will. To rebut them, I point to the Fates, and to the River of Dream. Those skilled in the arts of Synthesis constantly speak of the future as if they had seen it themselves. What better proof is there of destiny?

There will be much bloodshed, of that I am certain. Joan stirs once more, for the first time since Her Brother's death. The Fallen grow bold in their attacks against us. The Keepers wither like overripe fruits; their time is long since past, although they seem not to accept their fate. Squat tribes raid outlying settlements almost daily now.

The Crusade returns with a vengeance, Mareta, despite Tera Sheba's wishes to the contrary. We will crush the Beasts. Many Fallen seek to swell the tide against the peace that Tera Sheba made, some in fury at Her inaction, others with vain hopes of reacceptance by their former Tribes. No matter; they fight for our cause. If they are to die, then so much the better.

Tera Sheba will learn that Her heavy-handed ways are no longer of use. She must learn subtlety if She is to retain control. Even Her own Tribe will realize that She is far from perfect.

That statement troubles you, I know. The Fatimas are not perfect; Magdalen is the first to admit that. There is little beauty to be found in perfection, young Mareta. Perfect beauty is alien; flaws make one unique, and therefore special. We brand ourselves with tattoos and pierce our flesh, not to destroy beauty, but to enhance it.

Remember Magdalen's face; it was your own, Mareta. Despite your flaws, *yours* was the face of Her beauty. True beauty comes from within, and when that beauty fades, it is time to die. *That* is the true reason why Magdalen hates the Z'bri; they are ugly in their hearts, and thus beyond Her love. That is why we support the Crusade. That is why Tera Sheba will fall, unless She changes Her ways.

And Beyond

From the recollections of Mareta Deanakin:

Even after the past few days, I still had questions.

Why did Magdalen allow Deus to live, even after he'd spurned Her? Did She still love the Fallen? Was there still beauty in their hearts? Could it be found in the hearts of others: Squats, Keepers and perhaps even Serfs?

Could this be why She sends Her beloved into the Outlands? To spread Her love to those who live beyond Her immediate reach?

I asked Anshar about this, but he laughed at my questions. "If Magdalen truly loved them, would She not grant them the use of Synthesis?" he said. He'd answered me with another question; he knew more than he was telling.

I decided to approach the problem from another angle. "Why does Magdalen make Her presence felt at the Jardin?" I asked him.

He cast a furtive glance around the room. "It is to remind Her Gatherers that She has not forgotten them."

"Like She has forgotten the people in the slums?"

Anshar took a step backwards. "She has not forgotten them. *They* have forgotten *Her*. When they choose to remember, She will welcome them back."

"And the Fallen, then? What will She do when they seek to return to Her arms?"

Anshar stood before me, wide-eyed and blinking as if I'd slapped him in the face. "Mareta," he said, "no more questions, please. We will speak no more on this. We *must* say no more." He glanced around the room again.

Carefully, he regained his composure. His smile returned. "I have told you all that I can of our Tribe. Tomorrow, we will start on the *true* arts of the Concubine. The fun part." He bowed, turned on his heel and left.

That was the last time that I ever saw Anshar Demori'on.

There is Only Now

From the thoughts of Anshar Demori'on:

It has been a long day. I need to sit down, relax and have a drink. There is much to do tomorrow, and I will need my strength. Ah, sleep, how I could do with some sleep.

This wine is foul! No wonder Mareta suffers those hangovers of hers. It tastes sour and I can feel the sediment between my teeth! Why does she drink here, anyway? This place is a rathole! Still, it does offer a small amount of privacy; no self-respecting Siren would be seen dead here.

Ah, young Eban is here. I wonder if he would like to chat.

From a missive to Kalina Tarakin, Magdalite Voyeur:

I have received your most recent report and I understand your concerns. Nattakin has been warned not to speak of her dreams to anyone, and I am sure that even in her continual state of intoxication, she understands the potential consequences of her actions, both to her and to those with whom she would speak. Nattakin has proven troublesome in the past, and resources were allocated long ago to monitor her. Any further inquiry would simply be inefficient; your investigations are better directed elsewhere.

D.

2. Word of Magdalen


The Robed One,
Fallen Enigma

The man once known as Anshar Demori'on hides himself from the world; even when alone, he rarely exposes his face. He fears that his enemies will discover him and then his fate will be sealed. Anshar's father was born Chuvatt, the plaything of the Iv'chet known as the Almoner of S'deyahln. The Diplomat Cori Demori'on rescued Chuvatt as a child and brought him to Xstasis, where he took the name Giron. Unfortunately, Giron's early life as a Serf left a deep impression on him, and when he had a son of his own, he passed his experiences down to Anshar in the name of fatherly love. As so often happens, Anshar continued the cycle of abuse. Anshar now dwells in Hom, but still occasionally ventures forth into Bazaar under the veil of darkness. There, he seeks out children, to give them his love in the only way that he knows.

Highlights: Arrogant, paranoid, spiteful, withdrawn

Attributes: APP +3, INF +1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY -2, HEA -1, STA 20, LUD 3, AD 4

Eminences: Sensuality and Vengeance

Skills: Disguise 1/0, Dreaming 1/-2, Etiquette 2/+1, Grooming 2/+3, Hagglng 1/+1, Lore (Magdalite) 3/+1, Melee 1/0, Notice 2/+1, Read/Write (Tribal) 2/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Seduction 3/+3, Streetwise 2/+1, Teaching 1/0, Trade 1/+1, Synthesis (Passion) 2

Climax

From a missive to Chamberlain Dhara Ibenkin:

Greetings and a good day to you, My Lady.

I believe that I have witnessed an event that could prove the downfall of our subject. Late this afternoon, I observed a confrontation between the subject and one Eban, yet to choose a name. A transcript follows.

Subject: Good afternoon, young Eban.

Eban: Fuck you.

Subject: Now, do not be like that, not after all that I have done for you.

Eban, shouting: All that you've done for me? What about what you've done to me?

Subject: Calm down, Eban. You will cause a scene.

Eban: I don't care! You can't blackmail me any more! I'm sick of it! I'm sick of you and your sordid games!

Subject: Calm down. We can discuss this rationally.

Eban: I'm going to tell, and I don't care what you do to me!

Subject: All right, then, name your price.

Eban: My price? You just don't get it, do you? I'm going to finish it. You'll never be able to touch me again.

Subject, laughing: Who will they believe, Eban? A future Chamberlain or an irrational whelp?

At this point, Eban attempted to strike the subject in the face. The subject produced a knife and stabbed Eban in the chest. As Eban fell to the ground, the subject looked around, wiped his blade on Eban's tunic and fled the scene.

I believe that this would constitute sufficient evidence against the subject. Unfortunately, we have no live witnesses to whatever crimes that the subject previously perpetrated against Eban, but the murder and my testimony above should be enough to spur the others into action.

Forever your humble servant,

K.

Afterglow

From the thoughts of Anshar Demori'on:

The Voyeurs are watching — I can feel it. They're always watching. I'll never escape the fate that Dhara Ibenkin has planned for me now.

In all truth, I don't know why I did what I did. What spurred me to such acts? Was it my father's voice, that voice that haunts my nightmares? Has he risen from the grave to torment me? Did he deceive me somehow into inflicting myself on young Eban?

Was it the Z'bri taint that runs in my veins, passed down to the Serf that would later become my father? Was it some foul trick of the Beasts? Should I seek out the Almoner of S'deyahln for answers?

I'm only making excuses. I'm the one to blame. I could've stayed my hand at any time, yet I chose not to. What I did was wrong, I know that, but I feel no remorse. At the time, I took Eban out of love; his tears mattered little to me. I shouldn't have killed him, but it was the only way to protect myself. If only I'd managed to coax Eban from the Voyeurs' eyes. Damn you, Kalina Tarakin! Will you never leave me alone?

Calm down. You're panicking. You'll need a cool head if you're to get out of this alive.

There are only two ways out of this: I can beg to stand in the Circle of the Chosen, or I can flee. If I choose to stand in the Circle, I'm at Dhara's mercy. She would turn me over to Magdalen instead, and tell Her what I did; even death wouldn't spare me the agony.

No, I'll leave, and hide in the slums of Hom. Perhaps my enemies have forgiven me what I've done to them. Seamus will protect me; I can trust Seamus. No, I doubt it; a Magdalite never forgives, nor forgets. I'll have to disguise myself, and hide my face even from the Fallen.

I'll miss young Mareta Deanakin; she was a good student. I have to leave now, without saying good bye. I should gather a few things. I'll have to leave those trinkets of Magdalen behind; She'll be able to find me through them, and they'll give away my identity. Besides, they'll be next to worthless in Hom.

A pox on you, Dhara Ibenkin!

Now is not the time for revenge. Now is not the time for answers. It's time to flee.

I need time to think. I'll seek my answers in the darkest pit of Hom, let my pain tell me what to do. I'll discover my answers in Ile Perdue.

Ile Perdue.

Intimate Questions

From a transcript of the interrogation of Mareta Deanakin:

Kalina: That's all that you're willing to tell me?

Mareta: Yes. That's all that I know.

Kalina: And you haven't seen him since that day? He didn't tell you where he was going?

Mareta: No, I don't know where he is. He's out there somewhere, but he told me nothing at all.

Chapter three: A Nation in a Nation

Great Mother,
Look after me, this night and the next;
Look to me, as you look to all of your Children,
In the hopes of building a better Nation;
Great Mother,
You are the muscle and spirit of the Nation,
And None stand above you.
- An Evan night-time prayer



A Prayer for the Future

From the writings of Aria'on, Shayla At'kin

36th Day of the Season of Rebirth, my 17th Winter.

Remembering the Beginning

It has been a long day and I am more than ready to crawl into my straw-stuffed bed and allow sleep to overtake my senses, forgetting the world for a few hours at least. Yet, it is also one of those nights where I am so tired that my body refuses to relax and sleep. So I find myself here once again, sitting huddled over a single candle for both warmth and light.

Why do I stay awake, denying myself the one thing I need the most, sleep? Blackrock, my mentor, is dead and his little village, known as Sundown, located between the cities of Westholm and Bazaar, is in turmoil.

I write this not just for myself. My journal also holds my hope for the future. Someday, I hope, I will hand this to my firstborn child as she becomes an adult. If she can read the entries that follow and still look to me as a mother and a friend, I will know that I have done the greatest of Eva's works.

Things have been changing so fast lately, it is hard to keep up. On my death-bed I will look back at these pages and see that I lived through these, the most trying of times, and share those same thoughts with the person who will carry my legacy beyond my single span. I can do no less.

Now I Lay me Down...

Blackrock was a great man. Many Winters ago he took me into his bosom and began teaching me of the world. Blackrock is... was a great Shaman, in touch with the workings of the world unlike any other Dreamer. Guided by Eva's wants and desires, Blackrock walked the spirit world as easily as he did this world of flesh so many are chained to. He conversed with spirits as easily as he scolded me after I fouled a learning. He, like his sister and brother Shaman, was the heart of rebirth and life of Vimary.

Now he is dead, and I have never felt so alone.

Sundown seems so small now. In the past few days it seems every villager has run to me with their problems. I assumed Blackrock's responsibilities, dealing with the same problems he had to deal with on a daily basis. Evans are a hardy people, that is a certainty, but the many concerns brought before me since his death have me wondering if the people of Sundown deal with any of their own problems.



Shayla At'kin Aria'on,
Evan Nurse

Shayla is a young woman on the verge of becoming a very important figure in the Evan community of Sundown. Since childhood she has been apprenticed to and raised by an elder Shaman, Blackrock. His recent passing has created a life crisis for both Shayla and her community. In response to Blackrock's passing, Shayla has decided to continue with her training on her own, going so far as to act as Sundown's Shaman though her learning is still incomplete.

However, what she lacks in knowledge she more than makes up for in common sense and confidence.

Highlights: Obsessive, Charismatic, Self-important, Helpful

Attributes: INF +1, BLD -1, KNO +1, PSY -1, WIL +1

Skills: Agriculture 2/+1, Cooking 2/0, Dreaming 1/-1, Healing 2/+1, Herbalism 1/+1, Mythology 1/+1, Read/Write (Evan) 1/+1, Ritual 1/+1

Equipment: Small home in Sundown and its trappings, bequeathed Shamanic items, journal

Of course they do. I am simply alone and bitter, and no one else is qualified to do what must be done. Granted, I am just barely qualified, and am probably assuming more responsibility and authority than I normally should, but there just is no other alternative. Death is swift and uncertain, as are its consequences for the living. Eva will never give me more than I can handle. Still though, I pray to Her for time. Time to set Sundown back on track and time to travel to Sanctuary to seek my own elevation to the rank of Shaman. Finally, I ask for time to prepare for the inevitable tests that will precede that elevation. Blackrock occasionally mentioned the tests. I can still hear his voice in my mind, scolding me with his tone if not with his carefully-chosen words — "They are not easy, Shayla. You must know that you are meant to be a Shaman, otherwise you will fail. Remember though, there is no shame in that failure. Eva and Her children are very careful, and put everyone on their intended paths."

Choices Made

Today an old family friend, Aria'on, Jamin Othil came to me asking for my expertise about spirits. He asked, "Dearest Shayla, my wife's ghost haunts my small flower garden. It is all I have left in this world, and it is my memorial to her. Please, is there anything you can do to banish her shade, so that I can make her memorial worthy of her?"

I looked into his deep crystal blue eyes. I could tell he was desperate and was not above pleading with me for my help. Jamin treated his wife with little respect in life, and I seriously doubted the flowers he was so concerned about were the memorial he claimed.

"No Jamin." I told him. "That is not my duty. Appeal to the Yagans, maybe they can help you. A Shaman does not sully her hands with death."

At that point my vision became cloudy, and a sensation much like that of falling overcame me. I struggled to stop the sensation, flailing my arms wildly to slow my phantom descent. I could do nothing except blindly shout for aid. Just as I felt my legs crumple under the force of the fall against the hard earth, I awoke from my vision.

Slowly, my sight came back to me. I was in Jamin's arms, his words desperately trying to calm me. I gathered myself, and retired back home to meditate for the rest of the day. I am still unsure why or from where the vision had originated. I am sure that the vision was due to my thoughts about Jamin and his wife, but I am unsure exactly how they are connected.

Sundown's Loss

So what is a Shaman? To be honest I am still not entirely sure. Sundown seems to think I already own the title and the right, but I know I do not. I am merely an orphaned apprentice doing nothing to dissuade their belief that I can help the community. I am a girl playing at being a respected grownup, and I hope that the Shamanic Lodge does not hear of my little farce. I do not think they would look kindly upon my efforts; deep down, however, I know this is for the best, and I must continue so that Sundown may continue life at ease.

What I do know is that the Shaman are the chosen of Eva, the Great Mother. They are Her eyes, ears and soul. They are the leaders of the Tribe, personally guiding our communities. Most importantly, a Shaman speaks with Eva's voice. They are the ones who serve as valuable liaisons between the Great Mother and the many people of the Tribe. Despite being a Shamanic apprentice for many years I have never seen Eva. It is not that I, or any other Evan, am forbidden from seeing our Fatima, it is only that Sanctuary and Bazaar are so far away and we travel so little. Evans are rarely anywhere near Her holy places, since we are tied to our fields as only we can be. The Shaman are a vital link between my people and our Fatima. Without them, we may only learn of Eva's wishes indirectly. This is the main reason I want to become a Shaman. I want to bring the love of Eva directly to the people.

On a daily basis, I stood at Blackrock's side as he helped Sundown face the trials of each new sunrise. He was a friend and advisor to every family in Sundown and many of the outlying farmsteads. He was the leader of Sundown, appointed by the Lodge and Eva Herself to manage our village. He timed the plantings and helped select what each family would grow. He solved disputes and upheld the law. Blackrock listened to the woes and ailments of the villagers, and helped them along the road to recovery. As a Shaman he was a leader, a healer, an arbitrator and much more. Blackrock was the last word on nearly any spiritual matter that went on in Sundown, which is why the people feel so much pain at his absence, and why I must step in and fill the void.

I also know Blackrock held intimate knowledge of the River of Dream and all things spiritual. He was a master ritualist, as are all Shaman. Sadly, I only know //off// Blackrock's ritual knowledge, though I did gain a good deal of understanding about Spirits and their natures. I assume that much of that learning goes on before the Lodge and other Shaman. I need to get there and complete what Blackrock started and I am continuing. There is only so long an apprentice, even a confident one, can fulfill the needs of a village like Sundown.

Beyond the Spiritual

A **Shaman** is an important part of any Evan community, but they are not the only portion that deserves attention. The Evan Tribe is the strongest on Vimary, of that there is little doubt, and our strength comes from the many different people found in the Tribe and the integral role each plays within this immense tapestry.

There are the **Matrons**. They are the aged leaders of the tribe. The Matrons stand beside the Shaman and direct the more mundane aspects of Evan life. Their knowledge is valued beyond all others' due to the simple fact that they have survived more winters than most can count. They are the mental strength behind the Evans, guiding us on steady and fruitful courses. Where a Shaman is an appointed leader (appointed by Eva, that is), a Matron is more of an inherited position. Instead of leading a village, the Matrons often concentrate on a family, or clan. Each family has one Matron to help counsel and guide the family, much as the Shaman does for the village.

If a village is especially lucky, there will be more than two or three local Matrons leading their respective families. They help make the decisions over the minutiae, the things that a Shaman cannot and should not be bothered with.

Just like the families, the clans also have a Matron to lead them. These Clan Matrons are powerful and wise women indeed. They have gone beyond leading a single family and are now leading many families at once. The Clan Matrons, many of whom reach well over sixty years of age, are some of the oldest Dreamers on Vimary.

The Precious Waters of Childbirth

Below the Matrons are the **Nurses**. It is no coincidence that the Nurses are the oldest members of the Tribe next to the Matrons. Age is an important consideration in the Evan tribe, something I know all too well due to my mere seventeen Winters. The Nurses are the mothers to all Evans. They are trained in the ways of living and bringing new life to this side of the Fold. A Shaman knows the spiritual and mystical rituals to bless and aid a birth while a Nurse is trained in the physical rituals and methods necessary to ensure a safe and easy birth.

Beyond birthing, Nurses are herbalists and healers. They know the processes and combinations of roots, berries and herbs to make valuable poultices. It is a commonly used phrase among us Evans to say that the Nurses are the 'hands of Eva.' I myself, despite my youth, am technically a Nurse. As Blackrock's apprentice he wanted to make sure that I knew about the more mundane and physical aspects of life and demanded I continue my studies and duties as a Nurse. At the time I resented all the extra work; now I would sincerely thank Blackrock's spirit for the responsibility such training prepared me for.

The Watching Eye



Drew Oth'kin Deth'on, Evan Nanny

Drew is the recognized leader of the Nannies who work in and around Bazaar. He has close ties with the Joanites, having grown up and trained with them throughout a good portion of his life. Drew is a constant optimist and is at his best when working toward a specific (but often unattainable goal). Currently, he is working with the Joanite leadership to increase patrols into the fields of Vimary and will often lead the very same patrols he helps to create. Unfortunately, the Joanites have other concerns and can only occasionally allocate manpower and resources toward Drew's goals.

Upon first meeting him, many people mistake Drew for a Joanite.

Highlights: Jovial, highly-trained, optimistic

Attributes: AGI +2, BLD +1, FIT +3, INF +1

Skills: Agriculture 2/0, Combat Sense 1/0, Dodge 2/+2, Hand-to-Hand 3/+2, Herbalism 1/0, Melee 2/+2, Streetwise 1/+1, Survival 2/0, Teaching 1/+1, Throwing 2/+2

Equipment: Sword (x9 damage), Leather Armor (AR 5), and numerous contacts in the Joanites

Alongside the Nurses are the **Nannies**. Many Nannies and Nurses are the same age, most in their late twenties. The Nannies fulfill an interesting role within the tribe, for they alone do not normally dirty their hands with the pains of birth, be it animal, plant or child. Nannies are concerned with prolonging life, and at times, are the ones to bring swift and harsh death. The Nannies are our protectors and guardians and it is said that due to their long hours in the fields and demanding training they can fight for hours on end and run for days without tiring.

Sundown is a village like many others. It is a place located out in the fields of Vimary, away from the bustling cities of Bazaar, Westholm, or Griffentowne. Villages like Sundown are bastions of civilization, islands of Dreamers. Sundown is a full day's travel away from Sanctuary and Bazaar, and as such, we do not have the luxury of the Joanite Watch or military. Of course the Watch does find its way to one of our small villages, occasionally making their way here on some infrequent "routine" patrol or tracking down some wayward Fallen, but by and large we are on our own.

Not only that, but the Evans are the only Tribe to locate the majority of our people away from the cities. This is a necessity, of course, since it allows us to be closer to the land and Eva. Thus, our Tribe is on its own (as it should be) and the Nannies make sure we are protected at all times.

Most Nannies are trained hunters and have simply modified their patience and instincts to serve the Tribe. The Nannies stand on the edges of our villages, watching for danger, and rushing to meet it if need be.

People of the Soil

The souls of our Tribe are the **Tenders**. They are some of the youngest members of the Evan tribe, though their ages run the entire gambit from young adult to those who could become Matrons themselves, and their role in the Tribe is arguably the most important, for they are the ones who work the soil. The great bounty that is produced from the earth and Eva's bosom is what makes us Evans so wealthy and strong. Blessed are the Tenders for they are those that press their hands into Eva and pull forth Her bounty.

Tenders are more than farmers though; many are also skilled foragers. Anything that grows forth from the soil and that can be consumed is the province of the Tenders, and they will stop at nothing to gain that which is necessary to keep the Nation fed.

Most Evans are Tenders and as such, they are the backbone of not only our Tribe but the entire Nation. Without the Tenders, all of Vimary would wither and die like the berry patch as winter approaches. It is a shame that the other Tribes see the Tenders as simpletons and rustics. In some ways this is true, but what the Nation too often sees as a failing is actually a virtue. Strength and a will to do the hardest work in all of Vimary is what characterizes the Tenders, yet the others refuse to realize this.

My daughter, if you decide to not follow in my footsteps as a Nurse or Shaman and instead become a Tender, I will not be happier. The Tenders are direct and noble and nothing less would be worthy of any child of mine.

I probably should not mention this, but I am becoming increasingly concerned. Despite the skill and tenacity of our Tenders, the harvests each year are becoming less and less able to feed the growing population of the Nation. Most have not noticed this; the Shaman have, I am certain, and probably a number of Matrons, but as each Winter approaches, the problem is becoming more and more obvious. Blackrock and I would stay up some nights talking of possible solutions, but somehow he would always make me feel more sure that I was exaggerating my fears.

The problem is becoming so pronounced that the Shaman have told the Tribe to mount further expeditions into the Outlands. These expeditions are not a new development; we have been delving into those shadowed lands for as long as I can remember, but the Shaman are placing more and more emphasis on these risky ventures. They tell us it is Eva's will and we are not ones to question Her motivations.

The Youngest

The **Seeds** are the final components of Eva's great plan. They are the youngest of all the Tribe, with ages comparable to the Agnites. The Seeds are our future and have a long road of learning and work ahead of them. They are also destined, however, to inherit the responsibilities of the Evans, something I can remember looking forward to as a little Seed myself.

Along with their education from the Nurses and Matrons, the Seeds are expected to work the fields with the Tenders. No Evan is without responsibility, and the Seeds are no exception. They are often given the lightest, least physical of labors.

One of the more important duties of our Tribe is bound up with our willingness to take on the great responsibilities of the other Tribes, which, in turn makes us great. We Evans raise a number of the children of the other Tribes, a task that we take very seriously since it benefits us in so many ways.

The **Crèches** are monitored by a number of Nurses and Tenders, and are a common place for the Tribe to raise both our Seeds and others. The Magdalites, Joanites and Agnites that are sent to us are referred to as the **Adopted** and are often as common in a crèche as Evan Seeds. The crèche is more than a simple drop-off for children, but a place where the most skilled and caring individuals can pool their work and resources to help raise as many children in the proper Evan way as possible. Some crèches are as small as two or three children, others are as large as forty or fifty youngsters. The size greatly depends on the size of the community, as well as the village's proximity to Bazaar. Those closest to Bazaar gain more Magdalite, Joanite and Agnite children than those villages near Griffentowne or Westholm. In places like Sundown a crèche usually is no more than an elderly couple helping raise a couple of orphaned or Adopted children.

The children from other Tribes, the Adopted, are considered Seeds until they enter puberty, at which time they are expected to return to their Tribes. At that point, we have done all that we can for them, and the best we can do is to send them off to discover Vimary on their own with a strong background in Evan values. Occasionally, one of the Adopted asks to become an Evan in truth. We accept these Adopted into our ranks as full members of the Tribe with new names and a solemn rebirth ritual to sanctify their new lives.

Barren Fields

The occasional sterile Evan is someone to be pitied and often stands outside of the guild system. They cannot bear children and must be treated gently for their frailties. These sterile Evans are known as the Forgotten, and once their sterility is realized and understood, they may never again be a full member of the Tribe. Still, they are part of us and what we represent, doing what they can to make up for their inadequacies. Many Forgotten are encouraged to travel to Bazaar and help raise the Adopted in the larger crèches. Many others are guided toward the Outlands expeditions, gathering food that is only marginally blessed by the Great Mother.

It is a shame these poor beings exist. They are Evans in name, but not in fact. I guess it is not surprising that so many Forgotten flee to Hom and the embrace of the Fallen. Birds of a feather, I guess. . .

Into the Storm

From the recollections of Aria'on, Shayla At'kin

Remembering Responsibility

I was awoken by little Nathy, the little brother to Janie Trav'on, who was heavy with child. I was not sure what hour it was, though it must have been in the wee hours of the morning. It felt like I had just fallen asleep, and I could see the open pages of my journal beside my bed.

Nathy yelled at me to hurry, his urgency growing with each moment that I let slip past. Janie was in labor and had been for some time. Nathy, nearly hysterical, could not answer my questions with any semblance of coherency. I had to assume that Janie was in severe danger.

I grabbed Blackrock's old spirit hoop and great eagle feather and a few other odds and ends that were bequeathed to me after his death. I was still a little hesitant to use those Shamanic tools, but if I was to bring the newborn into the world with the correct rituals, I knew I would need the instruments.

My hesitation about the Shamanic tools did not derive from any uncertainty about the methods of their use, though that was a small factor. Instead, my pause came from a lingering doubt that I had been able to push aside up until that moment. This was going to be the first birth in which I was both Nurse and Shaman, both master of the physical and the spiritual. This was a different matter entirely from giving advice or acting like I knew what was going on; this was the real thing, the most sacred of all Evan rituals. This would be my first true test since Blackrock's death.

As I threw everything into my haversack and pushed my feet into my boots I finally noticed that it was storming outside. Nathy, in his haste, had not closed the door to my small house and regular waves of rain angled onto the wooden floor through the gaping doorway. I clasped on my cloak, shouldered my sack, brushed the sands of sleep from my eyes, and stalked toward the doorway. Nathy continued to yell at me, though I could barely understand him. I knew he wanted to make haste, if only by his repeated pointing toward the door. As we left, I let him lead.

Forever Working

The landscape that I considered as much a part of me as my Clan was almost entirely alien to me as the weather swirled about. The slightly rolling hills, their ground tightly packed as if pushed upon by a great hand, were barely visible due to the driving rain and darkness. There were no trees for me to rest under, of course, since that kind of obstacle to farming had been largely pulled up generations ago, except in certain areas to demarcate field boundaries or give some fields shelter from the wind.

Nathy and I jogged along the slowly winding dirt path; no wider than a man, it connected Sundown with a number of other small villages and farmsteads. The black stone paths of the World Before did not weave their ways through the fields except in a few isolated cases, and so we Evans had to rely on well traveled, tightly packed dirt roads. Unfortunately the weather had certain intentions and I pushed through mud instead of walked atop dirt. The small Trav'on Clan farmstead which Janie and Nathy called home was a little over an hour away, but the conditions doubled the time involved.

The rain continued and my state worsened, since in my haste I had not grabbed the correct clothing. Instead of my treated and cured cloak, I had grabbed my festival cloak, which was, by then, soaked through and through. If nothing else at least the howl of the wind and the incessant rain stopped Nathy from his incomprehensible screaming. I guess I should not have blamed him; his sister was in distress and in a very vulnerable state. He was worried for her safety. So was I.

I trudged along behind Nathy toward the Trav'on homestead, hoping that his youth had made him overstate the desperation of the situation.

The Pains of Birth

I arrived in the farmhouse with only a few moments to spare. Before I even stepped foot in the house, I knew things were going to be rough. Janie's screams could be heard well down the path, despite the pounding and crashing of the heavy rain. She was in a considerable amount of pain. Pain, of course, was healthy and to be expected in any birth. What poor Janie was experiencing, however, was not.

Her family stood at her side, some of the women muttering prayers and her father looking pale. None of the children were in sight, which was a good thing, though the entire family looked to be frozen in fear. I had little time to think. I dropped my cloak unceremoniously on the floor and began pulling tools out of my haversack without even paying attention to what I brought forth.

Before actually beginning the birth, I had one ritual to complete on my own that I had learned years earlier from Blackrock. I quickly entered a trance, calling for guidance from Den Mother, the totem of the Evans. I was granted with an insight, not a vision exactly, but more than enough to know that Janie was heavy with twins and that the second child, in some way, deserved special attention.

Drawing on memories of my lessons, I brushed Blackrock's feather across Janie's naked and sweating form. I brought the feather close to my face and counted the number of sweat droplets that had gathered along the edges. The seven good-sized droplets indicated the spiritual readiness of the child to be brought forth. The time was at hand.

Just then Carli, a Nurse and Janie's sister, burst through the kitchen door with a number of towels soaked in warm water. I knew Carli's aid would be crucial since she seemed to be the only member of the family with enough sense to be doing anything.

Carli and I worked through what was left of the night. A few hours later Janie's legs spread and her first child began entering the world. I had already informed Janie and the family that part of the reason for the excruciating pain was that Janie was heavy with twins, and that they were trying to push through simultaneously. In time, Carli aided me as I maneuvered one of the unborn children, still within Janie, toward the fore and helped guide it out. More blood than was safe gushed forth along with the infant. Janie was in danger but at this point we could not stop.



The Arrival

Carli bathed the first child as I brought forth the second. I knew from my communion with Den Mother that this newborn was important in some way, and that I wanted to be the one to help guide it into the World of Flesh. As the second came into the world I saw why I had been drawn to it. While the small boy's color was good and arms strong, his left leg was horribly malformed, twisted like some hangman's tree. It was a horrible sight, not only for the child, but for myself as well.

A few years before Blackrock had taught me a secret that the Shaman held within their ranks. As masters of the balance between the spiritual and physical, they knew the many signs of purity and corruption that graced our world. Blackrock told me of the duty all Shaman share in protecting the purity and removing that corruption. I still remember how he stressed that it was because of love that we removed the degenerate from the grace of the Goddess. He told me that Evans are led by their heart, and none more so than a Shaman performing what Blackrock called the *Culling*.

In my naïveté I did not quite understand the importance of his message. Now, with the still-red newborn cradled in my arms I understood. My mind raced. I knew what I had to do.

To this day, I still am not sure if it was my own will that guided my hand or that of Eva Herself. I watched as my right hand came forth and covered the tiny baby's face. With one swift motion I gripped his head and jerked it quickly to the left, snapping the child's leathery spine. It was a quick act, one that I was sure neither Janie, nor Carli, nor any of the family saw.

I had Culled the child. His leg was physical evidence that his soul was impure. Like the Beasts that take a Dreamer's form and roam the nights, physical deformity reflects spiritual imperfection. The Shaman know this. They also know that the spiritually impure need to be put out of their misery as quickly as possible, preventing them from hurting themselves or the Nation.

It was my love for Janie and for the Nation that guided my hand.

I quietly announced to the family that the child was stillborn, that there was nothing I could do and that I was sorry.

I thank Eva every day that Janie lived, along with at least one of her children.

Realities Hidden

From the writings of Aria'on, Shayla At'kin

4th Day of the Season of Life, my 17th Winter.

Remembering the other worlds.

Since the day I Culled Janie's child, things have begun to change. It is as if that twisted little leg was a mirror that allowed me to look directly back at myself and then into my soul. I did not see it all at once, but as time has gone on, I now realize that I am growing stronger and stronger in my need to understand the River of Dream. Maybe I am finally ready to become a Shaman and travel to Sanctuary.

Every night in my dreams I see a great bear, sometimes gray, sometimes brown, rear up and encompass all that I see. Its form is massive and on the periphery of my vision I see its great paws come down and embrace me. I still am unsure if the paws are part of an attack or a caring touch, for I wake up just as the first pitch-black claw touches my dreaming body.

It is a sign. I am communing with the Den Mother, totem of Eva. Blackrock told me that, in time, this would happen, especially after I had begun to look for her on my own for the first time. "Den Mother," he said "loves all Evans and all Evans know of her, but the totem takes special note of those beginning their walk toward the Shamanic Lodge. Eventually, she will come to you and greet you as one of her own."

Den Mother is a side of Eva that few have the opportunity to explore. I am certainly privileged, and Eva must know how grateful I am for such a gift. Den Mother is a bear totem, venerable, and undoubtedly more powerful than any other totem that sails on the currents of Dream. She is the embodiment of nurturing love, the greatest thing a person can feel for another. Den Mother looks upon the Evans much as Eva Herself looks upon Her tribe, as cubs to be protected and cared for. Den Mother's great bulk and boundless courage protect all Evans as we Dream.

I am sure that in my dreams I am communing with an emissary of Den Mother. With each dream I awake refreshed. As time passes and I continue meeting her in the Dreaming, though no words are spoken, I know my way of looking upon the world is changing. Den Mother has been slowly teaching me what spirituality is, and the role of the River of Dream in my own life.

I no longer see the physical world and the River of Dream as two entities, but rather continuations of one vast whole. I think of the two as a pond. Above the water line is a vast, thriving world. Below the waters, though we cannot see from the air, there is an amazing place of diversity and vibrancy. Below the water and above the water the environments seem to be totally separate, but in reality they are part of the same world. What affects life below the water affects the air, and vice versa. True understanding and appreciation only comes when the entire picture is appreciated, not just one portion of it.

Every tribal is something to be protected at all costs, even if it means my life. Den Mother has taught me that the Evans are my children and I am their mother. There is nothing I would not do for them. Moreover, with the knowledge I now hold I know what is best for my children. Some decisions, like the Culling, are difficult, but must be made for the good of both those directly involved and the Nation as a whole.

Along with my dreams of Den Mother I have still been having the waking dreams where I am falling. The visions are intermittent and unexpected, but I am starting to piece the dream together, bit by bit.

I crash through a snow drift and fall for some time, only to land in a darkened cave. My legs broken under me, I scream out in pain as I slowly crawl about the dusty floor of the cave. Eventually, my eyes adjust to the blackness and just as I am sure I see movement in one corner, the vision ends.

These visions feel much like those of Den Mother, but there is some powerful difference in the source itself. Someone or something is trying to warn me of something; I am sure of it. Maybe the Shaman at the Lodge will be able to help me discover the meaning of such visions.

A Line Crossed?

From the writings of Aria'on, Shayla At'kin

6th Day of the Season of Life, my 17th Winter.

Remembering danger.

Even with Den Mother's love within me, I still question my judgment. It's not about whether I think the Culling was appropriate or not; I am still sure the act was necessary. What I question is if my actions were appropriate. I am not a Shaman, merely a Nurse that was once apprenticed to a Shaman. Did I have the right to act upon a secret passed on to me in confidence? Did I have any inkling of spiritual ability that I am now sure is necessary to properly conduct a ritual such as the Culling?

Will I be punished if the Shamanic Lodge discovers my act? Dear Eva, could this be cause for my *banishment*? Please tell me these are only the fears of a scared little girl.

My doubts in myself remind me of the **Amber Fold**. They are a group within the Evans and are universally reviled by the Tribe. For whatever reason, they have forsaken Eva as their Mother and instead perform pagan rituals that defile their own bodies and the ground where they sleep.

The Amber Fold

Key Members: Carli Trav'on

Gathering Place: Duskfall Forest and fields of Vimary

Goal: To worship the Goddess in place of the Fatimas

Antagonists: Joanite military, Evan Nannies and Shaman

The Amber Fold is a cult composed almost entirely of Evans. Due to the distance they live from the Fatimas, and the fact that none have ever come into contact with Eva in any meaningful way, they have come to the conclusion that She is not the entity She claims to be. Instead, the Amber Fold has taken to worshipping the Goddess directly, going so far as to refer to the Fatimas as impostors.

Not surprisingly, the rest of the Nation, and particularly the Evans, hate the Amber Fold. The cult has developed a number of subtle signs and gestures to identify members, and has gone out of its way to remain as hidden as possible, worshipping the Goddess in the shadows of the Duskfall Forest far from prying eyes. The only reason they have not been destroyed outright is due to other issues taking up the time and energy of the Shaman and the Council. The Amber Fold is often seen as the least of their problems.

Relations: occasional contacts with the Fallen and Squats

Blackrock believed that the members of the cult have never had the fortune to see the Fatimas walk amongst their followers, and so fill their hearts with doubt rather than with Eva's love. These heretics are confused; their blasphemy is anathema to us, and is one of the great motivations for me to become a Shaman. I will bring Eva's love to the people of the Tribe so that their hearts know nothing but love, and doubt will have no place to rest.

I have heard that Eva has found it in Her heart to forgive those of the Amber Fold who apologize for their actions, banishing them from Vimary rather than killing them outright. I hope, if I too am in the wrong, that I can receive at least that much kindness.

Strength in Numbers

From the Recollections of Aria'on, Shayla At'kin

Remembering friendship

I have begun my journey to Bazaar. A small foot-bound caravan, consisting of three Yagans, a Dahlian Guide of some repute named Brehnsun, and a Joanite were returning from farther along the road toward Westholm. They stopped for a short time in Sundown to replenish their supplies. When I saw the black-clad Yagans I once again experienced my vision of the cave. This time I saw the movement in the corner just a little more clearly; to my astonishment, it appeared as though ropes or hands were writhing about on their own. I knew, then, that I needed to travel to Sanctuary with this caravan. I hailed the members, told them of my intention and quickly gathered up supplies for the journey.

It seems like the group I am traveling with is remarkably subdued. I did not go out of my way, at first, to pierce the silence that they maintained, and happily walked at their sides unbothered by chatter. It gave me some time to think back on Sundown and my life there. If I were a betting woman, I would say something important has happened to my traveling companions, especially to the younger Yagan. In contrast the Dahlian guide was full of jest and innuendo, but I felt drawn to find out what had happened.

Differences

I walked in silence and away from the others for a long time until Robyn walked up to my side and introduced herself.

"Do you mind if I walk with you for a time?" the dark-haired girl asked. I slightly shook my head but pointedly avoided eye contact with her. I had grown up my entire life in and around Evan company and was concerned about making some social blunder. I let her lead the conversation.

"Aria'on, have you heard much news from Bazaar?" I took note that she used my clan name in lieu of my personal one. She was either well taught or exceptionally polite.

"No, Verkin, I have not," I responded, still staring at the dust kicked up by our boots. "Most of my time I spend tending to my duties in Sundown. I am a Nurse there and am hoping this journey will end with my elevation to Shaman."

"Hmm. Then I suppose you have not heard of a Shaman named Broken Foot?"

I had, and I responded accordingly. "From what I know, Broken Foot is a well-regarded Shaman who has been feuding with one of your Tribe-mates, though I cannot remember her name."

"Anny Verkin Lanig'on — my grandmother." Robyn reminded me with a challenging look.

"Yes, that was it." I paused to collect my thoughts and give her a chance to continue; she held her tongue and I decided to continue. "My mentor told me he had sometimes had contact with Broken Foot, a Shaman of vast repute, even outside of Eva's chosen. Broken Foot is an expert in the River of Dream and has been arguing with your Lanig'on for some time over the nature of spirits and ghosts, or some such. Blackrock, my mentor, seemed to be frustrated that even Broken Foot could not convince the Lanig'on."

Robyn nodded her affirmation. "You have most of it. I fear I have words of death for you. Broken Foot is dead, found within the streets of Hom. Your Shaman in their Lodge are accusing my grandmother, Anny, of murdering the Shaman over their feud." She looked over at me and our eyes met for but the briefest of instants.

It took me some time to understand the gravity of what the young Yagan, Robyn, had just imparted to me. Broken Foot was a friend of Blackrock's and I had heard my mentor speak of him a number of times. Now even the friends of my mentor were falling under Baba Yaga's grip, and there was nothing I could do about it. Somehow, despite adamantly wanting to deny everything Robyn had just told me, I knew it for fact — or close to. I felt that Robyn would not lie about such matters.

"Shayla, may I call you that?" I nodded, trying to concentrate on the conversation and push my emotions aside. "Shayla, Anny Lanig'on did not do what your Shaman accuse her of. We are the tribe of death, but that does not mean we murder when we please. Far from it. Faide, the Old One I travel with, is very knowledgeable and knows. . . things. She told me some time ago while we traveled that it was not time for Broken Foot to die, that it was a murder most heinous. His death is a sin in our eyes as much as yours."

"I see." was all I could respond. "If your Anny did not murder Shaman Broken Foot, who did?"

"I don't know, Shayla. But I do know that it was not at her hand or by her behest. If you do indeed become a Shaman, please, Shayla, know that this rift is good for neither the Yagans nor the Evans. Will you do that?"

I met her eyes on my own accord. "Yes, Robyn. I will."

Our friendship blossomed at that moment. Though I did not get to know the others all that well, even the other Evans in the caravan, Robyn and I whiled the hours away discussing all manner of things, from spirits to fashionable tattoos. She was remarkably witty and intelligent for her age.

Reflections

Speaking with Robyn makes me think back on my life in Sundown and realize just how lucky I am.

I was born to the At'kin family of the Aria'on Clan. In all honesty, I am very proud of my family, my mother, brothers and sisters, but it is to my Clan that I hang must of my pride. Like most Evans I will often list my Clan name before my personal or family name. This is due in large part to practicality. The Evans are huge when compared to the other Tribes, and there are just too many family names to keep up with. The nine clans of the Evan Tribe are static though, and it is easier for a Dreamer I just met to relate to my Clan rather than my first names. So, my Clan forms a good deal of the identity I adopt.

I grew up in the At'kin family in Sundown, which no one outside of Sundown will ever recognize. Along with me, my three sisters and two brothers made our mother's life very busy. My father died when I was three, and only Ellen, the eldest of the At'kin children, has any meaningful memories of him.

3. Word of Eva

I know it may be horrible to say this, but I am glad I lost father rather than mother. If I had grown up in the Tribe without a mother I would have been a pariah. The Evans look down on such children, often breaking up a family with no mother and redistributing the children to stronger families.

Besides, from what I was last told, my father returned to his mother's clan about a year before his death to aid a large crËche there. I like to think of him raising and attending to little Magdalites and Agnites like he didn't have a chance to do for me.

I valued my childhood and adolescence, especially my time with my mother (Baba Yaga, guide her true). As a Seed, and later as a Tender, I worked with my brothers and sisters and the other people of my age in Sundown's fields. We maintained a good number of fields for the number of people that worked in those days. As a group the Seeds and Tenders collectively farmed the land, and it was our responsibility to do what was required and to give over our harvest to the passing Dahlian Caravans for the good of the Nation.

It is our duty, as it has always been. Eva is the strength of the Nation. It is through Her that we grow the grain, slay the venison, birth the children and act as the living bridge between Flesh and Spirit. The other Tribes are necessary in their own little ways, but none form the bulk and body of the Nation as Eva does.

I digress.

Many seasons ago a Matron that lost her family to rampaging feral dogs went mad. She demanded that the Nation yield her a plot of land to do with as she would. She said she was tired of being the Nation's slave. She demanded that Eva and the Fatimas give her the birthright she deserved.

Sundown did not take kindly to such ignorance. Blackrock called upon the spirits to punish the mad woman (I cannot remember her name for the life of me, only that she was a Wild'on) and with a simple gaze struck her down. Blackrock never explained to me how he did such a thing. I just assumed that it was Eva's will directed through him.

Through the Fields

From the writings of Aria'on, Shayla At'kin

20th Day of the Season of Life, my 17th Winter.

Remembering the journey.

These fields that we pass through are amazing. All through the day we travel along a well-worn path, past a number of small Evan settlements, not unlike Sundown — little places, with no more than four or five homes and buildings clustered around each other. Surely, like Sundown, there are twice that number of homesteads out in the surrounding terrain that are considered part of the community. All told, there are probably just over ten families in one of these communities, including the homesteads. Each family probably has seven or eight members, making the community number some eighty or ninety people.

Funny, Sundown always seems so confining while I am there. Yet, from a distance these villages that are almost exactly like my home look wide and open.

I shared my thoughts with Robyn and she agreed. Though she does not hail from a village like my own she told me that any place can seem small after you have traveled the width and breadth of Vimary. She is quite right.

Watching the Wilds

From the writings of Aria'on, Shayla At'kin:

26th Day of the Season of Life, my 17th Winter.

Remembering atrocity.

The village we camped outside of, softly illuminated by the flickering of our dying campfire, was called Hollyflower. Last week I heard word from a Dahlian caravan that Hollyflower was attacked by roving Gek'roh. The Nannies were away, helping another village that had been recently attacked by the same foul beasts, and were unable to return in time. Half the village died by the claws and teeth of the beasts and all the children were defiled and left to die.

I had to turn my eyes away from the silent village, but a sort of macabre fascination was overcoming me, and I was ashamed of it. The death of the Gek'roh was little consolation. Eva's tribe lost some of our own just a few days ago to the unnatural machinations of the Beasts. Lives are too precious to just throw away and Hollyflower will probably take years to recover from the slaughter.

Eva cannot stand to hear the screams of children, and it pains me greatly to have to endure year after year of these type of stories. It was through Her intervention that Hollyflower's Nannies returned before the entire village was in ruins, but it was too late. The blood of innocent Evans stained the precious soil that they cared for so deeply. Yes, the Nannies chased off the Gek'roh, though not before more of Eva's children fell under the vicious claws of the Z'bri. The damage had been done.

I heard that, when it was all over, what was left of Hollyflower wailed in anguish for three days and my heart wished to take up that cry now. Three days and nights the remaining villagers cried, to the point of exhaustion. It was only the arrival of Shaman sent from Sanctuary that finally ended the pain and began the healing and rebuilding. I wiped away silent tears as they cascaded down my face. I did my best to hide my anguish, not wanting to explain my emotions to the Yagans or the Caravan at this time. I could not bring myself to talk to Robyn; my sadness was for Eva and Her Tribe alone.

It is very hard to be Evan at times. We must rely on ourselves. There were no Pillars to rush to Hollyflower's aid. There were no Dancers to console the survivors. Eva's closest Sisters, the Fates, were in Hollyflower in spirit, but little more. It is sometimes very lonely being an Evan. We endure our hardships and joy within our own Tribe, often shunned and ignored by the other six unless they wish for our hospitality.

Eva is probably cross with me for the bitterness in my heart. I need to learn to love unconditionally as She does.

Hollyflower was silent the next morning. As we got ready to leave I saw a few children playing in the distance, though I could also see that the structures they played around were all ruined in one form or another. I wonder how far poor Hollyflower has come in healing? I think about asking the Caravan to make a stop at Hollyflower but hold my thoughts to myself, for fear of crossing the revered old one, Faide.

I vow upon my return, after I am a Shaman, to help Hollyflower heal both emotionally and spiritually. It is the least I can do for ignoring them now. Eva forgive me.

Dark and Deep Emotion

From the Recollections of Aria'on, Shayla Atkin:

Remembering Welcoming.

Finally! I have arrived on the island of Sanctuary. I now know why Eva's chosen place is named what it is. It is a wondrous place. It is certainly hard to put into words. Things grow here that I could never have imagined. Plants sprout from every inch of ground and when the wind blows low over the earth the green carpet that covers Sanctuary seems to come alive. The plants dance, I am sure of it! Insects and birds in a thousand-thousand colors and varieties dart across the blue sky, adding a brilliance and motion to the sky that makes it even more beautiful. This is paradise.

As for my companions who were so kind as to escort me to this land, I left them behind in Bazaar after saying my farewells. I was particularly sad to see Robyn go and asked her to return to Sundown after some time to see how I was faring. She promised to do so.

The caravan's final destination was the center of the city itself, and my own small road was not too long for me to tread alone. Besides, they were not Evans, and though all Tribes may share in the splendor of Sanctuary and Lai, they are not encouraged to do so. As beautiful as Sanctuary is, most Tribals do not realize that it is a place of serious work and labor, not a place for simple visitation or sight-seeing. This much, at least, Blackrock taught me many years ago in preparation for my coming. It saddens me that he can not be here to see my eyes as they fly from one magnificent work of Eva to another. It would have made him so happy.

To make my way to the Sanctuary Temple, home of Eva, I followed the road directly from Bazaar. I will always remember the sight of the great blooming structure of the Temple as I walked toward it, the road flanked on each side by an intricate network of canals. A few buildings marked more Evan communities, though these structures were noticeably larger than the ones I saw on my journey. Obviously, there are more Evans here than anywhere else in Vimary.

It really was a beautiful day.

A New Beginning

As I took my first step onto the Sunblessed Peninsula, two armored warriors seemed to materialize directly from the many trees that straddled the bridge. The Nannies asked my name and my intentions and made slow circles around me, sizing me up, as I stood there silent and unmoving.

After a few minutes I saw movement on the periphery of my vision, and a well-built man came forth from between the trees. He was dressed in a great fur cloak, even though the weather was warm enough to make my brow slightly slick with sweat. His head was entirely shaven, with a considerable number of tattoos across his bald skin. Everything he wore or carried was made of wood or leather.

"Good afternoon, Shaman's apprentice, little Blackrock." He greeted me heartily. I was confused as to how he knew who I was, but I continued in good faith.

"Good day to you, Evan." I nodded back to the man.

"My name is Keeton Cov'on, a Shaman and a former friend of your mentor, Blackrock. We probably should begin as soon as possible, but I am sure you are tired from your journey. It was a good one, I suppose?" He cocked his head slightly to note the question and I nodded quietly in response.

Keeton took my hand and led me away from the Nannies. When I looked back they were nowhere to be found, no doubt melded again with the underbrush.

"You have come far, little Blackrock," he said. "That you made it this far with no one to lead you is testament to your desire and love for Eva. This is good. This is very good. Much of the Lodge and the Circle will be quite pleased that you undertook the last leg on your own. Yes, yes, I know you are surprised that I speak of the 'last leg.' Well, Shayla, know this: you have spent the better part of your life under the tutelage of another Shaman. That was where your true training occurred, and all the Lodge has to do at this point is discover whether your training was thorough enough. Blackrock was greatly respected here, and many have high hopes for you. Come. If you are ready, we can begin."

Before he was done speaking the periphery of my vision began to cloud and I could barely see a mass of shapes moving just to the sides of my vision. I concentrated and tried to ignore the vision, sure it was a continuation of the cave dreams I had experienced so many times before. Just knowing that the vision came to me here told me that my destiny rested on this island.

"This is my place," I announced quietly to myself.

"We shall see," he responded, to my surprise.

The Grounded

His pace quickened again, and I was forced to stumble and run just to keep from being dragged by his powerful arms. I could not see where we were going, it all moved so fast.

"It is a good thing that you made your own way here," Shaman Cov'on continued. "However, this independence can be your undoing as well. You have no mentor, no teacher for the last few and crucial stages. If Blackrock were still with Eva and away from Baba Yaga's embrace then he would stand at your side. Now. . ." He stopped walking abruptly and I tripped over my own feet in an effort not to run into him. I looked up at the wall of a man as I struggled to my feet.

"Aria'on Shayla At'kin, will you take me as your Mentor for this, your final testing? I am Cov'on, Keeton Ta'kin. I have no spirit-name but I am prepared to lead you through your final testing if you accept me. I am ready. Are you?"

I was stunned. I remember distinctly trying to stammer out my reply three times, yet each time all I could communicate was a pathetic bleating like some confused lamb. I now realized that Keeton Cov'on was a Shaman who served the matters of the Tribe as a whole. Blackrock told me that he greatly admired this type of Shaman. Instead of devoting their lives immediately to matters of spiritual importance, they served the tribe as Scribes and ambassadors, working closely with the Circle and leadership of the Evans. In a willful act of penitence for some wrongful act, these 'Grounded,' as they are called, deny the true love of Eva that they could feel to help pay the spiritual fine for an act they are ashamed of. Not all Shaman who do wrong are expected to perform such an act, and those that do are not allowed a spirit-name until they fully re-enter Eva's love.



Keeton Ta'kin Cov'on, Grounded Evan Shaman

Keeton is the *de facto* leader of the Grounded, a sect of repentant Shaman who have dedicated their lives to undoing some specific wrong they committed earlier in their lives. Keeton once stood by as his best friend died in writhing agony from the ravages of a Gek'roh attack. At the time, Keeton was terrified of contracting a dark disease from touching the wound. In his grief, later, he gave up his Shamanic name and has dedicated his life to venerating Eva by strengthening the Shamanic Lodge any way he can. Keeton has been Grounded for well over nine years, longer than any other existing Shaman.

Highlights: Dedicated, Spiritual, Selfless, Sorrowful

Attributes: AGI -1, BLD +2, CRE +1, FIT +2, INF -1, PSY +3, WIL +1

Skills: Animal Care 1/0, Athletics 2/+2, Combat Sense 1/0, Craft (Carving) 1/+1, Dreaming 3/+3, Gambling 1/0, Healing 2/0, Human Perception 1/+3, Intimidate 1/+2, Lore (Evan) 2/0, Ritual 2/0, Speak (Shamanic) 2/0, Synthesis (Anima, Euthanize) 2

Equipment: Walking staff, simple robes, various Shamanic trinkets (feathers, hoops, chalk)

Few outside of the Tribe know of the Grounded, since they are both a source of shame and pride for the Tribe. The shame arises from the fact that the Grounded are a reminder that even the Shaman make mistakes they must pay for. Similarly, the Grounded are a source of quiet Tribal pride due to the fact that they are cognizant of their wrongdoing and have enough love in their heart to realize they must be punished. Since the grounded are Shaman, no one can punish them except themselves. Their repentance is entirely their own.

All this flashed through my head in an instant and it did not take long for me to again take Keeton Cov'on's hand.

"Blackrock admired the Grounded for your sacrifice. I admire you for your honesty. I would be proud for you to serve as my mentor in Blackrock's place, as I am sure he would be as well."

Rituals

From the writings of Aria'on, Shayla At'kin

28th Day of the Season of Life, my 17th Winter.

Remembering pain.

Today is the day that I am to go before the Circle, the council of elders of the nine clans that compose the Evans. I am scared.

At Keeton Cov'on's behest I went through a long ritual purification in order to cleanse my body and soul before I stepped before the Circle. The cleansing ritual was longer than any I have been part of before. Certainly, I had participated in the Rite of the Welcoming, where the innocence of newborns was ensured and their spirit hardened in preparation for their lives ahead. The Rite of the Welcoming involves scrubbing the small child with a whetstone until their young skin is raw and bleeding and then removing the foreskin if they are male. The dead skin is ritually cleansed in sacred waters from Lai and Sanctuary and then mixed with some Teaberries to make a sacred draught. The mother and aunts of the child then sip the draught, communing spiritually with the child as they do so. What is left is then fed to the infant, reinvigorating the newborn spiritually as its own flesh sustains it physically. It is a beautiful ritual, really.

What I went through, though, bordered on the injurious. I was woken from sleep and hurried into a darkened room where my hands and feet were bound, and my hands chained above my head. For what seemed to be the entire day I hung there, with nothing to remind me I was alive except the pressure on my muscles. The room was dark, no sounds emanated from anywhere, and I could not smell or touch anything. I drifted into and out of sleep, often confusing my nightmares with the dark reality that encompassed me. There was nothing separating dream from flesh.

In time I heard someone open a door and enter the room. I did not see the door open, nor the person enter, though I could hear all that was going on around me. Then all sound ceased. I heard nothing more. Time seemed to drag on for eternity until, finally, a sound scraped against my ears, welcome in its harshness. A female voice from somewhere in the room boomed forth, low and harsh, but powerful. "Who are you?"

"Aria'on, Shayla At'kin." I slowly answered back. I was exhausted.

"I will ask you once more. Answer me correctly and we can continue. Fail and all that you have endured will be for naught. One more time, who are you?"

I thought for some time, not feeling rushed in any way.

"I am Eva." I finally answered.

For a good deal of time I did not hear an answer and slowly began to panic. Just as I was about to amend my answer I heard the voice come forth once again, this time from a different spot, though I never heard the woman move.

"Little one, you are certainly conceited, but your answer is acceptable. Your soul is pure." She then left me in the darkness once again. If I had passed, my situation was no better than it was before she came.

The Rite of Cleansing continued some time afterwards. I think I was asleep when two Evans entered the room and began scrubbing my naked body. Somewhere along the line I had lost all my clothes and I hung in purity, my body as Eva made it. At least I finally had light flooding in from an open door. I could see that the room was no larger than my small bedroom back in Sundown; there was barely room enough for me, let alone the woman who had questioned me.

While I hung, still chained by my feet and wrists, the two Evans worked up and down my form, scrubbing with porous rocks and drenching my body in bone-chillingly cold water. All the while they whispered a chant that I only caught parts of:

*Sweet Mother take the taint of this girl's soul,
To a place only suitable for the Beasts,
A place a Dreamer would never survive,
A place where no Dreamer would want to survive...
... with boundless love.
Show her your ways, protect her from her follies,
And guide her as your Tribe guides the bounty of your Breasts.
... help her show the world your love,
For blessed are those who share your dreams,
In the Flesh and in Dream,
She is your humble servant, loyal until final breath,
Wishing only for your peace.*

With the end of their scrubbing and chanting, a bowl was brought forth before my sagging face. I had barely the energy to raise my head and look into the eyes of the Dreamer who offered me the watery paste. Before me stood the form of Keeton Cov'on. He whispered to me that the Rite was nearly finished and that I had only to consume the paste to be done with it.

I hungrily slurped down the paste as Keeton tipped it toward my lips. Near what felt like death, I gorged myself upon the gray paste, alternately eating and drinking the viscous liquid until my innards ached from the pressure of the food. I had little control over my body as Keeton tipped more and more of the paste into my greedy mouth. I defecated onto myself and continued to consume like a starved beast. I had never eaten so much, so quickly, in my entire life.

Only later did I learn from Keeton that the paste was made of the breast milk of Eva and of saliva and regurgitated food from each living Shaman. With their blessing, I had truly been reborn.

Before the Circle

As an aspiring Shaman, I entered into the Circle Hall, bathed, re-clothed and reinvigorated. The Hall stands in view of the great Sanctuary Temple, and through the many open-air windows one can see and smell the beauty of the Temple. I do not know if I will ever be able to enter into the Temple, but I should feel honored just to be able to stand on my own merit before the Circle, the leaders of our venerable Tribe.

The meeting hall of the Circle is an imposing place. The entire building is composed of great trees that have been coaxed, through Synthesis, herbalism and love to intertwine with each other and create an enclosed structure. In a very real way, the Meeting Hall is alive.

I was brought before the Circle in the central hall. I stood upon the earth and dirt floor surrounded by representatives of the nine clans. At each station, set an equal distance from her neighbors, a Clan Matron sat or knelt upon the ground, entirely nude, with no blanket or cloth to lie between her and the life-giving Earth. Each Matron was attended by two or three servants who wore loincloths, since they were not of station to be able to directly touch such sacred ground as that of the floor of the central hall.

I was here, before so many powerful women, in order to gain favor from the Circle, the political and familial leaders of the Evans. Beyond the Matrons of the Circle there is only the Shamanic Lodge, and even then the two are supposed to share power and leadership. The Circle, with aid from the Grounded, is to lead in matters of the Flesh while the Shamanic Lodge is supposed to lead in areas of the Spiritual.

I had to first pass inspection by the Circle before I could make my way to the Lodge.

The Nine

In turn, each of the nine Clan Matrons regarded me. I felt like a special piece of jewelry, highly regarded and respected, maybe even admired, but still simply a thing to be evaluated and appraised. I was taking up the Circle's valuable time, and I could feel it in many of their stares and gazes.

*The first Matron to speak in my favor was that of my own clan, the **Aria'on**. We are some of the most powerful leaders, and it set my fluttering heart at ease to see that they were the first to approve of me. I am proud to be Aria'on, because we stand for all that makes Eva beautiful. The Aria'on embody the best of growth and tolerance, and many of my own Clan can be found in the burgeoning village of Griffentowne. Someday, through our leadership, we will make Griffentowne as great as Bazaar itself.*

*The next to sound an affirmation was the **Chop'on**. Once simply a family known as the Chopin, the Chop'on grew to such stature that Eva Herself blessed them with a seat on the Circle. Now, the Chopin family dominate the Chop'on clan, but they are not the only family to be found within its midst. The Chop'on are good friends of the Aria'on and some whisper it is due to Aria'on support that the Chop'on came into being.*

Quickly following the Chop'on Matron in her support was the **Pal'on** Matron. I could see a hard glare coming from the Aria'on Matron toward the Pal'on Matron, as if my own Clan Matron was unsure the Pal'on would support my Ascent to the Lodge. The Pal'on are known for their abilities in numerous rituals, both Shamanic and Matriarchal, and it was probably they who cleansed me.

The **Cov'on** also added their voices to my Ascent. The Aria'on Matron nodded her head ever so slightly, and I am sure that I was the only one who saw it. The Cov'on are the Clan with the most experience in the River of Dream and have the closest ties to Den Mother. I was happy to have their support, though without the maneuverings of my own Clan or the support of Keeton, I am not sure I, as a masterless apprentice, would have gained their approval.

Things fell quiet as no more supporters spoke up. I was stunned. Why did not all the clans support my Ascent? Keeton never prepared me for the possibility that the Circle would reject me. I was prepared to possibly be refused by the Lodge, but to not even pass the judgment of the Nine would be a great failure on my part.

Eva forgive me once again, but I felt anger toward my Tribe. I felt betrayed by those who could not see how badly I wanted to be a Shaman. I was bitter that they could not see how I would add to the Tribe as a whole, given the opportunity to become one of Eva's Chosen. This did not feel like my failure, this felt like the failure of my Tribe.

Thoughts like those were probably why the other clans hesitated. I hoped so, at least.

Finally, the silence was broken by the Matron of the **Wild'on**. She quietly announced her support of my Ascent and I am sure she could see the tear as it rolled down my cheek. The Wild'on dominate the environs around Westholm and though they are a small and removed clan, they were recognized as powerful leaders, on par with my own clan.

With the Wild'on support, another voice, this one from the **Tal'on** Matron, pierced the silence. The Tal'ons are known throughout the Tribe for being even more removed than the Wild'ons. The Tal'ons are mysterious and their motivations, it is joked, shift with the winds of Lai. I still remember the eyes of the Tal'on Matron as she looked at me, as though she looked directly into my soul. It was an uncomfortable gaze that was made even more disconcerting when her eyes narrowed and a sly grin traced across her face, as if she knew a secret I did not know, even about myself.

Again, quiet fell over the central hall. It was time for the dissenting Clans to speak up.

Not surprisingly, the **Trav'on**, the rivals of my own Clan, raised a powerful 'No,' that continued to resonate in my head well after the Matron had turned her attentions elsewhere. The Trav'on are some of the most conservative and fanatical members of the Tribe, and are as much leaders of the Evans as the Aria'on or the Wild'on. Though I did not expect to gain their favor, their dissent hurt nonetheless.

Then, to what I was sure was the surprise of everyone gathered, most of all myself, the two remaining clans nodded, showing grudging support of my ascent, not the dismissal I had expected.

The **Gravkin**, elevated from family status like the Chop'on and considered the closest to the Tenders, had apparently decided at the last moment not to speak against me, instead silently adding their support. Similarly, the **Deth'on**, known for their association with the Pillars and for their choice to live in and around Bazaar, decided in favor of my Ascent. Both Clans' silent support was a powerful gesture.

With only the Trav'on speaking against my Ascent, my chance before the Shamanic Lodge was assured. If only one other Clan had remained entirely silent or spoken against me, I would never have continued.

Eva surely watched over me that day.

Division

From the writings of Aria'on, Shayla At'kin

29th Day of the Season of Life, my 17th Winter.

Remembering fear

It is my second day of Ascent and in a short while I will be before the Lodge. Before I go there I want to pen some words as I recall what happened while I stood before the Circle. Keeton has told me a little of what went on, behind the scenes, and what I know now is worrisome.



Spindled Reeds,
Evan Shaman

Spindled Reeds is the leader of the Shamanic Lodge, second only to Eva Herself. More than almost any other Evan, she is able to spend considerable time with her Fatima and is expected to impart divine wisdom to the other Shaman. Her burden has been heavy, and the responsibility of carrying her mistress's orders and wishes to imperfect and far-flung followers is beginning to tell on her health. Still she perseveres, and it is through her leadership that the harvests are kept bountiful.

Highlights: Subdued, Demanding, Understanding

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

Skills: Agriculture 2/+2, Craft (Storytelling), 2/+2, Healing 2/+3, Human Perception 3/+3, Intimidate 1/0, Leadership 3/+1, Read/Write (Evan) 2/+2, Ritual 3/+2, Speak (Shamanic) 3/+2, Teaching 3/+1, Synthesis (Anima, Smothering, Euthanize, Piggyback) 3

Equipment: Eva's Spoor (Spindled Reeds has access to the earth and soil on which Eva rests — this soil has the ability to make any normal plant blossom and grow under the most adverse conditions), various texts penned by her own hand on agriculture and the human body

According to Keeton, three Clans, the Aria'on, the Wild'on, and the Trav'on, vie for political and social supremacy within Eva's tribe. The other Clans remain independent or line up behind the three politically strong leaders. The support by many of the Clans was due less to their vision of my potential and more to the Aria'on Clan calling in favors and strong-arming the other Clans into approval. I know I should feel grateful to my Clan and be prepared to work for its betterment if I become a Shaman, but I cannot bring myself to engage in petty politics.

A Shaman is supposed to concern herself only with the world of the Spirit. In my studies Blackrock stressed that a Shaman is to work only for the Tribe, and no one else. "The Tribe above all else. All else!" he would yell at me when I fouled my learning.

Things are certainly different here than in Sundown.

I must go purge these and many other thoughts of heresy from my mind. I am to go before the Lodge and I must make sure my spirit and mind are clear. May Eva have mercy on all of our souls.

The Root Clan

From the recollections of Aria'on, Shayla At'kin

Remembering adversity

I first encountered the Root Clan at the base of the Sanctuary Temple. The Shamanic Lodge is not a physical place, as I thought it would be. The Lodge is simply the collection of the leaders of the Shaman. Wherever the Shaman are, so is the Lodge.

Twenty-one women and men were clustered haphazardly before the base of the Temple. I was unsure this was where I was supposed to be. After the rigid formality of the Circle, the Lodge came as quite a shock. The twenty-one were all definitely Shaman, I could see it in the furs and leathers they wore and in the spiritual foci they carried. Each had a distinctive way of dressing; here, a great skull of some fanged beast adorned a Shaman like a helmet, there, a Shaman wore only a cloak composed entirely of feathers.

As Keeton led me to within a few steps of the gathered twenty-one, one of the Shaman, a wizened, hunched-over lady, stepped forward from the rear of the group. Hobbling on her cane, she slowly stepped to me and stretched out her hand.

"I am Spindled-Reeds. Let me see your face." She said in a surprisingly powerful voice. At her command I bent over and let her wrinkled hand trace the outlines of my face. Her hands were cold but somehow reassuring against the bare skin of my face. She finished by slowly and methodically tracing the form of the Evan Tribe symbol that was emblazoned across my right cheek. With that, she patted me twice on the head, much as a one would do to a dog, then deliberately turned around and rejoined the group of Shaman before me.

"She is full of questions," the ancient Shaman announced. "Some can be answered. Others will haunt her until the Crone takes her. None of these questions interfere with the love she has for Eva, or for Vimary. This, at least, is acceptable." She took her place at the rear of the group. I felt Keeton's powerful hand grip my shoulder and he gave me a reassuring squeeze.

A large Shaman, with a bald head much like Keeton Cov'on's stepped forward. He I knew immediately as Storm Cry, a well respected Shaman and leader of the Trav'on Clan. I had heard rumors that the Shamanic Lodge was considering taking his spirit-name away, concerned as they were with his continued and questionable political actions. Obviously this had not happened yet, for he now stood before me.

"I am Storm Cry. I must let it be known that I oppose your entrance into the Root Clan, Shayla. You are too young and you lack a mentor. Blackrock's passing was a great blow to us and we feel your loss. However, our sorrow should not allow you to circumvent the standard rigors of joining the Root Clan. For these reasons, and others, I oppose your Ascent." I wondered if the fact that he still took the Clan name Trav'on was part of any of his "other" reasons for my Ascent. Despite my doubts, I stood silent as Storm Cry took a sweeping step back and rejoined the gathered Shaman.

I felt Keeton's other hand fall onto my shoulder. What I thought at first was a show of support soon became Keeton's large form spinning me around to face him. With the other Shaman to my back, Keeton pointed toward the faint image of Bazaar in the distance.

"What role does a Shaman fulfill?" Keeton abruptly asked.

"They are the spiritual leaders of our Tribe. The Shaman are a bridge between this world and the River of Dream and serve as our guides and our liaisons," I answered from the instinct Blackrock had instilled.

Keeton continued, "What role does Den Mother fulfill?"

"Den Mother is the one who embodies Eva's love. She is the holder of unadulterated love, the love a mother feels for her children. She is one aspect of Eva's emotion for us." I paused in an effort to give time to think about what I was about to say, but Keeton would have none of it, and gestured impatiently for me to continue. "Den Mother is only part of Eva's love for the Nation." I stumbled, in an effort to get the words out. "There is another... something. I do not quite know what. Yet, there *must* be another part of Eva's love because I have seen and done things that even Den Mother would not approve of, but which fall within Eva's graces."

I hoped Keeton would not press me about the horrible acts I had committed. I do not know if I could admit to the assembled Shamanic Lodge that I had Culled Janie's newborn.

At the same time, I was perplexed by my own answer and began to forget my apprehension about the Culling. Something seemed to play at the edges of my knowledge, like a long forgotten memory that was finally reemerging.

"What is this *other* something that you refer to? Do you tell me lies? Or do you know about what you speak?" Keeton demanded.

I could feel the cold sweat trickling down the small of my back. I remembered my words that I spoke just a few moments before, but I could not rationalize them further. I was failing.

Then the vision came.

I saw myself pushing my way through a deep snowdrift, clad in only rags. My arm was raised to protect my face from the blistering wind. It was numbingly cold. I had no idea where I was going, only that I had to continue.

Suddenly, the white of the snow gave way to the gray form of the largest bear I had ever seen. It let out a great bellowing roar, a roar so powerful that it forced me backward into the deep snow.

The ground gave way underneath me and I fell with an unceremonious thump into an open cave. I looked up toward the hole through which I had fallen, but it was no longer there. In a panic I hurriedly looked about me trying to find a way out. There was no exit, but a soft white light emanated from somewhere, illuminating the cave. Out of the corner of my eye I saw movement and my vision quickly focused on the source.

There, in one of the corners, were hundreds of small white snakes. The multitude of tiny snakes moved and slithered over and under a much larger snake, a viper, though I knew not where that name came from. Entranced I watched the family of snakes move about one another in a sinewy dance. Watching the many forms move into each other, blend into one, and then reemerge convinced me that this was the source of my dream. This was what I looked for. I had come to commune with this viper spirit.

I snapped back into the World of Flesh, staring at an impatient Keeton.

"A viper, a white viper." I stammered. Immediately I knew that my vision held true, for Keeton smiled a broad and loving smile. "Eva has another totem, one that embodies the viciousness of love that we Evans must occasionally enact." I looked at the gathered twenty-one and suddenly knew what the vision meant in its entirety. "The Shaman are the children of the White Viper. It is to the Root Clan that Eva looks for those acts that are in the best interest of the Nation, but that would be unacceptable to the Tribes."

I paused for a second to again gather my thoughts. "More than liaisons between the Spirit and the Flesh, we are the Chosen of Eva, we are Her hands. We are the ones that know the pains of living and the costs to maintain that life. We, and we alone, have the courage to pay that price."

Keeton raised an inquisitive eyebrow. "We?" he asked.

Without any hesitation I boldly answered, "Yes. We. I am a Shaman. I have been ever since I took the newborn's life and did what Eva, in Her bountiful love, could not. At that time, I truly became her servant. I cannot go back, can I?" It was more a statement than a question.

"No you may not." Keeton answered. I could detect the emotion in his voice; obviously I had touched a nerve in the collected Shaman. "Shayla, Blackrock certainly taught you well. In all honesty, you completed your training some time ago. This. . ." his outstretched hand swept over the gathered Root Clan, ". . . this is merely a formality, though some were hoping you would still fail. You made it past the Circle, an accomplishment in and of itself." Keeton turned me once again toward the twenty-one.

I stood there, amazed more at my audacity than at my acceptance. I had become a Shaman, Chosen of Eva.

Behind me, Keeton spoke up. "Tell me what you see, Aria'on, Shayla At'kin."

I looked about me, past the women and men that stood before my vision, and my sight fell upon the rolling and lush meadows and fields of Sanctuary. My heart jumped as I realized this was now my spiritual home.

"I see green meadows." I quietly responded.

"Then, from this moment on, you are no longer as you were. Your family and Clan you renounce. There is only the Root Clan, Eva and Her children, and the Nation. From this point on, you are a new Dreamer, you are Green Meadow, servant of Den Mother and the White Viper." Keeton's hand came from behind me and over my shoulder to trace the outline of a snake in ash onto the side of my neck, marking where my new tattoo would be.

The gathered Root Clan, in unison, announced, "Blessed is she who walks before Eva. Venerated is she who serves the Den Mother. Anointed is she who strikes on behalf of the White Viper, for she is the cold strength that must balance love and protection." I noticed even the great form of Storm Cry spoke with the group.

It was finally done.

New Beginnings

From the writings of Green Meadow:

1st Day of the Season of Death, my 17th Winter.

Remembering rebirth

It has been some time since I have written in my journal. As it is, it has taken a great amount of will for me just to open the pages of this book and look back through the past events of my life. It has been a full season since I became Green Meadow, no longer an Aria'on.

I returned to Sundown under my own wishes. I was offered a number of places of residency, since I am considered something of a prodigy within the Root Clan.

I cannot express how relieved I was to return to my own home, dust and cobwebs notwithstanding. Janie and her child are doing well; there is a strong aura about mother and son. Surprisingly though, I have not heard from Trav'on, Carli in some time. Janie told me that Carli moved to Griffentowne some time ago, that she has some extended family there and is being groomed to become a Matron.

The village of Sundown grows with surprising regularity. Life continues as normal, but this time there are more bodies going about their lives. The Tenders enter into the surrounding fields and work all day. The Nannies chip in when they are not on watch. Nurses go about curing the sick and making balms to soothe aching muscles. The Matrons watch the work and help decide when and where we harvest. Finally, there is me, aiding the many Dreamers of Sundown along the path of communion with the River of Dream. It is a humble, but important job.

I smile to myself each day now. Where once I was simply Shayla the Nurse, now I am Green Meadow, the Shaman. Even the Matrons occasionally confer with me on matters of the village. In time, I am sure, I will be a full partner in those decisions. Until then, I must gain the village's trust and support. When Keeton said I was reborn, he was making no jest. My return to Sundown has been as much a mission to reintroduce myself to the community and to renew old friendships.

On the other hand, as Green Meadow, I have acquired a few enemies that would never have even noticed Shayla.



Nemesis



Broken Foot, Specter

Broken Foot recently died at the hands of a Magdalite assassin, primarily because of his insult to a Magdalite Elder, but also due to his associations with Halos, the Guide.

Extremely knowledgeable about the River of Dream before his death, he has begun turning his considerable skills toward gaining vengeance against all three Fates and Their followers. He has a burning desire for revenge against the Evans, Magdalites and Yagans, and plans to use his new state to make the leadership of those Tribes as uncomfortable as possible.

Highlights: Wrathful, uncontrollable

Attributes: KNO +2, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL +1

Skills: Dodge 1/0, Dreaming 2/+1, Lore (River of Dream) 2/+2, Ritual 2/+2, Speak (Shamanic) 2/+2, Nightmare Plague (Broken Foot can enter into dreams and through his presence, manipulate those dreams into nightmares, and then leave at will.)

I have butted heads with Storm Cry a number of times, since he is convinced I have been working secretly for my former clan. He fails to see that my actions are motivated out of love for the Tribe, not for any dead and removed loyalties. I guess it is hard for him to believe that some of us act out of love, where he still tethers himself to the world of flesh and politics. Storm Cry really needs to remember what it is to stand in the River of Dream, walking among spiritual flower petals. It is time for him to work with the Root Clan and not for his own agenda.

He has weaknesses. Storm Cry was Grounded once, though he seems to refuse to give up the responsibilities that go along with such a station. Much of the Root Clan do not stand behind him, concerned with his incessant attention to physical matters such as gaining power and political influence, and his refusal to give up his Clan name. Storm Cry must temper his ways, or the Root Clan will remove him from his position.

Storm Cry will return to us in due time, or he will be removed before he becomes a danger to the Tribe. I fear for my new enemy, though. I have not seen Robyn in some time and I dread the next time I see my good friend. I once promised her that I would defend Anny Lanig'on from the Shaman, and now that I know a little more of the situation I must break that promise. It breaks my heart every time I think of the lie I must tell dear Robyn.

Broken Foot, the common subject that brought us together for the first time, was certainly murdered, but not by a Yagan, though it still looks that way and the Shaman continue to call for revenge.

The truth is that the Shaman are partially responsible for Broken Foot's untimely death. Broken Foot forgot his station and his duty to Eva, instead obsessing on his work with the River of Dream. He was the premier Evan expert, rivaling many Yagans with his knowledge. Yes, he feuded with Anny Lanig'on, but she had no hand in his death. To continue his work, Broken Foot once traveled to Hom to discuss matters with the Guides. This was a great sin.

We in the Root Clan know that the Guides are a danger to the Nation, a danger no other tribes recognize since the Guides are so horribly powerful. Den Mother shows us those newborns that have the potential to become Guides and we Cull them, so deep is our fear of these monsters. The Guides helped execute Mary, and have refused to repent. The Root Clan does what it can to punish the Guides for their audacity, as well as to correct their failings, by performing such acts as the Culling.

In blind madness and obsession Broken Foot went to one such monster by the name of Halos, asking for information to help him with his studies regarding the River of Dream. Broken Foot asked the worst of our enemies for corrupted knowledge about that on which we are experts. He had to be punished.

The Root Clan knew the Magdalites were similarly moving against Broken Foot and the Shaman stood idly by with the knowledge that Broken Foot was to die. We did not kill him, but his death served our interests, so we refused to save him. Now, to my great anguish, I must continue the ruse, though I refuse to add my voice to those accusing poor Anny Lanig'on of such a crime.

Eva requires us to do some horrible things for the good of the Tribe and Nation.

Xenophobia

From the Recollections of Green Meadow

Remembering the Nation

It has been a while since I have seen a Dahlian Caravan move through Sundown. The season was turned toward the blistering cold that Vimary is known for and travelers are few and far between. In fact, this Caravan came as a bit of a surprise to me as I saw its many carts on the horizon.

It was near dusk by the time the Caravan pulled into Sundown. It was no real surprise, then, that the Dahlians and the other Caravan members dismounted and began milling about as if they were making ready to set up camp. Like ants, they milled about their carts and animals, talking and yelling at each other, seemingly oblivious to the community that was slowly gathering around them.

I looked into the eyes of the gathered villagers of Sundown and saw some of the light and excitement that my own eyes had held years before. At the same time, though, I saw ignorance about what these interlopers brought to Sundown. Yes, the Caravans are necessary to bring in supplies and transport our harvests to Bazaar and the rest of the Tribe. They do what we cannot, but we do not have to accept their impulsive and chaotic ways. While we Evans toil in the fields each day, tending to our own, ignored by the rest of the Nation except when we birth their babies or grow their food, the Dancers go about their flighty business.

Here, before me, was just such an example. I was tired from the work that day and acted on pure emotion.

I told the Caravan leader to make camp elsewhere. The Caravan, while welcome to stay a while, was not suited to make camp here, in the center of the village. The Caravan master did not reply. He looked about the few buildings that comprised the center of Sundown, as if to ask whether Sundown really deserved the title of village. We stared at each other in silence until he turned and ordered his people to pack up and make for the outskirts. I kindly pointed to a copse of trees a few minutes' walk away.

He thanked me, though his speech positively dripped with sarcasm. I responded in kind.

Upon reflection, it was as much my weary state as my indignation that prompted me toward my behavior. I love the other Tribes, truly I do, but they need to know their place. Moreover, they need to learn to respect the Evans, their providers.

Without

Thinking about the Tribes outside of the Evans has inspired me to continue writing. I do not know if these pages will ever be seen by another's eyes, much less my own child, but at this point I do not care. This is a place for my thoughts.

When I see the **Dahlians** I see a number of strong and lithe backs that are not being utilized. They are grown-up children, refusing to adopt their birthright as contributing members of the Nation. Instead of meaningful work that produces tangible results, the focus on the frivolities of life. Do not get me wrong, I enjoy a good tale or song just like the next person, but devoting one's life to such acts is fruitless.

The **Agnites** are the Evans' children, even in light of recent events. Eva has begun to withdraw from the child Fatima, and we have followed suit. I love every Agnite I encounter, but they are refusing our outstretched arms, and there is only so far we, as a Tribe, can go. Eva waits for Agnes to realize Her folly and return to the bosom of the Mother. Until then, we do what we can to aid the Agnites through their growing pains, and sit and wait. I just hope we do not wait ourselves into oblivion.

As to the other Fates I am torn. **Baba Yaga** is older than even Eva and deserves our respect for that reason as well as many others. Her tribe fulfills roles in our lives that even the Matrons and Nurses cannot fill. Most of Baba Yaga's tribe are well respected by the Evans. The Magdalites, however, are a different matter. Magdalen is too much like the Dancers, focusing Her life on the pleasures of the flesh. She and Her Tribe need to ground themselves and look to Eva and Baba Yaga for guidance. Maybe it is time for Magdalen to grow up just as Agnes is.

The Pillars are an interesting conundrum. **Joan** acts in a way sympathetic to the Fallen, something that I know Eva does not approve of. Moreover, Joan is often the bringer of death. In Her mission to protect the Nation, She sends many a child off to their own demise, seemingly with little remorse. What takes the Evans years to create and mold, the Joanites destroy in a few short moments and then explain away their actions with empty words like 'honor' and 'glory.' Where is that honor and glory when places like Hollyflower are ravaged, without Joanite protection, by the teeth of the Z'bri? Still, the Joanites are an integral part of the Nation, filling an important role that we Evans must recognize. For that, and that alone, they deserve our respect. We Evans also raise a number of young Joanites in our crèches and my heart goes out to those brave Evans who try to temper their bloodlust before it ever develops.

Tera Sheba and Her Tribe are increasingly our allies. Though most of the Shebans maintain homes away from our blessed fields, they hold many of the same opinions as we do. The Nation is changing, and not for the better. Though we Evans do not always approve of the actions that the Shebans undertake, they understand the concept of punishment as well as love. Hopefully their wisdom will gain favor again. The Yagans and Shebans are the ones who most frequently recognize our oft-ignored importance in the Nation. Eva knows special love for them.

Then, of course, is **Eva**. Eva is beautiful like none other. She knows only boundless love tempered with occasional regret and devotion. I have heard Her voice on three occasions now, twice since becoming a Shaman. Hearing Her has brought me to tears each time. I aspire to be more like Her each day, filled only with caring for all other Dreamers and the land that sustains us. I am like almost every other Evan; we have yet to push away all other emotions besides love, and occasionally succumb to jealousy and anger.

The more I think about it, I do not know if, as a Shaman, I should know only love. The Root Clan tempers Eva's boundless love, performing the acts She cannot. If I knew only love, I do not think I could complete many of the tasks that I know I must. If I knew only love as Eva does, I do not think I could have even forced the caravan from earlier today to move.

Still, I aspire each day for Eva's guidance, and I know the rest of the Tribe, excepting the Root Clan, wishes only to know love. For their sake, and the sake of the Nation, I am glad they do not know of White Viper. It is best that way.

A Flower in the Field

From the writings of Green Meadow:

40th Day of the Season of Death, my 19th Winter.

Remembering the cycle

I removed a number of earlier pages from this journal. They reflect only folly that I wish to not remember. I will continue as if those pages never happened.

Today a woman, simply going by the name of Roma, who said she knew me from many lifetimes before, approached me. She told me things about myself and the past few months I did not think anyone knew. As she talked, my sight began to cloud, as it had done so many times before at the start of a vision. This time however, my eyes refused to cloud entirely over, and instead Roma's tale enraptured me. I hung on her every word, entranced.

"May I take a seat?" she asked.

"Shayla Aria'on or Green Meadow, your name does not matter, for they both are false. You are more than just an Evan,

more than just a Shaman. For some time you have probably been receiving visions. What these visions consisted of really does not matter, merely that you received them often and regularly. Those visions were a sign, more than just a way to convey a message. The vision itself was a message."

I could say nothing in response, and for some reason I believed every word.

"You have a great destiny before you. Maybe you thought you had completed it? No matter, you have only just begun to serve your Tribe. You have much love in your heart and I know that there is room for forgiveness as well; a powerful weapon in the right hands. Hands like yours."

I childishly looked down at my hands, wondering where I could hold such a thing.

"Shayla, you are a child of Mary, the Forgiver and martyr."

I stared at the woman before me, this stranger, as my mind tried to clean away the clouds and cobwebs as well as to reconcile her statements and the world that I knew.

Before I could even form the first few words of the many questions that flooded my mind, Roma then went on to ask me if I would aid their effort. She spent hours talking about her life as a Marian, for she was indeed a member of the lost clan. Roma informed me of all manner of things I should not write here, but at least one I must share.

The Aria'ons have long been associated with the Wreathed Marians, a certain sect of the Lost Clan. Many Aria'ons, like myself, have the blood of Mary the Forgiver within us and it is part of our destiny to become reunited with our lost clan. It all came so quickly, the revelation, the knowledge, the disbelief.

Roma approached me both because of her want to reveal my dual heritage as an Evan and Marian, and because of her sect's concern over my continued feud with Storm Cry. Apparently, the Marians have been moving to check the growing power of the Trav'ons and their hateful ways. Many of the Aria'ons have worked hand in hand with the Marians toward this effort, and my quarrels with my fellow Shaman piqued their interest.

I must say that the Marians piqued mine as well. I asked for some time to think on all that Roma had said. She bade me farewell just as the sun was rising for a new day.

Final Thoughts

From the Recollections of Green Meadow, Evan Shaman and Daughter of Mary

Remembering the end

I have decided to work with the Wreathed Marians. I have been reborn, yet again.

I think I can finally work toward embracing the love that would make Eva proud. I have not renounced my Tribe, nor my sacred status as a Shaman, but I have discarded much of what I knew about Vimary and its people.

After I write these words I plan on burying this journal; I do not have the heart to destroy any more of its pages. So much of myself is found within these words. I am still quite young by any standard; maybe someday I will decide to see how far I have come, return to my secret spot, and re-read the story of my first few vital years.

Maybe, on some sunny day, a young Evan girl will seek shelter underneath this copse of trees and discover part of the journal poking through the rich soil. There, she will read my words and discover a part of herself, much as I have taken my steps into womanhood.

It is time for me to return to Sundown and fulfill whatever destiny Eva has in store for me. May She have pity on my soul.

Chapter four: Children of the Crone

From Death we come,
To Death we return.
Life is the blessing and illusion,
The trial we all endure,
To see through the deception
And know the truth of Life,
To know Death.

- Yagan Morning Prayer



Reflections on Future

From the tale of Robyn Verkin:

The blow of the carved bone shattered the disk of ice, the crack and splash loud in the morning quiet. Robyn caught the freezing water in her cupped hands; with a gasp and the rub of slick hands, she left the shores of Dream. Blinking in the colorless dawn light, she watched the ripples fade. She gazed at her reflection: the dark straight hair, the thin face, the blue eyes, and pale smooth skin. Damn that smoothness, thought Robyn with a frown — barely the line of a wrinkle in twenty-five summers. In the Yagans, wisdom ruled; wisdom was seen in age, and age was worn proudly.

Robyn felt her youth upon her like a burden. She longed to be respected in her tribe. Robyn knew her tattooing technique was promising, her cutting masterful — so said the likes of Old One Viven — but Robyn's destiny was still unclear.

Robyn tried to rub the puffiness of sleep from her eyes. Ever since her sleeping illness of three years past she had used a cold-water face wash as a ritual to keep her from the endless days of slumber that had left her useless. Robyn still had not shrugged off the feeling of failure, knowing she had fallen behind her friends in tribal standing because of the illness. Many of them had been taken in by one of the Orders. Some had even walked the Raven Trail, or died trying. Robyn struggled each day to do all that was expected of her, or at least what she thought she should do to be the same as the others. She felt blessed by Baba Yaga that her illness was never blamed on her, and that her mother and sisters looked after her so well. Robyn wanted to return that love. She also felt, deep within her bones, that she was destined for more.

The Farewell

"Robyn," Toria whispered harshly from behind the door curtain. "Em, mother and granny are waiting. You better hurry up." Robyn heard the sound of her younger sister's feet and fabric moving away.

Robyn reflected on the day to come. Today began her new apprenticeship to a great Pellis Artisan. She would leave her mother's hearth forever and continue the lineage of Verkin. She would be shown more secrets of the Artisans, mysteries of death and fate.

The smell of bacon and onions turned fear into a mix of hunger and tear-jerking loss, as Robyn entered the warm main room for the last time. The fire flickered under the griddle. Her family, all with eyes for her arrival, sat at the large table. Her mug of tea was there, steaming. She busied herself with her possessions, keeping her eyes down, her emotions hidden. When Robyn sat down she drank slowly, moving her left hand around as if admiring the year-old tattoo anew. She wondered for the umpteenth time if her mother and grandmother were offended by her leaving the family Flesher tradition for the Pellis Artisans.

Upon eating, she immediately felt happier and lighter. Her grandmother and family clan leader, the Little Crone Anny Verkin, gave her reassuring smiles after examining her tea leaves. The breakfast seemed to be over in no time; her mother made a point of telling Toria and Em to not bother Robyn with their many questions. After the meal, Em was asked to give the ritual blessing:



Little Crone Anny Verkin Lanig'on, Revered Mystic

Anny is the mother of one of the largest Yagan families. Anny is sought out for her ability to read the signs and her understanding of the occult. Her family expects her to be made an Old One soon, but Anny seems content. Only she and the Old Ones know her part in selecting appropriate marriage partners for the youth of the tribe, based on omen and dream.

Anny had an old friendship with an Evan, Broken Foot, which took a bitter turn over its last few years. What was once banter and debate over the origin of new souls became points of heated argument, and a loss of face for the younger Evan. Now Broken Foot is dead, the Evan Shamans blaming his death on Anny and her ties to more shadowy figures within the Yagan Tribe.

Highlights: Homely, Wise, Knowing

Attributes: AGL -1, FIT -2, BLD +1, CRE +1, KNO +2, PSY +2, WIL +1, INF +2, STR -1, HEA 0, STA 25, UUD 2, AD 3

Skills: Animal Handling 2/+2, Animal Care 1/+2, Craft (Cooking) 3/+1, Dreaming 3/+2, Healing 2/+2, Herbalism 3/+2, Human Perception 3/+2, Lore (Death) 2/+2, Lore (Omens) 3/+2, Melee (Knife) 1/-1, Navigation (Vimary) 2/+1, Notice 1/+0, Riding 1/+2, Ritual 2/+2, Speak (Tribal, Yagan, Old One, Magdalite, Fanzay, Evan) 2/+2, Synthesis (Dream Travel and Curse of Dream) 2.



Old One Jacqui Pryns Ih'on, Flesher

Jacqui is one of the least assuming Old Ones, always working in the bone fields with the others, or attending to Baba Yaga at the Bone Pile. She is often found teaching other Fleshers her secrets of preparing various cuts of meat. Jacqui is renowned throughout the Tribe for her special meat dishes, which are prepared for special occasions like rituals and festivals.

Jacqui is very non-political, even for a Yagan, and just enjoys being able to pass on her wealth of experience.

She is involved in the Yagans' attempts to bring back one of their own with her memories intact to be reborn amongst the Tribes. Jacqui is assisting but she has her reservations about meddling with the afterlife. Who knows what they might bring back?

Highlights: Humble, Friendly, Warm

Attributes: AGL -1, FIT -1, BLD +1, CRE +2, KNO +2, PSY +3, WILL +1, INF +3, HEA +1, STA 35, UD 2, AD 4

Skills: Animal Handling 2/+2, Animal Care 2/+2, Craft (Cooking) 4/+2, Dreaming 4/+3, Etiquette 2/+1, Healing 3/+2, Herbalism 3/+2, Human Perception 2/+3, Lore (Death) 3/+2, Melee (Knife) 2/-1, Navigation (Catacombs) 2/+2, Notice 2/+0, Ritual 3/+2, Speak (Tribal, Yagan, Old One, Magdalite, Evan) 2/+2, Synthesis (Dream Travel and Curse) 4, Teaching 3/+2.

"Thanks be to Baba Yaga, our eternal mother,

She who brought us to this life,

And She who will see us safely through to the next,

Thanks be to the Three Sisters,

They are the past and the future.

This is the fate of the blessed.

Thanks be to the Seven,

Who freed us from the Damned,

And guide us through this present darkness."

Robyn's brother Stuar made it to the house as she was saying her farewells. He had come down from Mortuary Hill where he and his wife were Bonecrafters, living in the tombs that riddled the hill. His gift of an expertly carved skull bowl delighted her. It was a valuable artifact that promised to bring her wisdom. Stuar would not say if it was a relic of his wife's line, the Kajkin, but she suspected that her friendship with Mykala was strong enough for such a valuable gift. Robyn left them in the field with the beasts.

The Fate

Tribal Secrets — the writings of Anny Verkin Lanig'on, Little Crone, Revered Mystic:

Fate. We who walk with Death, children of the great Baba Yaga — Death's Mistress — must seek our future in the Fate, else be cursed for defying the Dream. I write this so you children and your children's children will forever know the truth, and live that truth. Your life will be decided by the Fate. The best of us are the Old Ones and Mystics to whom destiny is a close friend. You must trust the elders to see your future and place you on the right path. If you are blessed, you will see your own destiny.

Although not all our people so honor the Great Baba Yaga, I must remind you of what is expected. Your marriage's destiny will enhance the tribe's success and the health of your children. The timing of your children is of great importance, for you may be the bearer of one of us who returns to this life. Any success of the works you do for the Tribe and Baba Yaga is all decided by destiny; defying destiny will lead to poor works.

Take guidance on all these things, even if your heart or head says otherwise. Trust in the Fate. If you live by the Fate, this life, or the next life, will be rich for you and the tribe. If you defy the Fate, your pain and loss will be harsh and your path back to this life may be lost. Live in Fate, my children, my kin, my legacy. Give thanks to Baba Yaga.

Mortuary Hill

From the tale of Robyn Verkin:

Robyn ascended the Great Hill shrouded in her dark shawl. The place was familiar to her. She drank it in afresh. The air was damp and cold, the ground muddy and slick. Mist clung to the water far below, mixing with the cooking fires whose smoke washed out over the river. Around Robyn, unseen crows cawed from the trees and rocks; her friends liked to tell her the crows were the guardians of the Yagans and the eyes of the Mordred. None of the teachers or her own elder kin would comment; all said wisdom would come in time. Surely wisdom came from teaching, Robyn always thought, (and confided to a few trusted friends) like the many lessons that had filled her life since she could barely speak; writing, sewing, herbs, farming, weaving, slaughtering, skinning, curing, breeding, piercing, healing, cooking, anatomy and the art that would find her a place finally in the tribe as a Pellis Artisan, tattooing.

The trail Robyn had taken was one she had walked since childhood, a quiet path separated from the bustling larger ones. All along it were old graves, most of them with barely legible deathstones. Robyn looked around at their mossy and weatherworn faces. It was reassuring to her to be alone with the dead. She always suspected a body she had once had was laying here now, her special connection to this cemetery.

After much exertion, Robyn slowed as the way leveled off amidst a thick copse of trees. She knew a Mordred would be here. Searching the deep shadows, she managed to spot the guard, its large bone-headed spear the only thing Robyn could make out. When she was a little girl the Mordred presence had always spooked her, but now she found them reassuring, like the crows and deathstones. She gave the watcher a smile and passed on by, entering the mortuary proper.

Witch Faide

On the broken walls and tombs all around her Robyn watched the ravens caw and stare back. Robyn could see the couple waiting for her. A moment of fear over her tardiness jolted Robyn from her reflection. She could see as well a few stocky ponies laden with provisions, their breath misting into the first rays of sunshine that spilt over the hill. Robyn moved closer and waited at a respectful distance, feeling like a little girl once again. She silently cursed her insecurities and tried to calm herself.

Robyn could make out only the dark dress and shawl of her new mentor, who was speaking in low tones to a tall, skin-clad man who rested on his spear. A Mordred protector, thought Robyn, here to escort them. His face turned toward hers and gave her a hard penetrating look that she had to resist flinching from. His weathered face was covered by a large raven tattoo of fine design, its beak his nose, wings his cheeks, tail his chin. Robyn stared back, wondering if she knew the artist who had cut such a fine piece. He turned back to the hunched woman's murmurings. His large physique was covered in a variety of skins; bear hood and boots, deer coat and pants. His arm coverings, though, were cured human hide to Robyn's expert eye, probably an older male relative's flesh, she mused. Most striking to Robyn, as was clearly its intention, was the shoulder piece, a human — Squat, from the markings — face, stretched oddly by rings and studs, its eyes and mouth sewn shut. Robyn had heard curious tales about protection offered by such unusual skincrafting; it was another piece of occult she intended to discover one day.

The Mordred turned his face to watch her again as the witch finally let her unsettling gaze settle on Robyn. Robyn knew her. Witch Faide was ancient, the folds of her skin so deep that the tattoos on the few bits of her visible skin were more blotches than images or symbols. Faide had taught Robyn some cutting and tattooing techniques over the last few years and Faide had taught Old One Viven some of the art that Viven herself had passed on to Robyn. But Faide was too old herself, too troubled by the pains of age to do the fine work any longer. Robyn found it unsettling that one who should have remained home by the warm fires was leading her on a trip away from the Tribal lands to teach her some of the deeper mysteries. Robyn knew better than to voice her concerns. She also wondered at their destination, but that too stayed firmly behind her teeth. Beckoned forward, Robyn approached and bowed to her new mentor.



Shanin Morkin,
Mordred Bonecrafter

Shanin is one of the elder Mordred who accompanies Yagans when they venture away from Tribal lands. His role as a protector to other Yagans allows both he and his activities on behalf of his cult's secret agenda to be more easily overlooked. Shanin suspects, however, that his constant orders to travel have been arranged by enemies within the cult to keep him from building the power base he wishes to have amongst the Yagans.

Highlights: Distant, Ominous,
Mysterious

Attributes: APP -1, AGL +1, BLD +2, FIT +1, KNO +1, PER +2, WIL +1, STR +1, HEA +1, STA 40, UD 6, AD 6

Skills: Animal Handling 2/0, Boat Handling 1/+2, Combat Sense 2/+2, Craft (Bones) 2/+0, Dodge 2/+1, Hand-to-Hand 2/+1, Human Perception 2/0, Lore (Bones and Omens) 1/+1, Melee 2/+1, Navigation (Duskfall) 1/+1, Notice 2/+2, Read/Write (Tribal, Fanzay, Yagan) 2/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Sneak 2/+1, Speak (as written, Evan) 2/+1, Synthesis (Curse) 2. Animal Kinship (Ravens and Crows).

"Dear child" began the old witch, "this is Shanin Morkin, son of the mystic Ellem Morkin Lunakin. He has arranged our caravan to Westholm. There, you and I have an important death ceremony to perform." She ended with a crinkled smile, but Robyn felt the witch's watery eyes probing for signs of weakness.

Robyn remained passive as she absorbed this information. It was surely a test; everything was a test while one was a child. Faide would be watching like a raven, dark and ominous, everything Robyn did. Robyn worked on changing her anxiousness into determination. Robyn silently commanded herself: she would satisfy, even amaze the old witch. During this focusing Robyn had a flash of understanding. When they got back Robyn would start to study under the ancient Faide, and she would receive Faide's knowledge of the craft before Faide died — which must be soon. This was Robyn's destiny. The tribe would respect her for the secrets that Faide passed on to her. Robyn gave the pair a half-bow in acknowledgment even before the thoughts had stopped bubbling. Inside, Robyn was jubilant. Outside, she struggled to betray nothing, as was the way of the witches.

The Fates

From Word to all Verkin of Thirteen Summers:

Our mother Baba Yaga guides and protects us and all the Tribes. With Her two sisters Eva and Magdalen are the Fates complete.

Magdalites are the most in touch with themselves and the Goddess' wonder and beauty. They comfort us, bring pleasure and keep all the tribes in touch with each other's goings-on. They understand us poorly and see only the moment, not the fate of years or lives. Magdalites scheme and spy, but they rely on their bodies too much; they forget their inner eye. Their knowledge misleads them into thinking they have power and that they know best. Fate is what is best. When dealing with them remember it is only your heart they understand and are after, but it must not upset your fate or the greater fate of the tribes. Always expect deception.

Evans are the lifeblood of the Tribes, the great people who nurture and increase our numbers. They are the grain providers and bread makers who keep us fed and well. Remember this, but also remember that they are too much caught up with the living to understand the cycle of fate, although the fate of the living is their strength. The Evans strive to keep us all safe, even from ourselves. They would coddle us, thinking they know best because they are consumed so much by living and being in control of so much of the Tribes. Evans' success is also that which blinds them to the other side of life, death. Everything dies. Evans grow to defy this, and so defy the cycle of life — of the Mother-Goddess. We must always remind them of this so they do not forget and bring down upon us a darker fate than has already been dealt.

The Journey Begins

From the tale of Robyn Verkin:

They broke for lunch in the Hunting Grounds, north of the Great Hill. After descending down from the Yagan lands, they had met the rest of those who were in the caravan. Brehnsun, a well-mannered Dahlian of slight stature and colorful clothes, was their guide. Already, his Dreaming had made their passage a swift one. The group was also composed of some Evan hunters on their way back to Westholm with trade from the bazaar. A cheerful Joanite was along to provide protection, his quick smiles and casual ease seeming strange to Robyn, given what she had heard of the turmoil that the Joanites seemed to be always going through. Robyn walked with her thoughts whilst the others chatted. Faide watched on from atop one of the ponies.

Robyn unslung her satchel and helped Faide to a comfortable place to rest; the old witch's arthritic knees were causing her some obvious discomfort. Robyn then helped the hard-faced Shanin assemble their lunch from the pony packs. Up close, she cast surreptitious glances at the tattoos on his flesh and the trinkets that he wore. A finely crafted yellowed bone ring stood out on his left hand — a raven, perhaps. Robyn left with the food and drink to attend Faide. One day, she thought, she would be so attended.

Faide was talking with Brehnsun, who munched on an apple and fiddled with the many earrings and studs in his right ear. The little Dahlian's voice was smooth and confident as he explained the paths he was using to lead them to Westholm. He acknowledged Robyn's presence with a quick smile and took the liberty of taking the food from her arms and presenting it to Faide. Faide chuckled at his charm, and Robyn clenched her teeth at the impertinence. Seeing her mistress occupied, Robyn moved away and sat down on the edge of the camp.

Robyn spent the rest of the break brooding under a tree as the party chatted away, swapping tales of recent events and doings in Vimary. One of the Evans had already caught the Joanite's eye, and Robyn saw him admiring the woman's curves under the thin leathers she wore. Envy and resentment rose in Robyn. No one had ever showed much interest in her. Drab clothes and a constant focus on death was Robyn's fate. She had had sex partners at two festivals when she was a teenager, but nothing since. Robyn knew that her mate would be decided for her — probably very soon, as she was old to be childless. Grandma Anny had reassured her that it would be fine and Robyn knew she was right, even if she did not feel it. So it was with the Yagans; destiny as seen by the elders would decide all the important parts of her life. Now, as always, Robyn noticed her mind turning to comforting thoughts of her own destiny, so as to forget her present miseries. One day, she reassured herself, she would be one of those elders, and the decisions would be hers.

Duskfall

Robyn was caught up tending Faide and the ponies that evening. She was glad she had not been asked to stand watch that night. The next morning, they were off again, slogging through the mud and rain that had greeted them on the new day. Robyn led Faide's pony at the rear of the caravan. During this journey all she could keep track of was the number of bridges they crossed, which was three. Robyn was not much of a traveler, and she was distracted by the many pains of the journey, her shoulders and feet hurting the most of all. Robyn was joyful when they finally entered the great Duskfall forest in the early afternoon. She had thought it a day away at least. The Dahlian's Synthesis was indeed strong.

Duskfall was all she had imagined. Trees loomed, twisted and ancient. The trail never seemed to strike true in any direction for very long, and mossy stones, gnarled roots and deadfalls all littered the way. The softly misting rain added to the strangeness of the place. Robyn was tired and wet, and slowly grew concerned about the things that might stalk this wild place. When they finally stopped, Faide had to send Shanin to organize the meal.

The campsite they found, deep in the gloom, was obviously a regular place for travelers. Thick trees had been felled and their carcasses had been used to create a barrier around the clearing. A few had even been braced to allow a shelter to be rigged. The fire pit was quickly dug out and some partly dried wood found and lit. Faide even lent a hand, her Dream accelerating the flame before the rain could put it out. Soon, several large logs assured a good evening's fire. Robyn was reassured and dried herself alongside the others. On the logs around the camp and on the trees around them, she picked out the runes and marks made by previous travelers. Tribes, clans, prominent personages, all had their marks here. Some signs poked humor; time or axes had erased others. One in particular caught Robyn's eye, an Agnite drawing that a sister Yagan had said would show the way to the caves under the Duskfall. The same sister had also told her that the Agnites had a nasty trick for any who misread their map, but she knew not what.

Death Walker

Near light's end, as much as it was visible under the thick canopy, Robyn was unsettled. The rain had stopped and all was quiet. She dismissed it as nerves and attempted to calm her mind. A scream issued from nearby, startling the entire caravan. Robyn stood quickly, her eyes darting toward the darkness from where the sound had issued and then to the others to follow their lead.

Petyr Ben'on had leapt high onto a barrier log; his spear shifted in an instant in his grip and then it was gone, propelled into the dusky shadows. The Joanite then drew his hunting knife and jumped after his spear. Two of the Evans moved swiftly to grab weapons and scattered through the openings between the barriers. Shanin moved to protect Faide. Faide took a brand from the fire and they shuffled forward. Robyn could now hear the sounds of fighting. She made up her mind and ran through a break toward the noise.

Outside the sheltered camp the darkness was almost complete. Robyn struggled through branches and mud, sensing the danger ahead. She stopped and struggled to sense what was happening after her mad dash. Sharp pain pierced her, almost knocking her out. Fire seemed to be burning through her leg. An incredibly foul stench burnt her eyes and throat as she screamed between rapid breaths. Then Robyn was back in the darkness, her ears picking up the nearby scream. The vision had passed. She dove ahead toward the fighting.

In the light of Faide's flaring torch, the creature was a frightening sight, a bear-sized mass of slick, dark, patchy fur through which gleamed the white of bones. Its eye sockets were empty, and its teeth clashed mightily as it swung its head around. Robyn could see Petyr's spear wobbling deep in the beast's back. Amda Trav'on, Petyr's Evan fancy, was in the mud at the creature's feet, her leg soaked in blood. Robyn watched as Amda fought the pain, raised her knife to slash again and again at the beast. Robyn realized she was frozen with wonder and fear. Here was a life of bones moving without organs, animated by some dark power. Was this a Z'bri?

Next to Robyn, Faide pushed the torch into Shanin's hand; his face remained impassive as she croaked something at him. The torch tumbled at the creature, distracting it from attacking Petyr. Petyr slashed at its throat, then at the back of its neck. The beast kept fighting. Flames burst and roared. Robyn raised her hand to shield herself from the frightful heat. All the travelers raced away, Petyr hauling the screaming Amda into the darkness. Then the flames dimmed.

Brehnsun appeared from nowhere next to Robyn. "A Skuller, and a big one. Thanks be to your mistress's Dreaming." Robyn acknowledged his grinning face. Yes, a Skuller, she thought, with her own grin. Incredible.

Preservation

Robyn's focus on the beast's flickering remains was broken by Faide's commanding summons. Robyn raced to where the witch stood over the bleeding and blistered Amda. The wounds looked fatal to Robyn's senses. Faide grabbed her chin. "Watch closely, Robyn. See here and in spirit."

Robyn stepped back and watched as Faide stooped over the weakly breathing figure. Behind her, the Evans and Petyr were arguing with Shanin about helping the fallen Amda. Robyn sensed Faide shift into dream. Robyn crouched and touched Amda's leg, trying to feel what was going on. Robyn could see Amda in the otherworld. Her death was near, and her blood flowed weakly. Amda's chest struggled to rise at each breath. In the darkness Robyn could see the shimmering aura crumbling slowly, fading. The wounded leg grew dark as black tendrils spread along the red channels of life. Faide's own deep purple life force intervened, a bright silver shimmer spread across the Evan's body. Amda's breathing slowed and stopped. Faide's hands stroked the body, closing the mouth and eyes.

Robyn had witnessed a few deaths; something here was different. Amda's life force had not faded; the silver was surrounding the body and resisting the darkness. Robyn could feel another spirit nearby. The filth of the Skulker's soul tainted the earth here, smelling poisonous and foul just like the blackness in the Evan's leg. It was the stasis, the false death. The Evan was frozen between life and the great journey. Robyn understood. A mystery was revealed to her. Robyn felt powerful and alive.

"Good, too, for preserving the flesh of those who are destined to die but whose flesh there is no time for skinning," added Faide quietly when the others had taken Amda away.

Tales of Bones

From the tale of Robyn Verkin:

The other travelers took a while to understand Faide's explanation of what had happened. Robyn saw their respect for Faide, and for herself by association, increased by this rescue when they finally nodded in comprehension. Evan healers at Westholm would be able to heal Amda when they arrived in a few days. Petyr spent the evening fashioning a sturdy frame to which Amda's body would be strapped, and placed it on the other pony. The others talked late, too energized from the fight to sleep. The rain had gone and the evening meal sat warm in their bellies. Faide was tired from the day and her exertions and went to sleep at her prime position near the fire. She refused to discuss with Robyn why Baba Yaga allowed such living dead to be — another mystery Robyn was not ready for, she said. Shanin watched on. There was guard duty for them all tonight.

The Mysteries — the writings of Old One Kaye Morkin Gia'on

The Mysteries are the hidden truths of the world and its workings, the great cycle that is life. The greatest of these mysteries are Fate and Death. These are our occult. We guard them well for their power is not for the unwise.

Mysteries are not taught, not in the typical sense. Occult must be experienced to be understood. The old give the young the experiences and through them, the young become wise. Understanding this way, the young see more than the power; they see its place in life and death. They see the subtleties, the dangers, and the inner sight.

Our mysteries are divided among our people as fate decides. The Mother-Goddess and Baba Yaga show us the way. Some of us learn to be one with destiny and bless the tribe with their insight; they are the Mystics. Some of these also have a sacred understanding of life and death, and help guide us. They are our leaders, known to us as the Old Ones and the Crones.

Those known as the Pellis Artisans are gifted with keeping the wisdom of our history. Some know the skin so well they can see the demon marks and so protect us. The Fleshers are our rite leaders and our butchers. They see to it that life is ended well, and they guide our souls across the Fold. The Mordred guard our secrets. They tend our mother Baba Yaga, and are our stalwart defenders against the great enemy, the Z'bri.



The Hag (Ghost)

The Hag is indeed real, the ghost of one of the first outcast Yagans. She haunts the Duskfall at night from the remains of the huge burnt out tree that she used for shelter in her final days. She is called the Hag because the few accounts of her appearance describe dark flesh, broken like bark, and spindly gnarled limbs and fingers. The Crone has told Her more trusted children, in secret, that the Hag is to be left alone. Since then the Mordred have kept track of the stories surrounding the ancient spirit. The Bark Book, as it is known, records the stories of the Hag, noting that she seems to prefer killing Evans, Magdalites and Agnites. The Hag is known to play upon the fears of those she haunts - even whispering in the dark to them - before snatching one or more away to conduct some foul ritual or torture.

Highlights: Vengeful, Frightening, Mysterious

Eminence: Death

Attributes: CRE +1, INF -5, KNO +1, PER +2, WILL +4, PSY +1, STR +4, HEA +2, STA 50, LID 11

Skills: Combat Sense 3/+1, Dreaming 4/+1, Hand-to-Hand 3/+1, Human Perception 2/+1, Intimidate 3/+4, Lore (River of Dream) 3/+1, Mythology 3/+1, Navigation (Duskfall) 3/+1, Notice 3/+2, Ritual 3/+1, Sneak 4/+1, Synthesis (Dream Travel) 4, Understand Fear (learn a fear or important secret on an opposed PSY roll)

Brehnsun stepped to the fire not long after Faide had settled in, and cheered them up with some amusing tales of Sheban misfortune at a recent festival. He even enticed Robyn to recount the well-known tale of the Hag who supposedly haunts the Duskfall; one of the many beings who would prey upon stray travelers - especially children. The Hag was a well-worn tale told to children across the Nation, but Robyn thought it still went down well coming from her.

Robyn's ears perked up when Brehnsun ventured to discuss the nature of the Skullers, a subject which, Robyn noticed, grabbed all their attention. The Dahlian's demeanor changed as he began. Gone was the lighthearted, racing pace of his usual wit. He drew slightly away from the fire and spoke in a measured and knowing tone.

"Skullers, those beasts whose flesh rots while they live on, may be foul, but there are far more malevolent creatures walking these woods. Skullers are beasts driven mad by foul infection, condemned to die slowly as their flesh falls from their bones. There is another curse, however, that has created beings far more evil. The Tribes and even the Z'bri fear them. Perhaps you have heard the little Agnites skipping to their song:

*"On darkest night, that has no moon,
On darkest night, rise they from tomb,
Beware those, whose eyes are dead,
Beware those, whose hearts have bled,
They hunt the wilds, far and wide,
They hunt the wilds, for those who lied,
Beware those, whose bones go clink,
Beware those, whose flesh does stink,
On darkest night, best stay asleep,
On darkest night, when they do reap,
Beware those, whose souls are foul,
Beware those, whose voices howl,
They hunt the wilds, with dark intent,
They hunt the wilds, till the night is spent,
Beware the Zom, until the night is done,
Beware the Zom, until the dawn has come."*

Silence settled on the group when he finished. The fire cracked suddenly, making Robyn jump. Brehnsun smiled broadly, his teeth flashing in the firelight.

"Time for bed, my friends. We have a long march through the Duskfall tomorrow and watches to carry out tonight. I will wake you, Petyr, when your time comes." Brehnsun finished with a wink.

Robyn grabbed her blanket and, on impulse, glanced at where Faide slept. Eyes glowed green in the firelight — but no, Faide breathed slowly in sleep. Robyn was sure she had caught the witch staring at her. Disturbed, Robyn put her back to a barrier log and tried to sleep.

Night Lessons

The night wore on, and Shanin woke Robyn from her quick-forgotten dream. Shanin left her by the fire, whispering that she was to wake the Evan hunter Jylls in two hours. Robyn stirred the fire up and settled near it against the chill — and for safety. The trees around the clearing looked baleful in the dancing light. In the forest around her crickets chirped and things moved with the rustle of leaves through the branches. Frogs croaked from a nearby pool. The guttural sound of fighting possums and the occasional distant howl punctuated the background din. Silent dark flying things were caught momentarily in the light and then vanished. She watched the stars slowly turn to keep track of the time.

Robyn caught herself humming the tune of the Zom song. So many dead things still living, a mystery that fell cleanly in the realm of her Fatima. Robyn had learnt long ago all things have their purpose, but the why made her restless. Unsettled, she closed her eyes and reviewed the reassuring lessons of the Crone. The great gift of Baba Yaga, the sacred death rites.

Baba Yaga's Great Gift

From the Teachings of Old One Wend Cerekin Venu'on:

Death takes many forms. In ceremonies and rites, these forms are seen for what they truly are. Without Baba Yaga we would not cross the Fold and our souls would be set adrift in the Sea of the Lost until the end times. On rare occasion some of these souls might be saved, pulled back from the endless brink of madness, but most are forever lost.

The first of the three most fundamental forms of death rite is the **Rite of Dust**. A Yagan Flesher or Artisan will preside and chant the Death Chant and the body is buried to return to the Mother-Goddess. Before burial the body is washed, wrapped in strips of cloth, and blessed. This way it is awakened to Baba Yaga, who will come to fetch the soul from near its mortal remains. If more than three days pass, this becomes much harder and the spirit may be lost.

A diseased body, one badly damaged from beast — or Z'bri — attack or one who has blessed the Pellis Artisan halls with its outer flesh, will be burned on a wood pyre. This is known as the **Rite of Ash**. The flames will purify the body, and the smoke seen by Baba Yaga who will come and save the soul. The Rite of Ash can be performed by any of Yagan clan lines, although Fleshers usually lead these rites. In the case of bodies whose skin has been taken, Pellis Artisans (unless a Rite of the Raven is to occur) will conduct the ceremony immediately after the skinning, burning the body's inner flesh and bones. The remains of a Rite of Ash are usually brought to Mortuary Hill to be deposited in Baba Yaga's Bone Pile.

Some Yagans are chosen to receive the **Rite of the Raven**. Mordred are typically blessed with this fate. The body is washed and brought to the Great Dome. Here in the early dawn of a dry day the Mordred will take the body to the broken dome roof and lay it out for the crows and giant ravens to feast on. Then, as the sun sets, they will go and recover the skeletal remains, which are then scattered into the Burial Pile. The Dream Harrowers (**T8 Companion**, pp. 30-32) are also created with this type of ritual, which is the one time when bones from the other factions and Tribes are brought to the Bone Pile.

Fate will speak to the Old Ones on occasion and ask for one of the living to be given the **Rite of the Beasts**. Sometimes this one is close to death and the ceremony is an honor. At other times the chosen one is young and fate has seen her false heart. She is given the Rite of the Beasts to rip the corrupted flesh of this incarnation from her immortal soul, so that Baba Yaga can save her and place her back on the wheel of life. Such persons are staked out at sacred sites in the Hunting Grounds where beasts and Z'bri come and act out their part. Those that are freed or flee these rites are damned.

Baba Yaga has been known to pass down great blessings to some of Her children. These chosen few in every generation serve Baba Yaga in mysterious ways that may even be blurred and unknowable to the Old Ones. The **Rite of the Chosen** is only conducted after the chosen one is arduously tested to determine that they truly are worthy of this rite. Chosen ones undergo a ceremony unique to each of the chosen, where their normal tribal works end and they go forth as avatars of Baba Yaga, with powerful Dream at their call to help them carry out their new roles. This rite counts as their death rite, for when they die what becomes of their remains is of no consequence.



Old One Wend Cerekin Venu'on

Wend is one of the mysterious Old Ones, and like her peers she spends many hours at the Bone Pile listening to the whispers of her Fatima. Wend was once a Reaper, and after her many years of service and very personal insight into death she was made an Old One at Baba Yaga's bidding. Wend acts as a contact to the Reaper cells that operate within the Yagan tribe, helping them and directing them in their duties on behalf of the Reaper head, Old One Jacyn Verkin Lanig'on. Wend is fascinated by those known as the Guides, whom her people have spied among the Fallen. She has one of her Reaper circles investigating the Guides, while they, in turn, watch the Herites among the Fallen.

Highlights: Distant, Mysterious, Haggard

Attributes: APP -2, BLD -1, CRE +1, KNO +2, WILL +2, PSY +2, STR -1, HEA +1, STA 25, LUD 5, AD 4

Skills: Combat Sense 2/+0, Craft (Cooking) 3/+1, Craft (Tattoo), 2/+1, Dodge 2/+0, Dreaming 3/+2, Hand-to-Hand 3/+0, Healing 2/+2, Herbalism 3/+2, Human Perception 2/+2, Lore (Poisons and Omens) 3/+2, Melee 2/+0, Notice 2/+0, Read/Write (Tribal, Yagan, Evan, Sheban) 2/+2, Ritual 3/+2, Sneak 2/+0, Speak (as written, Magdalite, Dahlian) 2/+2, Synthesis (Dream Travel and Curse) 3.

When proper death rites cannot be performed, sometimes souls can be tied to a place or thing to be saved later. This is the **Rite of the Cairn**. Non-Yagan members of the Nation are taught this rite to try and save those souls when a Yagan is not present. If a body cannot be brought back to a Yagan hand or stronghold, then it is buried below a mound of stones, and prayers seeking Baba Yaga's protection are said. If a Yagan knowledgeable in the funeral rites can later get to the body, then the soul of the deceased may be saved from the Sea of the Lost. The Rite is not without risk; the longer the body has rested below the cairn, the lower the chance the soul will be found. If a body cannot be buried it is burnt, but the ashes must be likewise treated.

Dreams of Bone

From the tale of Robyn Verkin:

Jylls was rubbing her eyes and sitting up when Robyn let he muscles relax and she fell back into her bedroll. Robyn felt better for remembering all the Crone's blessings, but her nerves had used up what little energy she had. Gritty eyed, she turned away from the light and sought Dream. It came quickly.

She was walking, the path was dark and the wind whistled through stones all around her. A fire burnt fiercely over a hill that rose high up against the night sky. Around her, others struggled against the fatigue and pain of their bodies. They stumbled up the hill toward the light.

At the crest Robyn stopped. Below, flames roared silently in the distance as a series of structures burned furiously. Robyn knew her enemies died in those flames, but not all. Many had escaped and packs of them headed toward the hill. The fighters could not raise a hand to fight off their tormentors, nor could they even walk away. All seemed lost, but they were too tired to do anything but cry silvered ribbons down dirty cheeks.

Robyn turned to one beside her who was young in body but already old at heart. "Fear not, child," the figure spoke. "She is with us. Look, She has the dead fight for us."

Robyn gazed at the dark field below; the demons stormed across, seeking vengeance. Skeletons rose from the cold ground, tearing their way to the surface, their eyes pinpricks of light. The demons came on. The numbers of waking dead increased, the ground boiling with them; the darkened field had become a raging sea of clawing bone. Into the writhing corpses crashed the demons, and swiftly they vanished below the rippling, clicking, mass. Screams of the beasts and the dead pummeled Robyn's ears with its deafening roar. Robyn woke with a weak cry. Faide was staring at her impassively in the pale dawn light. The others who were stirring seemed not to hear.

Westholm

Two more days passed swiftly. Robyn found herself relieved when the oppressive canopy of the forest gave way to blue sky. Soon after, the Joanites greeted them and Amda was quickly taken away by the Evans to receive healing. Brehsun was thanked by Faide for all his help and he headed off with a big grin. The Joanites returned to their duty, and what was left of the group walked toward the collection of buildings. Far beyond them Robyn could see towers and the distant bridge to the Outlands.

Before they arrived at the settlement Faide got off her pony and gathered Robyn, Petyr and Shanin around her. "Dream has shown me that we shall meet resistance here. The one whose skin we come for is much loved by her sisters and daughters. Petyr, Shanin, you must stand fast against any resistance to our task, else fate will be dark for all here."

Robyn trailed along as they resumed their way between the houses made from rock and wood. Chickens and pigs were penned in large enclosures, and some dogs watched the group pass with half-closed eyes. The orchards and vegetable fields appeared to be doing well. Robyn had not realized how big Westholm really was. The simple task of guarding the western bridge had turned the place into a large community.

Faide kicked her pony along past the stares of the mostly Evan group who had come out of their cottages to see the visitors. The elder Evan faces revealed clearly to Robyn that they knew what the Yagans were here to do. The children among them were obviously intimidated by Faide and Shanin, hiding behind fences and their mothers' legs.

A woman marked as a Flesher approached Faide. She was middle-aged and bore the mark of the Crone on her brow. Faide dismounted and hobbled forward to hug her in greeting. Robyn could not hear what they were saying but both were full of smiles. A few Evans watched on, most others went back to their work. Robyn was gestured to come forward. "Robyn, this is Elies Yeth Athen'on. Elies, this is my pupil Robyn Verkin Lanig'on."

Elies passed her eye over Robyn's exposed flesh and looked at her amulets and other markings. Robyn was doing likewise, gauging Elies' own history and standing.

"I am most pleased to meet you, young Robyn." Glancing at Faide, she continued with a knowing smile, "I am glad to have met you, and will be pleased to join with you in the rite." Robyn mumbled words of greeting and thanks in response, unused to being treated as a peer by one so obviously experienced with the mysteries.

Defying Fate

Robyn followed Faide and Elies along the muddy street. They rounded a corner and approached the largest building in the village. At its doorway quickly stood a huddle of Evans, some with spears. It was hard to make out their faces in the deep shadows of sunset. Shanin and Petyr moved to either side of the older witches, both with their spears held firm but unthreateningly. The murmuring died down and a figure appeared through the crowd to stand face to face with Faide.

"Old One", she greeted Faide with right words but with a sharp tone, "you are early. Mother Felic Sunkin Cov'on is ailing but she will live beyond this night." With barely a breath she raced on, her voice losing its edge in the apparent hopes of diplomacy. "I am Geeta Sunkin Cov'on. I have arranged for the Firkin family to take you in and tend to all your needs until nature takes its course. Thank you for coming, Old One, you honor the Cov'on Clan."

Witch Faide stood silent, slowly gazing over all those Evan kin who stood behind Geeta. Robyn waited tensely. She knew it was a direct challenge to the authority of the Fates to deny Faide entrance to the house of the dying. "Geeta Sunkin Cov'on, I am here because fate has spoken to my heart that your mother dies this night."

The family's faces changed slowly at hearing this, expressions becoming sad or defiant. Geeta stared hard, her jaw clenching to hold back words of anger. Robyn watched as the two leaders faced each other down. Robyn knew Faide. To defy an Old One's prediction was to defy fate itself. Robyn suppressed a shiver as she tried to sense what would happen through the turmoil of the moment. Insight eluded her.

Faide spoke again, calmly and with deference she did not need to use. "I understand your grief, sister. I will wait in the place you have prepared for myself and my companions. I ask that I be allowed to say my farewells to Mother Sunkin. I also ask that the moment her breath ceases, I be sought immediately to conduct the death rites."

Geeta appeared to measure these words. Robyn wondered what would happen if Geeta defied the old witch; Robyn had heard of Fleshers killing with a glance. Geeta appeared to take solace in those around her who were whispering words of advice. Her face relaxed and showed its grief.

"You honor the Cov'on clan and the Sunkin family with your wishes, Old One. Please, enter my house, and may the blessing of the Fates be upon you."

"Come, Robyn", whispered Faide, jolting Robyn from her thoughts. Faide hobbled inside, her bone cane tapping loudly on the floorboards. Inside the great long house the air was warm and filled with the scent of cooking. Herbs and meaty smells stirred Robyn's stomach. Around the pit fire lay the extended family and friends who had managed to make such a large place feel so cramped. Geeta led the way, sending children out to make room for Faide and Robyn.

In the warmest part of the chamber, lying on furs and large down-filled pillows, lay the revered clan mother. An Evan shaman tended her, with the help of some close family. Here, now dying, was one of the first born after the age of the camps.

Faide approached close to the dying hearth-founder, who lay almost completely unmoving under her colorful healing-quilt. Robyn thought she could hear Faide whisper softly to the dying woman. Sniffles of anguish broke the silence in the smoky room. Robyn could see that Faide had caught the attention of the dying woman's watery eyes. Mother Sunkin's thin wrinkled face broke into a grimace, her gums supporting a handful of yellowed teeth. Faide smiled in return, rose, turned and left. Robyn followed quickly, glad to be going.

The Raven's Kiss

Robyn waited patiently while Shanin finished preparing to go out into the night to guard and ensure that Faide and Robyn were not disturbed. Faide had told the family who were lodging them that she needed time alone with her attendants to prepare for the death rites. Already apprehensive of the formidable Old One, the family took their hunting dogs and left. Petyr had been sent off to prepare a pyre in a sheltered clearing that Faide had seen on the way into town. Since the body could not be taken to Mortuary, this would have to do.

Faide had Robyn bar the door and begin boiling water in the great iron pot. She then assisted the old witch in cutting and preparing herbs for some task. Robyn took careful mental notes on proportions and order. Since Faide had said little since leaving Mother Sunkin's lodge, Robyn also kept silent.

"Geeta loves her mother so much that she defies fate," said Faide quietly as if to the room in general. "Geeta and the others are using their mystery of Life to keep mother Sunkin from passing on at the appointed time.

"This must be stopped. You, girl, will come with me into the spirit shores where we will set things right." The last was said firmly.

Robyn watched as Faide mixed the herbs with the water, stirring slowly, and the room filled with a pungent and intoxicating aroma. After several minutes Robyn began to feel wool-headed, and she reached to open a wooden window shutter.

"No, Robyn," said the witch, staring into the pot carefully. "The herbs are to help us travel to Dream. Get blankets and furs. Make a place for us to lie here near the pot." Robyn moved to obey.

Soon, Robyn and her mistress lay head to head near the pot, sprawled on the floor. Robyn's eyes stung in the herb-and-steam fog that made it hard even to make out the far wall and roof.

"Robyn" came a voice. Robyn struggled to wake. "No Robyn, come here." Robyn felt a tugging and turned. There was Faide, her image burning fresh and strong. Robyn sensed the Dream.

"Robyn, follow me. We are on the shores of Dream, where the Dream Harrowers patrol against the Z'bri. We will go to the great lodge of Mother Sunkin and see this for ourselves. Take my hand." The tattoos on the witch's hand looked vibrant and striking, as Robyn looked down and took her powerful grip. They moved quickly through a strange fog, then through the dark and then into the light of a large room. Many spirits glimmered faintly where they were, but at the other end, several souls glowed brightly.

"Powerful Dreamers work their will here, Robyn" came the strong voice from inside Robyn's skull. "As we draw closer you will be able to make out Mother Sunkin as the bright yellow glow, her daughters smaller and the energy that they are sending into Life in red. It is that red that I will sever, and so allow nature to take its course."

Robyn watched, and indeed she could see the images of the daughters and mother clearly. Floating over Mother Sunkin, Robyn turned and watched Witch Faide. The Old One was chanting the chant of death. Robyn saw a purple-black knot start to form on the red strand when she looked back. It grew larger and the red streaming toward Mother Sunkin paled to pink and then faded out. Time passed. The old mother's yellow paled but stayed burning.

Then Robyn sensed anger. . . from the Old One who held her hand tight. The purple-black began to encircle the form of Mother Sunkin; her yellow light began to shrink. A fluttering like the wings of a black bird seemed to cover the light. Then the yellow flared and moved, drifting away, the form of Mother Sunkin coming into focus. A shadow moved behind her. Robyn feared for a moment that a Z'bri had appeared, but the dark form was that of a huge raven. Then they were gone from the shores into deeper waters. Robyn woke with a cough and a heavy head.

Admiring the Flesh

Old Faide was already up and about; more candles were lit and the shutters swung open allowing cold, fresh air to cleanse the room. Robyn thought back as she regained her feet. Had she really witnessed Faide kill Mother Sunkin? The Synthesis had seemed more than a severing of ties. It reminded Robyn of the snuffing of a candle.

There was a loud knock on the door before Robyn could get up the courage to ask any questions. Robyn opened it at Faide's bidding. Shanin was there with a lantern. A young Evan woman was waiting for them, her face streaked with tears. "She has died, Old One. My mother says to come."

In short time they stood over the lifeless body of the great clan mother. Faide commanded them all to leave, staring hard at Geeta to get her to go. She then removed the great multihued quilt and, asking for no help, began to strip the corpse of its clothes. At her command, Robyn brought across what looked like an heirloom candle stand, with three new candles of beeswax. Robyn watched as the old witch admired the flesh, careful to avoid letting any wax drip on it. The old mother's body was covered in tattoos, piercings, and scars. Faide lifted limbs to follow designs. She had Robyn bring out the razors and boil water for the shaving. Even with her swelling joints, she worked fast to catch up to some time plan that the Evans had interfered with. Once the body was shaved and washed with Robyn's help, it was rolled into a shroud Faide had readied. Robyn and Shanin carried the body out.

Outside, the Evans waited. In large numbers they followed the body to where Petyr the Joanite had a fire going and a pyre ready. He had also looped two ropes over a long level branch of a large red maple tree. Unsettled murmuring began from the column. It was apparent to Robyn that they were confused by what was to take place. The words "skin" and "skinning" passed through the mob. Robyn and Petyr were told to place the body below the tree branch on the furs that lay there. Robyn knew exactly what was going on, and she asked them to help her get the boiling cauldron from the main house.

There was some shouting in the distance when they started to return to the unlit pyre. Most of the Evans had broken off into small groups or couples and headed away back to the town. A few hung around near other trees or with the first daughter Geeta. Clearly, she was refusing to leave, but that was her right. Faide had the body unwrapped on the furs. Petyr and Robyn hurried back, with the cauldron swinging between them on its carrying pole. They laid it down near a freshly hollowed-out log that would be the ritual trough.

The Skinning

Faide began directing them. Robyn and Shanin bound the old mother's ankles, one to each of the ropes hanging over the maple branch. They then bound the arms with a rope between her legs. Gently, they hauled her up, until the clan elder dangled headfirst about a meter and a half from the ground. Robyn dragged the trough into place. She stripped off her clothing to stand naked in the firelight from the waist up. She shivered briefly in the chill air. Robyn then helped the Old One Faide to strip down likewise. They had the men pour some of the hot water into the trough. Cold water was added from a bucket. The two of them scrubbed each other down with the warm water and some herbs Faide mixed in.

Robyn then set about scrubbing down the trough with a mixture of bark from a large black dish that lay among their tools near the fire. Petyr held the lantern high so that Faide could examine the body. Shanin hauled water from the nearby well, as Robyn had emptied the bucket and finished cleaning the trough.

A moment of stillness ensued. From the darkness Robyn heard the sharp intake of breath as Faide selected a needlepoint stiletto from the tools on the cloth near the fire. Reverently the Old One approached the hanging form. Faide's ancient wrinkled body, tattooed and pierced, looked very much like the one swinging slowly from the tree. Robyn brought the trough across and waited. Faide had the two men lower the body above the trough. With a careful move Faide then pulled the head back by the forehead and sliced vertically along the throat arteries. Blood poured darkly into the trough with a splattering sound. The air was filled with its metallic, acrid smell. In the distance, receding footfalls could be heard and from somewhere else came the sound of one of the Evans being noisily sick.

The Cutting

They waited until the blood drained away. The Old One had the body lowered again and then cut the bindings off with a curved blade she drew from her knife-laden apron. Robyn helped steady the still-warm body as Faide sliced deftly along the body's legs and spine.

"Child, I am sure you have heard this before, but you will hear it again from me. Remember that no skinning is the same, just as no life is the same. Tattoos and other marks worth keeping are to be carefully avoided, and the cuts must be precise, else the skin may tear."

With the cutting done, Faide directed Robyn to continue with the next step herself. Robyn noted that, in the background, Shanin had set up the fire stand and the two ceremonial vases had been filled with hot coals, the bitter scent of the herbs now wafting through the clearing.

Robyn moved forward and gripped the old mother near her ankles, her flesh warm and slick with blood. With a nod from Faide, who stood close, Robyn carefully pulled the hide clear of the muscle, bone and fat of the legs, one leg at a time. In a practiced series of steps, Robyn peeled the skin off from the feet down to the head, slipping it off the gleaming skull. During the lifting of the skin Faide moved around the body, adding extra cuts and helping shake sections of skin free.

As Robyn carefully laid out the skin on the nearby white cloth, coils of bowel and a few organs began to fall free from the body. Faide quickly caught them, her wrinkled breasts getting covered in the blood and gore. Robyn moved and tied cords to the skin. Shanin appeared at Faide's shoulder with a large black plate, and Faide pulled the bowels free and dropped them onto it with wet smacking sounds. The thick and musky smell of the corpse washed over them, then began to slowly disperse to the winds.

Petyr came forward to pour a bucket of water over the Old One's torso, to cleanse her of most of the viscera. Robyn and Shanin began to raise the skin by the cords Robyn had tied to it over the same branch from which the rest of the body again swung. Shanin shifted one of the smoking vases below the skin to begin the curing process. Robyn was slick with sweat, spotted here and there by flecks of flesh and blood. A small grin tugged at the corners of her mouth as she gazed at the beautiful skin. The ceremony was going well.

Preparing the Skin

Allowed little time for a break, the blood-stained Robyn and Faide began the curing process. They chanted to harmonize their Synthesis, and smoke began to boil quickly from the vase below the skin. Shanin moved back and forth to pour fine slivers of wood and herbs into the flames to feed the burning fire. The whole clearing filled with the strong-smelling smoke, assaulting noses and bringing tears to all eyes. The pleasant scent of burning applewood contrasted starkly with the bloody smoke that now covered everything — a strange effect of the fire smoldering in the vase.

Faide then directed Robyn to do the choosing. Robyn stepped up to the gently swinging body and looked closely at the skeleton. She slid her hand along the body, probing to touch the slick bones, still mostly buried in muscle and fat. Robyn found most of them ravaged by age and betraying the unmistakable signs of the joint-swell, the hands and feet worst of all. The smaller bone of the left forearm drew her attention. Faide handed her a stubby, hooked blade, and Robyn braced the skinless limb in the crook of her arm, proceeding to cut the bone free. Once done, she washed the chosen bone with fresh water and placed it near the fire's heat.

The wizened Yagan took out a large cleaver. She gestured to Robyn to hold back the head of the corpse, and then, with a deft cut, lopped the neck in two, severing the head from the body. Faide then drew a strangely curved blade from her belt. Taking the skull, whose eyeballs flashed sightlessly in the light of Shanin's lantern, she began to cut and then remove parts from inside. The eyeballs popped out into the bloody trough; cartilage and gristle followed. The bottom jaw came away and was laid on the trough's edge. The Old One then settled herself down on the ground and began to chant the death chant, gripping the skull in both hands.

Robyn took the trough and emptied it onto the pyre, the pale unlit firewood now darkly capped by the blood and viscera. Robyn laid the jawbone on top. She then went about scrubbing the trough clean. A short time later, red in the face from her exertions and aided by Shanin, Robyn brought the trough before Faide, filled with ash and water. Under Faide's guidance, the skin was lowered into the clean trough, Faide folding it carefully as it was immersed. The Yagan witch then began a chant which Robyn quickly picked up, and bubbles could be heard from the soaking skin. Robyn occasionally stirred the skin with an etched stick, to assist the time-acceleration which allowed a two-week process to be achieved in but a night.

Faide then led Robyn away to clean herself. Robyn helped Faide over to a creek that fed into the river, and the pair began to scrub each other down. Witch Elies, watching the whole procedure from the edge of the clearing, held a torch high over the rippling water to assist them. Robyn was glad of the cleansing, since the physical effort had made her tired and sore. The icy water cleared her mind quickly, and it wasn't long before they returned. Geeta was still watching on, but she stood alone now.

Robyn and Faide took the skin to the slanted log, where the Witch began to use a scraper to remove the fatty underside of the skin. While she was working, Robyn cleaned the trough again and returned to fill it with boiling water from the caldron. Robyn poured glistening oil into the steaming trough. The stars slowly shifted across the sky as Faide worked on, taking the time to remove every bit of flesh from the hide. Faide ended by cutting open the lips and ears, squeezing the fat and cartilage into her palm. Once Faide was done, Shanin carried the viscera carefully to the unlit pyre.

The Art of the Cut

Although there are many complicated steps in skinning a person, the most difficult is deciding where the cuts will go. Cuts must be carefully planned to keep the best of the tattoos intact, and also make sure that the flesh will peel off properly, without tearing. Some Yagans only take part of a skin, especially if the death was damaging to the flesh.

A recent and disturbing phenomenon has been the subject of a number of new rumors. According to the tale-bearers, some Yagans have been removing special tattoos from the bodies of those still living. The Old Ones are investigating, and their current prime suspects are a small group of Pellis Artisans, although there are also a few reports of such stolen tattoos appearing in Sheban records to help identify members of various Fallen groups. It has been suggested that these tattoos are being collected for some sort of ritual, perhaps one that relates to the original owners.



Delisa Kerithkin, Mordred Reaper

Delisa is leading a circle of Reapers investigating the Magdalite Bloodied Roses for their activities outside their own Tribe. She hopes to kill those directing the Bloodied Rose so that the order itself is not destroyed. She is conducting her own investigation into Broken Foot's slaying, and has already made up her mind to focus on the Magdalites and not the Evan Shamans.

Delisa is in her late thirties, a solid but supple woman. She never makes a move without extensive planning and backup. She enjoys the rare opportunity to lead operations away from her catacombs.

Highlights: Secret, Deadly, Grim

Attributes: APP -1, AGL +2, BLD +1, FIT -1, INF +1, KNO +1, PER +1, WILL +2, STR +1, HEA +1, STA 35, UD 6, AD 7

Skills: Acrobatics 1/+2, Athletics 2/+2, Camouflage 2/0, Combat Sense 2/+1, Craft (Tattoo) 2/0, Dodge 2/+2, Dreaming 2/0, Hand-to-Hand 2/+2, Herbalism 2/+1, Human Perception 2/0, Lore (Poisons) 3/+1, Lore (Yagan) 1/+1, Melee 3/+2, Notice 2/+1, Sneak 2/+2, Synthesis (Curse and Dream Travel) 2, Tactics 2/0, Teaching 2/+1.

Equipment: Bone Longsword (+1 ACC), bone blowpipe, poison darts (POT 12-15, Onset:Instant, Lethal), Pain reliever (POT 10, Onset:Instant, Analgesic).

The Curing

Faide picked up the inverted skull and a glazed ceramic pestle. Robyn came forward and wiped down the outer parts of skull with a damp rag. She then left to return with a silver bottle that had been heating over the fire, which contained the other part of the curing mixture that Faide was preparing. Robyn poured the steaming contents into the skull, through the hole where the throat once was. Faide then set to work using the pestle, turning the skull into the mortar as she mashed the gray brain matter. Robyn watched on as the foamy pink mixture was thinned of lumps by the Old One's skillful hand. At one point Faide's hand slipped on the slick surface of the skull, the frothy brain soup slopping out onto her chest and down her ancient belly. Robyn reached forward with the damp cloth to clean her.

Robyn gathered up Mother Sunkin's drying skin, and slowly lowered it down onto a large bearskin, which rested fur side down. Robyn carefully laid it out as she had many times before, the underside open to the night sky. Faide approached, muttering prayers to Baba Yaga with every step. Holding the skull low to avoid splashing, Faide poured the brain mix from the eye sockets onto the skin as Robyn and Shanin held it taut. Both Robyn and Faide then reached forth; using their hands, they began to rub the mixture into every crevice, crease and hole in the flesh, to ensure that no part of the hide was left uncured. Bubbles frothed between Robyn's fingers as she worked, and she hummed away happily.

Tales of the Death Dealers

"Robyn, dear", said Faide in low conversational tones. "Never be complacent. Never think you can learn all there is to know about death from your tribe. It may be the Crone's domain, but the other tribes feel that they do not need us to determine who should live and who should die."

Robyn looked at her in the flickering light. She nodded and waited. Faide flashed her a broken smile and continued. "The Evans you have met are so attached to life that they forget life is part of a cycle which will always include death. It is the ultimate purpose of life to die. The Evans focus too much on the living. The children of the second Sister of Fate, Magdalen, have other insights to offer but like the Agnites they are so removed from death that they give it little respect."

Robyn nodded and stifled a question; now was not the time to stop the normally tight-lipped Faide from talking. Faide went on. "The Magdalites even harbor a secret order of killers, intended to eliminate the problems within the tribe, but the order was only intended to be used against other Magdalites. The Old Ones know that these Bloodied Roses have been acting against others in the Nation. This lack of faith in Baba Yaga has created a rift between the Magdalites and our kin. Our own anointed death-bringers, the Reapers, have taken this rather personally. Soon there could be problems even within our circle of three. Indeed, it may already have come with the killing of the Evan Shaman, Broken Foot. His death is blamed on our blades, specifically on your own grandma Anny. But don't worry, child. Your gran will be protected."

Robyn tried to let the information all soak in. Robyn refocused and kept working, wondering at this. Now was not the time for distractions.

The Smoking

Finally, Faide gave Robyn a murmur of approval. Robyn's shoulders and arms ached as she helped Faide pick the skin up and carry it to the trough Shanin had cleaned once more. Here she and Faide began to chant again, making the skin pass through another few weeks of time to cure the hide. The smell of the pulped brain grew quite pungent from the bubbles that boiled up into the air as the brain material decayed.

Once done, Faide led Robyn down the long trip to the creek. Here, in the light of Elies' lantern they carefully washed the hide, wiping it down with their hands and then carefully twisting it up to dispel the water. A last quick shake, and they returned for the final drying process. Once again the skin was hung up over the tree branch. Shanin lit the second vase and placed it under the old Evan's skin. Robyn and Faide repeated the ritual to accelerate the smoking process, and the tendrils of smoke began to writhe their way across the dark clearing.

While the smoke still hung heavy in the air, Robyn helped Shanin lower the last remains of Mother Sunkin and carry them to the pyre. The bloody carcass was heavy and slippery, and Shanin took it from her and hauled it onto the pile.

Faide then began the last part of the ceremony. Robyn watched, her head heavy and her body longing for rest. The Old One chanted the final death song in the cool pre-morning air. At the chant's climax, Shanin brought forth a brand from the fire and soaked it in harsh liquor. A coal ignited it easily, and they had to step back as it caught quickly and furiously. Robyn watched impassively as the flesh of the body on the pyre blistered and blackened, the bones revealed momentarily white before they too burned darkly. Behind her, Robyn could hear a woman crying. She turned and saw the silvery trails of tears down Geeta's face. Robyn winced as her dream of the risen dead fighting the Z'bri rushed back to her with startling clarity.

Robyn slept late into the afternoon, waking every once in a while to take long drinks of water from a bowl set beside her. Faide slept nearby, her wheezing breaths sounding like a death rattle. In the early evening, Robyn went out of the cottage and cleaned herself. She was glad that the Evans now seemed in a festive mood, the village bustling with preparations for the coming funeral feast. Robyn ran into Shanin, who explained that an ox had been bartered for and was being slaughtered by Witch Elies. It would be roasted and given to the Sunkin family and others of clan Cov'on.

Robyn went along to the feast and took up her place of honor next to Faide on the raised dias. Mother Geeta Sunkin was now the Little Crone for the Cov'on clan, and Robyn saw the strength in her set jaw as she sat before her family. Robyn received a cold glance from Geeta for her staring. Both looked away.

The spit over the firepit filled the room with a rich meaty flavor. All went well with the feasting and gifting until Faide did the ritual unrolling of the skin to display to the assembled kinfolk. The Evans went respectfully quiet, but their eyes revealed disgust at the sight of the preserved hide. Robyn glanced around with amazement, startled at their distaste and ignorance of the honor that had been done to one of their own.

Robyn slept again that night, her belly bloated with the rich food. She dreamt of smoke filled with red light and the leering skull peering, sightless, from the flames of the pyre. At times she thought she could hear the wail of the dead and the Z'bri from her earlier dream. It was a restless time.

The Final Farewell

The next morning, they left early, the Dahlian Brehnsun at the lead and Petyr at their side. Duskfall passed swiftly, and a few days later they once again had a good rest in the Evan township of Sundown. It was the only night Robyn slept soundly since leaving Mortuary. On leaving, they came upon a rather pretty young Evan woman, by the name of Shayla, who requested that she be allowed to travel with them. Robyn was concerned she might already know of the skinning from Dreaming, but Shayla was either too reserved to show any anger over anything she might have heard, or she was familiar with the proper Yagan rituals. Soon, Brehnsun had her in giggles with his tricks and jests.

Robyn was surprised to find Shayla introducing herself directly sometime later. Robyn was further surprised when she found herself raising the subject of the death of the Evan Broken Foot. Her grandmother's feud with Broken Foot, and his recent murder, needed to be straightened out. If she could gain Shayla's understanding, it would help mend this rift. Fortunately Shayla seemed open-minded on the matter, and Robyn sighed softly with relief at Shayla's promise to help.

After they were well away from Sundown, Robyn, who was leading Faide's pony near the rear of the group, turned back to Faide and asked, in a soft voice, so that they could not be overheard, "Old One, about the Zom. What is their secret over the power over death? And why does Baba Yaga allow them this strange survival?"

From atop her pony, Faide gave Robyn an unsettling look. "I have seen visions in Dream, young Robyn, of you asking the Zom the selfsame question. Perhaps you should wait for their answer." Shocked, Robyn knew she would get no additional reply. If Faide had glimpsed the future, then it must be so. Robyn remained silent, watching her feet on the winding muddy trail, her mind not sure what to do with itself. She was going to meet a Zom.

The Pillars and Dancers

From Word to all Verkin of Thirteen Summers:

The **Pillars**, Joan and Tera Sheba, claim to keep us safe from the Z'bri and from each other. Their bureaucracy and rigid rank structure are something we Yagans find unsuitable for our own lives, which makes it difficult to receive the proper respect from their rank-obsessed Elders. It is also true that Tera Sheba wishes to impose Her will on all the tribes, and this is something that is resisted passively by the Fates. Joan's people's fate is clear. They serve, but they serve unwisely.

The **Dancers** are impulsive and fickle. Agnes grows up slowly, which is good, for She, out of all the other Fatimas, seems to be truly recognizing the cycle of life. Soon the rebellion will come and we will stand by and help guide Her and Her tribe where the others cannot. Our hand must be light but firm. Dahlia, on the other hand, brings both hope and fear to us. Her wish to bring change and growth is good, but Her secretive actions and uncertain loyalty to the Nation make Her a danger. The Old Ones saw Her dabbling with the so-called Eighth Tribe and agreed the jest had merit, but it is all the other tricks She has yet to play that could wreak havoc on the destiny of the Nation. Her people must be watched closely.

Coming Home

From the tale of Robyn Verkin:

The journey back to the Tribal lands had been swift but tiring. Robyn had had a chance to examine the flesh cutting on Petyr's shoulder, and indeed it was the face of a Squat sporting strange tattoos and brandings. Petyr had told her of the recent incursions by these barbaric warlords, who had been sneaking across the river on floating logs. The Joanites now sent their hunters and cavalry to seek them out before they could intrude again. Petyr was planning to return to Westholm once he was freed of this obligation, if his commander allowed, for he wished to see Amda again. He was also taken by the idea of sorties across the Western bridge for occasional hunting trips.

Robyn had watched Old One Faide with care as they returned. She shown signs of deep-seated fatigue, even illness. The ceremony had drained her deeply. Robyn's reassurance came that the old witch would know the time and place of her death, and it was surely not before they returned safely to Mortuary Hill.

Brehnsun had spoken to her a few times in the evenings. He had assured her that their group would be safe, for Dahlia was looking over them. Robyn had managed to get him to show her some of his fine markings. Robyn was sure that the one over his breast was not done by mortal hand. This insight marked Brehnsun as a Little Trickster, she guessed, or perhaps some other even more loved by Dahlia. In return she had to defend the Yagan mysteries from his prying banter, although he did beguile her into showing him some of her more intimate tattoos before she blushed and turned away.

Mortuary

They returned to Mortuary Dome in the early afternoon of the fourth day. Brehnsun, Shayla and Petyr bade them farewell and headed off quickly to the din of Bazaar with talk of good food and drink. Robyn declined to go with them, and they did not press the issue with the Old One present. Robyn led the ponies and her mistress up the winding cart trail to the Mortuary Dome.

Robyn was startled momentarily when a serious-looking man stopped her in her tracks. He grabbed her by the chin, albeit too gently to be an attack of some kind, and gazed at her face as though trying to see straight through her soul. Robyn could see the mark of the seer on his forehead and held her indignation back. Behind the seer, another man rode up and stopped.

"Kraig, I think your sight is playing the fool with you. Can't you see this girl travels with the reverend Old One?"

The first man, Kraig, released Robyn's chin, his smooth hands dropping to his waist, as he seemed to ponder his friend's banter. He replied in a stern tone, without turning to face the tall man on the horse. "Andrue, it is best to assume that all might bear the dark marks. At least until I am proven wrong."

With that they both left, Kraig bowing deeply to Faide, still perched on her small pony. As the two rode off, Faide let a bemused smile play about her face, and she let out a soft, wry chuckle.

"An overzealous Daemonseeker and his Seer, dear. Let's get on."

The Great Library

On arrival at the top, Faide directed the group to the Crone's Library. Once there, Shanin led them deep into the sacred chambers, and Robyn was once again amazed at the hundreds of skins hanging here. This was only the third chance that she had to enter the Library, and the place seemed more awe-inspiring every time. Watching Mordred said sacred words to Shanin as they passed through the place, Robyn holding the bundled skin and Faide's bone cane rapping loudly on the cold marble floor. Twice, as they moved from room to room, they stopped before Pellis Artisan guards, who scrutinized their tattoos before letting them pass.

Faide stopped them several times to examine the hanging skins in the light of the lantern that Shanin carried. She spoke to skins of past Old Ones and famous persons as though they were close friends. Faide made efforts to point out special tattoos on the skin-records, telling stories of past struggles and victories, marriages and appointments, deaths and rebirths.

Eventually they arrived at a series of small rooms lit by many thick candles. Faide had Robyn unwrap old mother Sunkin on a stone table, before some other wizened sisters whose every centimeter of flesh bore the mark of ink or steel. Robyn stood back as the three Old Ones carefully touched and examined the skin. The low murmurings seemed pleased. Almost absentmindedly, Faide turned and politely asked Shanin to take Robyn to the Bonecrafters. The bone Robyn had selected needed to be presented properly.



Andrue Synkl'on - Daemonseeker

Andrue has only recently become a Daemonseeker after spending a few seasons working with the Joanites at the Seven Fingers. Fortunately he has linked up with an experienced seer who lost his own Daemonseeker last year.

Andrue knows he is in his prime as a fighter and has a strong affinity towards the Joanites and their talk of crusade against the Z'bri. He has a particular dislike of the Shebans and has had to be warned a few times by Old Ones for his open antagonism toward them.

Highlights: Righteous, Driven, Daring

Attributes: AGL +1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL +1, HEA +1, STA 30, ULD 5, AD 6

Skills: Animal Handling 2/+1, Archery (Crossbow) 2/+1, Combat Sense 2/+1, Dodge 2/+1, Hand-to-Hand 2/+1, Interrogate 2/+1, Investigation 1/+1, Lore (Z'bri) 1/+1, Melee 3/+1, Notice 2/+1, Read/Write (Tribal, Yagan) 2/+1, Riding 2/+1, Ritual 1/+1, Sneak 2/+1, Speak (as written, Evan, Joanite) 2/+1, Synthesis (Curse) 2, Throwing 2/+1.

Equipment: Bone Crossbow, poison bolts (POT 12, Onset: 2 rounds, Paralyze), Long Sword (+1 ACC), poison darts (POT 15, Onset: Instant), Heavy Armor, survival gear, horses.



Kraig Stant'on - Pellis
Artisan - Flesh Seer

Kraig has been a Seer for five years. He has recently lost his partner of some three years, Kram, to an unfortunate exorcism attempt. Kraig was a particularly talented Pellis Artisan before he was drawn into being a Seer. He keeps records and portraits (on flesh and parchment) of those who have been infected by Z'bri taint. He also keeps rough notes on these drawings, details he thinks significant about the person.

Highlights: Disturbing, Artistic, Haunted

Attributes: AGL +1, CRE +1, KNO +1, PER +2, PSY +1, WILL +1, HEA +1, STA 30, UID 3, AD 4

Skills: Combat Sense 2/+2, Craft (Sketch and Tattoo) 3/+1, Dodge 2/+1, Dreaming 1/+1, Hand-to-Hand 1/+1, Healing 2/+1, Herbalism 2/+1, Investigation 2/+1, Lore (Flesh) 2/+1, Lore (Z'bri) 2/+1, Melee (Knife) 2/+1, Navigation (Vimary) 1/+1, Notice 3/+1, Read/Write (Tribal, Fanzay, Squat, Yagan) 2/+1, Riding 2/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Speak (as written) 2/+1, Synthesis (Curse and Dream Travel) 3.

Equipment: Bone Spear (+1 ACC), Knives, Bone pit spike (+1 ACC), curing equipment, tattooing equipment, horse.

The Bone Man

Shanin led her off. They descended down winding stairs into a series of tunnels and caves. Robyn grew a little concerned at this; to her knowledge, only the Witches walked these paths. Shanin remained his grim silent self. Passing through a series of bone chambers, they stopped before a large work area. Tables of bones sported great candle stands like some feast where the bodies of the dead were to be the main course.

"Robyn Verkin, this is Adem Kajkin. He is a Bonecrafter. Give him the Evan bone."

Robyn slowly unwrapped the package, looking over the plump figure before her. He was large, and seated as he was behind the large table, Robyn could see no clothing on his heavy frame. His pale flesh was covered in spidery tattoo lines making out bones that his fatty flesh concealed so well.

With one hand, Adem swept an area of the table clean; bones clattered to the floor. Robyn laid the cloth down. He picked up the bone and held it close to his eye, turning it back and forth. His thumb rubbed its surface. Robyn glanced at him surreptitiously. She was confused to find so many Yagan tattoos she had not yet witnessed, even through her years as an apprentice artisan. There seemed to be so many mysteries still to learn.

"So Robyn, why did you choose this bone?" His voice was polite and warming. She examined her feelings and began.

"It felt right, Adem. I always have been taught to feel the bones, not to trust my eyes." Her tone had begun rather haughtily but she softened her voice as she caught a glance from Adem's kindly eyes.

"Your feel of the bone shows wisdom. The Old Ones have chosen well, young Robyn. No, I can say no more. You must experience the mystery to know it. We will talk again soon. Go with Shanin, and may the Raven be with you."

Robyn stood still. More testing, she thought. Fear fluttered her heart. She quelled it and turned to her companion. Fear was a thing of youth, childishness. Shanin was impassive. He turned and led them away, continuing along through the labyrinth.

Robyn's Destiny

Robyn was led away and back to the outside. Shanin took her to a place near Mortuary Dome where she could eat and rest. When she was awakened, it was after dusk. Her dreams were scattered, but a foreboding lay upon her. She bathed in icy water and dressed in the simple black robe provided to her. She would be initiated tonight. She saw this clearly, although she could see nothing else of what was to come.

The Flesher Witch Selka knocked on the black, wooden door of Robyn's small sleeping chamber, and, without a word, led her away toward the great dome. Faide was there, also in a dark, featureless, cowed robe. Selka left them and Robyn waited for Faide. The moon stood full and stark against the sky, and the field of deathstones reflected its glow. Despite her preparation, Robyn felt out of place, unready.

"Robyn, dear," said Faide in a motherly instructing tone, "so ends the final hours of your long youth. You have been patient. This patience is very important, so remember it after this night. Now raise your hood and walk beside me. Do as I say. Do not question my instructions. Do not shy away from what must be done. If you do you will fail. You will have wasted this particular life cycle if you do. Now come." With that, she hobbled on along the path between the graves, her bone walking stick rapping noisily on the stones.

They approached and entered through a fallen section of the Great Dome. Dozens of torches encircled the great chamber. Figures stood silently amid the pillars and rubble, staring into the great pit where lay the eternal Crone. Robyn could hear a whisper rising from the darkness, a noise like the rubbing together of many bones, from which she could make out what sounded like words. Robyn felt a burning desire to stop and listen harder, but Faide kept moving.

They circled the pit slowly. Stars were visible through the great gap in the ceiling. Then the noise of the bones grew suddenly louder; the caw of ravens and crows broke out, rebounding off the walls, amplified to painful levels. Robyn stopped and saw that Faide had as well. Stunned and unsure of what to do, Robyn was suddenly flung back into her dream of a week past. Once again, her eyes were seared with the burning images; once again she saw the hundreds of corpses engulfing the bestial bodies of the Z'bri.

Robyn blinked and before her towered a rippling column of bones, highlighted by the moonlight and flickering candles. Robyn stared, feelings of elation and awe battling each other within her stricken mind. The thick column dipped and the great skull of Baba Yaga floated before her. Robyn could not feel her body. Dream and reality mixed and she blinked to try and wake.

A tall hooded figure appeared in the corner of Robyn's vision, clutching a long knife. Robyn could not move. The face of the Great Crone came closer and Robyn felt her own arms, independent from her will, clutch her robe and hold it out. The column snaked and bones of all varieties tumbled noisily into the fold Robyn had made, weighing her down. The birds had gone silent. Then great Fatimal form before Robyn slid away and down.

From the depths came a rasping whisper Robyn felt to the core of her being, a vibrant burning sensation. "You are the bridge between life and death. See the children of death have their life."

The figure with the blade passed before Robyn and handed the weapon to Witch Faide.

"Come, Robyn. Walk the Raven's Trail with me," whispered Faide, in a small and exhausted voice.

The Raven's Trail

Robyn found herself walking slowly past the rows of ancient deathstones, Faide wheezing alongside her. Sensation had returned to her body and she struggled to hold the heavy pile of bones in her robe. In the moonlight, Robyn was sure many of the bones showed signs of etching. One clearly bore a dyed rune of a winged hourglass, the symbol of her own tribe.

"Robyn," Faide whispered. "Now we walk the Raven's Trail. No matter how often you walk it, it will never be the same. The Raven's Trail is one of the greatest mysteries of our Tribe. It shifts and changes, moving between Dream and this place of the dead. The Raven's Trail has few laws, much like our people. One of the laws is that when first trodden it must be walked alone."

Robyn was disturbed. She struggled to understand why Faide had told her a rule they were clearly violating. Robyn saw the knife catch the light in the Old One's hand; perhaps this was some warning that this night Robyn's duty was to be a sacrifice. Was that the bridge that the Crone meant? Robyn tried to keep her breath steady and deep. She should not fear death. Death was the other half of life. Robyn lowered her head, breathing in the strangeness of the nighttime grave field as she walked.

Children of Death



Zom of the Rite / Dead-kin

Since the time of the uprising in the camps, many of the dead-kin who were raised as Zoms have gone insane and reverted to a wild existence. Those that remain for the most part pay homage to Baba Yaga and continue the Rite of the Pact. In the rite, bones from the Bonepit and sacrifices of willing Yagans allow the Zom of the Rite to grow in number, saving souls from the Sea of the Lost. In return, they live in peace in the catacombs under Mortuary, protecting the Yagans and acting as agents for the Yagans well away from Tribal lands.

Highlights: Dead, Decaying, Horrific

Eminence: Death

Attributes: AGI +1, APP -4, BLD +1, KNO +1, PER +2, WILL +1, PSY +1, STR, HEA, STA, LID, AD

Skills: Athletics 2/+1, Combat Sense 2/+2, Dodge 2/+1, Dreaming 1/+1, Hand-to-Hand 2/+1, Human Perception 2/+1, Lore (Death) 2/+1, Melee 2/+1, Notice 2/+2, Ritual 2/+1, Sneak 2/+1, Speak (Yagan, Old One, Fanzy) 2/+1, Survival 2/0, Synthesis (Dream Travel) 1, Darksight (no penalty to see or act in darkness), Immune to Poison and Drowning, Reanimate (If given Yagan death rite will rise again with the dark of the moon).

The rhythmic, constant tapping of the old woman's cane stopped. Robyn looked up, startled from her thoughts of gloom. From out of the darkness of a crypt loomed an apparition of bones and armor. Robyn held back a cry. The thing was tall, its eye sockets glowing pale blue. Rings and bracelets rattled against its arms, held in place by cloth and cords.

Its jaw did not move, but words could be heard, like the sound of rustling leaves in the wind.

"Life sister, I am the rite binder."

"Greetings, daughter of death," came Faide's croaking voice, as she stepped forward. "We come to honor the pact of uprising. I have brought the blessings of our mother. With this tithe I bind thee anew to the oath."

"Life sister, my dead-kin will be renewed and increased with this blessing. As rite binder I recognize your part of the pact. With these we shall bring forth our missing sisters from the great black sea of the lost."

Robyn grew used to the strange voice; her alarm became awe and then fascination at the words that had been spoken. This was one of those creatures that she had seen defending the Yagans at the uprising of the camps. It spoke of bringing souls back from the Sea of the Lost and creating more of whatever it was. Robyn blinked, gasping slightly as the import of this moment hit her. The birthing of these walking dead was no curse — it was Baba Yaga's blessing.

"Hand her the bones, Robyn. Give her the whole of your robe," said the Old One in a measured voice. Robyn crouched down with her burden; she managed to lift the robe free from her back and bundle the bones up in it. She shivered at the feel of the air against her nakedness, feeling very vulnerable as she stood. She quickly stepped forward and deposited the bone-filled robe into the skeletal arms. She stepped back again, casting a measured glance at Faide, awaiting the slash of the blade against her throat or the pressure of a blade's penetration into her back. So. She had failed this cycle and would be sent away to return as someone more promising — perhaps as one of these living dead.

"This is the sacrifice?" The words sent chills through Robyn's being. The knife flashed briefly in the moonlight as Faide turned it.

"No," said the witch, "I am. Robyn, take this knife now. Cut my throat over the bones in the Zom's arms. Do it, Robyn. No hesitation." The knife smacked handle-first into Robyn's hand. Faide then handed Robyn her cane and stumbled forward, almost bumping into the huge creature who faced them, waiting. Robyn moved forward slowly as her mind raced. So this was the final test. Robyn dropped the cane and seized the Old One under her left arm. Then, without further thought, her eyes holding fast on the being before her, she slit Faide's throat wide open, a quick, vertical slash along the pulsing artery. She held the slumping form up as Faide's muscles sagged, and the Witch's blood gushed over the bones, both dead and living. Warm blood ran slick down Robyn's own arms and body. She held onto the old woman as the death rattle issued from her windpipe. It was done.

"Farewell, life," the Zom hissed. "Our pact is kept. The Old Ones next decide our meeting."

"Farewell, daughter of death," sighed Robyn, softly. She slumped down to the ground, Faide's body before her. The Zom stepped back into the darkness of the vault and the noise of its tapping strides reminded Robyn of her dead mistress' bone cane. Time passed and then Shanin was there, casting a garment about her. Robyn remembered to take the cane. Others picked up the body.

Final Reflections

Robyn found herself woken from her semiconscious state by fleeting words that spilled up from the great pit. She couldn't catch the meaning, but the words warned her as the soft clatter spilled over and around her. Leaning heavily on Shanin, she entered the brightly lit mausoleum. The incense was pungent, smelling of summer. Naked again, she soon found herself lying facedown on a lush, but stained, fur. Warm water splashed across her back, and was quickly wiped dry. Another robed figure handed her a bowl, a skullcap like the one she had been gifted with when she left home so long ago. It was warm from the steaming liquid within. With prompting gestures and a little help, Robyn drank deeply of the bowl; the taste of rich herbs brought a grimace of distaste.

A hand was placed on her back, and a voice spoke in a reassuring tone. "Welcome, Robyn Verkin Lanig'on, to our Order. This is the rite of union between you and the Mordred. You are our kin and we yours. Your fate is our fate. Now bend forward and this will be sealed with the mark of your place, as the bridge between the living and the dead, as daughter of life."

Robyn carefully placed the bowl down and leaned forward. She knew she had not absorbed everything but she felt reassured that her place was here. Why she had been chosen to be a Mordred and not an Artisan did not seem to matter. Overwhelmed, she held tight to the knowledge that the great Crone had blessed her and would keep her safe. This was her fate. She must accept it.

A needle began its quick puncturing at the nape of her neck. Robyn's mind drifted and she gazed at her reflection in the skull-top bowl. The pricking kept her from falling asleep, but her gaze blurred as she let her eyes relax. Robyn could see Faide's smiling face drift into view, her body clutched in the talons of a great raven that was passing over a sea of blackness. The vision was broken as drops of Robyn's own blood, sliding down her cheek, dropped into the bowl. The ripples died away quickly and Robyn was amused to see wrinkles around her eyes. Finally. Signs of wisdom.



Grandmère Decembre:

(Vimary, pg.100-101)

Grandmère Decembre acts as surrogate mother to the Yagans in Baba Yaga's place, since Baba Yaga remains rather detached from her subjects. Grandmère Decembre is well thought of by all Yagans and many wonder how soon it will be till she returns across the River of Dream. Word has reached the Mordred that when the Grandmère dies a special ritual will be conducted to return her soul and wisdom to a newborn within the Tribes, so that the Yagans might have her back.

The Mordred are already investigating this, and Old One Wend Cerekin Venu'on believes she will be able to see the Grandmère in the flesh and placenta of the newborn when this happens. Furthermore, it is understood that the Grandmère herself mentioned such a concept in reference to a long-lost friend whom she expects back in the Tribes very soon. Old One Wend has leapt upon the idea and has formed a circle to find Grandmère's friend among the Tribes when she returns from wherever she is now. Why she was not taken across the Fold is a mystery that Wend's circle is looking into.

Chapter five: A Lover's Touch

The Siren's shoulders slumped and tears stained her pretty cheeks. Her eyes were deep pools of fear and she shook her head. We all felt her loss.

"Fear not," Our Lover said. "I send you forth into Tibor's court not as punishment, but to tempt the Z'bri to their doom. Your love will help buy the freedom of your friends, your lovers and all of the Tribes. We will not forget you. With your act of love, you set us all free."

The Siren nodded and turned to leave, knowing that her sacrifice would not be for naught. She journeyed to H'I Kar with Magdalen's blessing, never to return.

- Volume 73 of the One Hundred Books



TRIBAL CYCLES

Those Magdalites still living with the Tribe differ greatly from their Fallen counterparts. They are not embittered by the withdrawal of Magdalen's love, nor must they yield their bodies to others out of desperation. Tribal Magdalites are one of the wealthiest groups in all of Vimary, reveling in the temporal world and the pleasures that it brings.

THEMES

Magdalite cycles abound with opportunities for self-discovery; with no overriding sense of duty, the Magdalites are free to pursue personal goals. Nonetheless, some fight for more abstract things, such as particular ideologies and the advancement of perceived Tribal objectives. Common themes include:

Favor and Prestige: Nepotism and sycophancy lie at the heart of any political system; the Tribe of Magdalen is little different. An average Magdalite spends much time and energy trying to improve her position; the shifting pattern of alliances in the Tribe ensures that this is an ongoing process. Without careful maintenance, favors held today will disappear tomorrow; colleagues will forget friendships and debts will lapse. Matters beyond a character's control will alter her position within the Tribe, and every friendship made has the potential to bring dark rivalries along with it. Worse still, allies will turn against each other, and a Magdalite must be cunning indeed to avoid being branded a traitor by either side.

The Ascendancy of the Tribe: The Magdalites' role in the nation is ambiguous. On the one hand, they stand in positions of great respect as servants of a Fate and managers of the flow of information to the Pillars; on the other, they are expected to exist beneath the Sheban yoke and many deride the Lovers as decadent and unnecessary. This is seen as a dichotomy by some Magdalites; the temptation to take Vimary's reins is too great, and they secretly seek to lead the Tribes. The Dentata are the most extreme proponents of such sentiment, but it boils beneath the surface of almost every Magdalite clique. Through subtle influence of the other Tribes, they seek to direct the future.

True Love: In the world of Tribe 8, it is easy to believe in destiny; the Fatimas are a daily reminder of its existence. It is hardly surprising, then, that most Magdalites believe that there is one true love for each of them, a partner that is truly their equal and perfect complement. Great quests have been mounted in the name of true love; many have died, but some have found the lover that they seek. The hope of such a find drives many in their daily lives; however, the path is long, and many despair of never finding their partner. Some spurn all other lovers until their "other half" is found, and some carry on regardless; nonetheless, the possibility is always there in the back of their minds.

The Search for Truth: Magdalen has commanded Her Tribe to seek the truth in their daily lives. How they try to accomplish this varies from Magdalite to Magdalite, ranging from ecstatic sex to drug-induced visions to the interpretation of everyday omens.

The truth is elusive; more philosophical Magdalites can spend their entire lives trying to piece together the glimpses that they are allowed to witness. Others ponder the nature of truth and its relationship to concepts such as beauty or good and evil. Some ponder too long and slip into insanity; a few even deny the existence of truth, and try to muddy the waters for other searchers with such drive that even the Dahlians find them enigmatic and confusing.



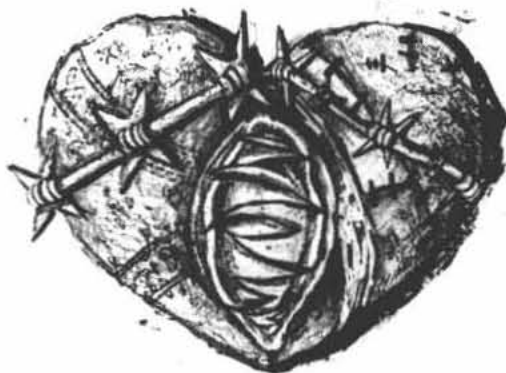
MOOD

Magdalites are emotional creatures, and mood plays a very important part in their cycles. It is rare that a Magdalite should become aloof from her surroundings; she is, almost by definition, constantly emotionally involved with everything that happens around her. Common moods include:

Paranoia and Uncertainty: Given the dynamic world in which the Magdalites live, it is only natural that a Magdalite should suspect her friends of treachery. She will make and break many friendships in her life; just as often, her life may change without her foreknowledge. Every Magdalite is an individual with her own objectives often conflicting with those around her; given the choice between fleeting friendship and attainment of her goals, some will choose the latter. Trust is a scarce commodity in the Tribe of Magdalen.

Love and Belonging: The intrigues of Magdalite society leave many harboring deep insecurity. A Magdalite will do anything in her power to maintain the rare instances of trust and acceptance that she finds. Love cannot be bought nor coerced; it is rarer and more precious than the greatest of Fatimal treasures. Magdalites desperately cling to those that they love, all too aware of what may happen should their love turn sour. Sadly, some smother their beloved beneath too much devotion, alienating them and forcing them away.

Pleasure and Pain: Whether for personal satisfaction or for spiritual enlightenment, most Magdalites engage in acts of pleasure on a regular basis. Some few gain perverse pleasure from abstinence and asceticism; others find solace only in suffering or inflicting pain. Whatever her particular brand of hedonistic endeavor, any given Magdalite will spend an inordinate amount of time engaged in carnal pursuits. Some other Tribes disapprove of the Magdalites' wanton behavior, but such a life is necessary to the Nation's survival; the Magdalites invite others to participate, thereby giving them release from their everyday worries and guaranteeing clarity of vision.



LOCATIONS

Although the Magdalites are perhaps more urban-oriented than other Tribes, their environment is no less varied. Where Magdalites dwell, the scenery takes on a beauty and complexity rivaling that of Magdalen Herself.

Xstasis: Whilst not the only place to find the Magdalites, it is certainly the largest by far. Xstasis is in many ways a separate entity to Bazaar; it is a maze of delights and a center of Tribal culture. Concubines languish in doorways, enticing passers-by to experience the pleasures within; Ecstasies hawk their wares at streetside stalls. Xstasis is a vision of beauty, every sight and smell a call to tarry and lose oneself; it is also a trap for the unwary, but this is carefully hidden beneath its pleasant façade. Love is given without reservation, yet not without price; eyes are watching and ears are listening, hoping to wrest secrets from those who wander the silken roads of Magdalen's web.

The Castle: At the center of the web lies the Castle, like a radiant spider. Magdalen Herself dwells here, surrounded by an entourage of Sirens and Maskers and their attendants from all Guilds. The Castle's layout is all but impossible to fathom, for the Fatima's presence twists and warps the very fabric of reality. Its towers claw at the sky, their white spires a beacon to any with unrealized dreams or secret desires. Cats languish in shadowed corners, watching passing humans closely and trying to comprehend their goals and weaknesses, same as their Magdalite friends.

Envy Line: The Underlands span the length and breadth of Vimary; indeed, what the Keepers call the Envy Line passes directly beneath the Castle. Magdalite merchants use the Envy Line as a semi-secret transport route into the heart of Bazaar; however, the tunnels are flooded west of Lion Nexus, so they must travel overland to Lai. There has been some suggestion that sections of the Envy Line at either end of Xstasis should be collapsed and the tunnel used for storage or as a series of giant feast halls, but for now, the Magdalites consider the route too valuable to waste.

The Red House: The origins of its name lost in antiquity, these ruins from the World Before sit across from the Castle. The Red House is home to visiting emissaries from the other Tribes; on one or two occasions, it has even housed Z'bri ambassadors. Its luxuries rival those of the Castle, ensuring a pleasurable stay for its visitors. Spies roam the Red House's halls, however, and the attendants' wiles are more than capable of loosening all but the most unwilling tongues.

The Whispering Vaults: The hill that Xstasis rests upon is riddled with secret passages that pass from building to building. Many homes and other structures have been subtly altered to channel conversations to the Voyeurs' alcoves; they listen constantly, hoping for snippets of "improper" thoughts and deeds. Deep within the maze of tunnels lie the Whispering Vaults, the Voyeurs' headquarters — a sparse, ugly and dismal collection of chambers. The Voyeurs' archive rests at the complex's center, rivaling the libraries of the Sunken City in size; the archive is a chronicle of lives and happenings within Xstasis, dating back nearly to the Liberation. Both Magdalites and visitors are detailed in the books that fill the shelves; more than a few would give anything to have their pasts erased. A number of meeting halls and interrogation chambers surrounds the archive. When the Voyeurs' passive avenues of investigation are exhausted, they bring people here to be questioned. On a quiet day, the screams of prisoners might be heard echoing from beneath the streets of Xstasis; then again, the streets of Xstasis are rarely (if ever) quiet.

The Garden Quarter: A small community of Evans lives within Xstasis, working for the wealthier Magdalites; they serve as gardeners, midwives and household servants. Many live in their employers' homes, but others choose to live in the Quarter amongst their own kind, looking across the canal to their Tribe's traditional land. In either case, most Evans find the Magdalites' lifestyle strange and perhaps immoral; they spend little time with their employers beyond that which their duties require. All of Xstasis' Evans gather in the Garden Quarter in their free time, a lush and serene environment and a world away from the rest of the settlement's bustling streets. A few Ecstatics and the occasional Gatherer, returned from the Outlands, join the Evans here, but the Garden Quarter is too mundane and boring for most Magdalites.

The Slums: Carefully hidden from the sight of outsiders, the slums are home to those Magdalites that have fallen from grace, yet who were of little enough consequence or whose crimes were petty enough to save them from banishment to Hom. It is a sad place, filled with lost souls who have forgotten how to hope or how to love. They exist in drug-induced stupors, forever reliving their failed lives in an attempt to redeem themselves, or to simply hide from the present. Occasionally, one will find the will to emerge from the squalor, but unfortunately, this seldom happens. Addiction is common here, as are violence and suicide.

The Outlands: The lands beyond Vimary are rich in diversity. Magdalite traders ply the waters of the Otter and Great Rivers, selling their goods to various Squat settlements; the Gatherers harvest raw materials for the Ecstatics' potions and spy on the Outlanders. The Jardin, the Gatherers' secret meeting place, lies

to east of Vimary and the Z'bri cities of Rahntoh and Capal brood at opposite edges of Tribal exploration. The Outlands are a place of mystery and wonder, full of adventure for the brave and hardy Magdalite. Some truth-seekers wander the expanses; as yet, only a few sense the Outlands' role in the Nation's destiny.

FALLEN CYCLES

The Fallen do not encounter Magdalites as frequently as they do Joanites or Shebans. However, the Magdalites are frequently more colorful than either of these Tribes, and they are often more memorable as individuals.

MAGDALITES AS ALLIES

Many Fallen regard the Tribe of Magdalen as they did before their exile: liars, whores and drunkards all. However, some — particularly former Magdalites — realize that this is a gross overgeneralization; Magdalites are as individualistic as the Fallen themselves. Each Magdalite has her own lifestyle and objectives; these will occasionally take them into contact with the Fallen.

Magdalen has spies everywhere, and Hom is no exception. A few Fallen work for Magdalite masters, gathering what information that they can in return for drugs, jewelry, or more intimate favors. Conversely, a Magdalite will sometimes leak information about the Tribes' inner workings if it suits her goals to do so. Fallen characters could conceivably act as double agents, playing the Tribes off against the Fallen, and reaping the rewards and the dangers inherent in such practices.

Love is a fickle thing, and it is not unknown for a Magdalite to keep a clandestine lover or two amongst the Fallen. Tera Sheba's High Judges frown upon these liaisons, but they occur nonetheless; the Magdalites involved often have enough influence to keep the enforcers of Tribal law at bay. In other cases, the lovers must meet in secret, often leading to complicated series of intrigues.

Magdalites of a more philosophical bent sometimes seek out the Fallen in their pursuit of truth. Some Magdalites seek out Doomsayers and Guides, hoping to gain more insight into the architecture of the universe.

MAGDALITES AS NEUTRALS

Paradoxically, the Tribe that spends so much time and resources spying on their fellows is also one of the most self-absorbed. Many Magdalites simply do not care for Tribal politics and are more concerned with their own little worlds. Ambivalent toward the Fallen, these Magdalites will treat them as any other member of the Tribes.

More interesting, however, are Magdalites that embody intense love-hate relationships with the Fallen; they will alternately grant aid and harry the outcasts. The reasons for such behavior are many. Some Magdalites adore "Fallen chic" and are fascinated by the outcasts' lives, yet harbor deep guilt or hostility for their plight. Others have Fallen lovers, yet punish them for leaving, despite their lovers' exile being far from voluntary. The complex relationships that these Magdalites have with Fallen characters will no doubt shake their trust and opinions of the Lovers' Tribe as a whole, and could provide many a memorable encounter.

MAGDALITES AS ENEMIES

It is said that a wronged woman's anger is sharper than any blade; this nowhere more true than amongst the Tribe of Magdalen. Jealous or betrayed Magdalites will pursue former lovers to the ends of the Earth in an effort to seek vengeance for real or imagined slights. This can be very dangerous for their quarry, as Magdalites are masters of disguise and intrigue; their former lovers often find themselves assailed from all sides with neither apparent rhyme nor reason.

The Fallen sometimes stumble into the middle of Magdalite plots and conspiracies, unwittingly defusing them by their actions. Given the amount of effort that goes into these intrigues, it is hardly surprising that a Magdalite manipulator might become enraged when her pet ploy collapses around her. Retribution will be invariably swift and painful for the Fallen in question.



CHARACTERS

Magdalites are complex individuals in a complex world. It is too easy to think of them as simple spies, politicians or ladies of the evening; each one is her own person, with her own opinions, desires and goals. All too often, the façade that they project differs radically from the truth that hides beneath.

CONCEPTS

With little loyalty to concepts of clan or family, Magdalites are more individualistic than other Tribals are. They are motivated foremost by their own agendas, with devotion to Magdalen a distant second. Existence in **Tribe 8** is a hard and austere life, yet the Magdalites are urbane and bohemian.

Outlook: Although Magdalites generally only express opinions that they want to be heard, a member's stance on various issues nonetheless determines her friends and foes. These issues include the Crusade, the Fallen, the other Tribes and rivalries within Guilds and between families. Where does your character stand on these issues? How passionate is she about these beliefs? How far would she go to further her cause?

The Dentata: Although not a Guild *per se*, the Dentata nonetheless constitute a power within the Tribe of Magdalen. Factionalism within the Tribe is often nebulous and transitory, but the Dentata have a purpose that is set in stone: the advancement of the Tribe by any means necessary. They have members in every Guild and see themselves as the will of Magdalen made flesh. Although small in size (numbering less than 100 members), their hand can be felt far beyond the boundaries of the Tribe. It is not enough to simply profess their beliefs; the Dentata constantly test their members' loyalty and set tasks to further their cause. Is your character even aware of their existence? What does she think of their goals? Does she support the Dentata, or perhaps even feel that their actions are not extreme enough?

Other Allegiances: Some Magdalites have humble goals; others have dreams that span the Tribes and great lengths of time. In any case, friendships and other, more temporary, alliances are required to reach these goals. What debts does your character owe, and what favors can she call upon? Would she betray her friends to embrace her dreams?

Love or Lust? The day-to-day existence of many Magdalites — especially Concubines — requires a level of intimacy alien to the other Tribes. Magdalites consort with many people; more often than not, their lovers are strangers. How does your character feel about this? Does she do it to spread the love of Magdalen, to quench her own carnal fires or does she emotionally detach herself, her mind focusing only upon the act itself? Does she act out of a sense of duty alone?

GUILDS

Most Magdalites are born into their Guilds, although some join other Guilds an early age if they show talent in a given field. In some ways, Guilds take the place of the family in Magdalite society; their members derive more security from their guildmates' commonality than from simple ties of blood. The Guilds in the Tribe of Magdalen are:

Bloodied Roses: The Bloodied Roses are the assassins of the Tribe. Whereas Yagans generally kill only when their victims' time has come, the Bloodied Roses are almost solely used for political purposes; they operate on orders from the Sirens or the Masters' Council. They operate covertly, although some Bloodied Roses like to let their "marks" know that they are being followed; the victims' fear and paranoia are as much a part of their punishment as the act of killing itself.

Concubines: Concubines are entertainers of the most carnal sort; their ministrations allow for release and anonymous pleasure not often found in the other Tribes. However, people will often whisper things in the throes of ecstasy that they would otherwise keep hidden, and so the Concubines also gather intelligence from their clientele.

Diplomats: The Diplomats are second only to the Sirens in prestige. Their task consists not only of acting as emissaries for the Tribe or the Nation as a whole, but includes spying on their hosts. Diplomats can be found amongst other Tribes, the Fallen, Squats or the Z'bri. This last duty is considered the highest; those who are given this task are branded with the mark of the Withered Rose, a tattoo or scar of a dried rose branch carved across their foreheads as though part of a crown, and are forbidden to re-enter Tribal Society.

Ecstatics: Most Ecstatics brew intoxicating potions and hallucinogens, although a significant minority work as jewelers and other craftsmen. They jealously guard their secrets, but none is more closely kept than the method by which Magdalen's secretions are transformed into Emori. Many Ecstatics test their creations on themselves, and so develop all sorts of eccentricities.

Gatherers: The Gatherers operate almost solely in the Outlands. Officially, their task is to gather raw materials for the Ecstatics, although they also tend sacred sites such as the Jardin. Their most important duty, however, is to conceal themselves amongst the Squats, seeking information that would be denied to the more visible Diplomats.

Maskers: The Maskers are entertainers; they have much in common with their Dahlian counterparts. They dance before their Fatima and for the entertainment of all that watch their displays. Their dances conceal deadly secrets, however, for each rhythm is a fighting style in itself.

Sirens: Once sent to lure the Z'bri to their doom, the Sirens now live a comfortable existence at the right hand of Magdalen. They tend to the Lover, fulfilling Her every whim. Although they hold no seat on the Masters' Council, they are nonetheless *de facto* leaders of the Tribe, carrying Magdalen's word to her beloved.

Voyeurs: The Voyeurs dwell in the shadows, watching for breaches of Magdalite law. The most important laws relate to rape and the molestation of children; the proper channels are quick to open up in such cases. The Voyeurs also watch for "impropriety," behavior that runs counter to the interests of the Tribe.



THE QUESTION OF FAMILY

Given that Magdalite children spend little time with their parents, it is not surprising that family ties are less rigid in Magdalen's Tribe than in most others. Most children grow up in crèches just outside of Xstasis with Evan foster parents; some, however, are given to Dahlians or Agnites to raise. A few grow up in Lovers' Circles, cared for by a designated "mother," a man or woman designated as a stand-in of sorts for the Evan caretakers. Unlike the typical arrangement in other tribes, very few Magdalite children live with their biological parents.

Magdalites' names are also a reflection of this, and form a major part of the coming-of-age ceremony. Although many Magdalites bear a family or clan name, others choose names on the basis of aesthetics and some are known only by their first names or nicknames. Families will sometimes adopt members not related by blood; just because two Magdalites bear the same family name does not necessarily mean that they were born into the same family. Occasionally, a Magdalite will adopt the name of a family without their permission; this practice is generally frowned upon, since an individual's actions could wrongfully reflect upon the family name.

About twenty summers ago, a few families took to calling themselves by clan names. Thus, it is possible to find subsets of *kin* families with names ending in *'on* — the reverse of the pattern traditionally found within the Tribes. While this does lead to some confusion (especially among outsiders), the practice is largely tolerated by the Magdalites.

Prominent families include:

Bela'on: Most members of the Bela'on family are Gatherers, although the family has members in all the Guilds, save for the Bloodied Rose. As a group, they are fairly insular; as individuals, they largely pass unnoticed. It is hard to estimate the size of the family, for the majority travel the Outlands as traders and spies.

Deanakin: Formerly known as the Shelkin, this family renamed themselves in honor of Deana, a Concubine of great ability. While they lag behind the Sevkin in influence within the Concubines, they are well known by name and reputation.

Hevkin: The Hevkin family is famed for producing fine Diplomats, although some Voyeurs and a few Sirens also come from their ranks. The Demori'ons are a cadet branch of the Hevkin line, but they are held in low esteem and not often mentioned in polite company.

Ibenkin: The Ibenkin have long held high positions within the Sirens; their beauty is almost legendary. They are an old family, tracing their roots back to the Liberation. The current Chamberlain, Dhara Ibenkin, is the latest in a long line of handmaidens in service to Magdalen. Those Ibenkin not chosen to become Sirens usually become Diplomats, although some exceptions do occur.

Jansey: The Jansey are one of the largest family groups, churning out members of all Guilds. They are regarded as jacks of all trades and masters of none; despite their number, few Janseys have risen to prominence in their respective fields.

Renkin: The Renkin are almost exclusively Ecstatics and Gatherers. Their stranglehold on the production of Emori and other potions has given them enormous power within the Tribe. This power has made them many enemies, but they have bought themselves just as many allies.

Sevkin: The preeminent family in the Concubines, the Sevkin also produce a fair number of Voyeurs and Bloodied Roses. The Sevkin are said to have a special relationship with Magdalen Herself, and are therefore well respected within the Tribe. They are also renowned for their wisdom; many Magdalites seek out the Sevkin family for advice.

Tarakin: The Tarakin were formerly obscure and of little note; however, with the elevation of Jonas Tarakin to the position of Voyer Master, people have started to take notice. Personally loyal to the Chamberlain, they are a rising star within the Magdalites. Intense hatred exists between the Tarakin and the Cardikin, who head the Bloodied Rose.

Yavith: The Yavith are the primary power within the Maskers — they have performed for Magdalen since the Liberation. Numerous cadet branches exist, including the Serakin. An informal rivalry exists between the Yavith and their Serakin cousins, each attempting to outdo each other on the stage.



SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

Attributes: As a rule, Magdalites tend to have high Influence, Perception and Psyche scores. Many also have high Appearance, although others rely on a nondescript façade to maintain the anonymity that their covert activities require.

Skills: Interpersonal skills (Etiquette, Human Perception, Seduction) are important Magdalite traits. Others will vary depending on a specific Magdalite's occupation.

Synthesis: Magdalites possess the Eminences of Conflict and Sensuality; particularly favored members of the Tribe may possess the Aspects of Passion and Treason. The Aspect of Manifestation (see below) is most common amongst the Voyeurs, although a small number of Diplomats, Gatherers or even the occasional Concubine or Masker have been known to wield this power.

Perks/Flaws: Magdalite Perks and Flaws reflect the fickle nature of their society and intrigues. Appropriate Perks include Connections, Fake Identity, Favor, Prestige and Strong Immune System; appropriate Flaws include Addiction, Debt, Liar, Nemesis, Paranoid and Secret.

THE RIVER OF DREAM

Magdalites are largely creatures of the flesh, and one could be forgiven for thinking that they have little use for the River of Dream. In actuality, they regularly use Synthesis to augment their festivities; Passion and Sensuality only add to the excitement and ecstasy of these events. They also use their abilities to uncover secrets, much to the detriment of their victims.

RITUALS

Magdalite existence is nearly a ritual in itself, a celebration of love and life. Nonetheless, the Tribe does have its own festivals to celebrate various points of life. At other times, rituals will spontaneously erupt. All these rites are characterized by excess; intoxication, decadence and debauchery are the norm. Indeed, sex and drugs are often a vehicle to allow Synthesis to manifest. Some important rituals are listed below:

Coming of Age: Magdalite law prohibits any from engaging in acts of pleasure with those who are under fifteen summers. Magdalites below this age have no power within the Tribe, and are ignored at best, considered nuisances at worst. At the age of fifteen summers, however, they are finally brought into the Tribe. They are considered mature enough to join their elders, but must wait for the Festival of Choice before they are properly accepted. The Coming of Age is an unofficial precursor to the Festival.

The Festival of Choice: The Festival of Choice is perhaps the greatest of Magdalite rituals. This week-long event marks the beginning of spring and a point at which all relationships may change. It is the time when suitors work hardest to attract those

that they admire, and Emori flows freely. It is also the time when young Magdalites are fully accepted into the Tribe. However, they are forbidden to form long-term relationships until the next Festival; they are expected to use the year of freedom to experience the depth and breadth of physical pleasure, so as to make better lovers.

The Lover's Return: Motherhood is an infrequent event in the Tribe of Magdalen, yet it does occur. A pregnant Magdalite withdraws from the Tribe about halfway through her pregnancy, in order to prepare for and eventually give birth to the child. When she gives up responsibility for the child (by giving it to another Tribe, or — rarely — raising it to maturity herself), she is accepted back by her fellows with great fanfare; this is the ritual of the Lover's Return.

ARTIFACTS

Despite Her Tribe's materialism, Magdalen is not a great provider of Artifacts; Her love is Her greatest gift. Excepting Emori, Artifacts play a small part in Magdalite life; the Tribe's wealth is more often expressed in mundane items. Those few Artifacts that do exist include:

The Mirror of Kopet: Made from a shard of Magdalen's thigh, this polished piece of metal was given to Kopet, a particularly favored Siren. It preserves the owner's beauty for the rest of her life; despite aging or injury, neither scar nor wrinkle will sully her features. It is otherwise treated as Major Fatimal Artifact. In a pinch, the Mirror can be used as a makeshift knife (ACC -1, Parry -1, AD +3).

Emori: The elixir of love is in high demand amongst the Tribes; its price is often beyond all but the wealthiest. Emori is a secretion from Magdalen herself, transformed by the ministrations of the Ecstatics. The true process of its production is a closely guarded secret. A person imbibing Emori gains a one-die bonus to Seduction rolls; more concentrated versions (usually only available to Ecstatics and their allies) grant bonuses of up to three dice.

Tokens of Affection: Some small pieces of Magdalen have been fashioned into jewelry. Many superstitious rituals have arisen around these articles; a Magdalite might place one under her pillow to dream of her true love, or write on the back of a Token the name of someone whose eye she wishes to catch. Whether any of these applications actually have any effect is up to the Weaver; they otherwise act as Minor Fatimal Artifacts.



TOTEM

The Castle at the center of Xstasis is home not only to Magdalen, but also to swarms of well-cared-for cats. Some Magdalites keep the animals as pets; others habitually feed the strays that roam the street. The cats make ideal pets for the Tribe of Magdalen; they are often solitary creatures, keeping their own counsel, but always craving companionship. For this reason, the spirit Hearth Minder makes her home in the Castle.

If the Sirens sit at the right hand of Magdalen, then Hearth Minder sits in Her lap. When asked, Hearth Minder states that she is content, for Magdalen is one of the finest pets that she has ever had. Whilst Dreamers may chuckle at this, there is no doubt that Hearth Minder believes it herself. The cat spirit is possessive, hedonistic and vain, but she is also loyal, caring and protective of her "pets." Magdalites do not so much worship Hearth Minder as they are fond of her; they placate her lest her capricious nature get the better of her and the Tribe suffer as a result. Hearth Minder pays close attention to her pets; she rewards those that please her and punishes those who act contrary to her whims.

Positive Actions of Hearth Minder: Adopting a foundling, taking a cat as a pet, keeping clean, style, grace, hedonism.

Negative Actions of Hearth Minder: Uncleanliness, slovenliness, injuring a cat, making loud noises, begging, boorishness, abstinence.

HEARTH MINDER (TOTEM CAT SPIRIT)

Highlights: Broody, caring, impulsive, pleasure-seeking

ATTRIBUTES:

CRE	+5	INF	+3	KNO	+3	PER	+5	PSY	+7
WIL	+2	STR	+2	HEA	+4	STA	70	UD	20

SKILLS:

Skill	Level	Attrib.	Skill	Level	Attrib.	Skill	Level	Attrib.
Acrobatics	2	+4	Athletics	2	+7	Comb. Sense	4	+5
Dodge	4	+4	Grooming	4	+3	Hand-to-Hand	2	+4
Healing	3	+3	Human Percep.	4	+7	Lore (Spirit)	3	+3
Mythology	2	+3	Notice	5	+5	Sneak	6	+4

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Bite (UD +10), Claws (UD +10), Shadow Walk (teleport between any shadows in sight), Caterwaul (victim gains the Insomnia Flaw), Healing Lick (acts as the Evan Aspect of Anima)

MANIFESTATION

Some Magdalites are blessed with the Aspect of Manifestation. This ability is closely guarded, especially by the more espionage-oriented Guilds. A few Concubines have made use of the ability to change their appearance to suit their customers' needs.

MANIFESTATION (MAGDALITE ASPECT; CRE, VARIABLE THRESHOLD)

Manifestation allows the dreamer to take on the form of another. Voyeurs and the few others with Manifestation use the Aspect to disguise their identities or to deceive others into divulging information known only to their intimates. 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.

Threshold	Familiarity
3	Intimate
5	Observed closely
7	Observed from afar or saw a picture
8	Glimpsed briefly
10	Heard or read a description

Manifestation can also be used to create the appearance of a fictitious character. The few Concubines that possess this Aspect often use it in this manner to appear as a "dream lover" for their clients; Voyeurs and others use this variant to create non-specific disguises. In this case, the Threshold is 5, plus 2 per point of APP difference between the dreamer and her Manifested character. For example, a Concubine with +1 APP, trying to emulate +3 APP, would have a difficulty of 9, as she would be trying to emulate an APP of -1. 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. Simple changes such as eye color or the shape of the nose can also be effected in this manner. It is much easier to make these changes; the Threshold is 4 for this application of the Aspect.

A TOUCH. A TASTE

The Magdalites have a wide array of drugs at their disposal. Some are sold to the Evans for use as medications, others are used for recreational purposes, and others still form an important part of the Bloodied Roses' arsenal. Most ingredients are gathered within Vimary's borders; some, however, are found in the Outlands or bought from the Keepers of Olympus, who make lightning raids into the Arc Harbor to steal the precious plants.

Some common drugs used by the Magdalites are listed below as examples. Some are unique to the Tribe, while others find use throughout the entire Nation.

SMOKE-FILLED EVENINGS

The most common drugs in Vimary are those which are smoked. They are easy to prepare (being simply rolled, dried leaves) and keep well so long as they remain dry. Smoking is largely a communal activity; friends will often gather at the end of a day's work, draw forth their herb pouches and reminisce on the day's happenings, surrounded by a dim haze.

GREENWEED

Greenweed is a common tool for dreamers across Vimary; these hardy plants will grow wherever there is sufficient sunlight and water, provided that the ground is not poisoned. Greenweed finds common use as a recreational drug, and is fairly common amongst those just beginning to explore the River of Dream. More experienced dreamers, however, prefer stronger substances to propel their inner visions.

Potency:	7
Effects:	Hallucinogen
Onset Time:	10 minutes
Value:	Average (4)

BROWNWEED

The Magdalites found small copses of brownweed growing wild after the Liberation, and now use Evan servants to farm a sizeable crop on the Castle's grounds. As its name suggests, brownweed leaves turn brown when dried, making it easily distinguishable from greenweed. Brownweed is usually smoked by itself, although greenweed smokers often mix it in to give their personal batch an extra "kick".

Potency:	5
Effects:	Stimulant
Onset Time:	1 minute
Value:	Low (3)

A TENDER BITE

The use of ingested drugs is perhaps less widespread than smoking herbs, but the impact of such substances is greatly increased. A wider range of effects is available to the users of ingested drugs, whether they be for medicinal, spiritual or darker purposes. These substances are the Bloodied Roses' favorites, for they allow victims to be specifically targeted.

BEECH STALKERS

Many varieties of mushrooms make their homes amongst the shady root hollows of the beech tree. Even woodcutters have learned to leave these mushrooms well enough alone, for, in the right season, even a taste of the sap can kill, but the Bloodied Roses collect these fungi for their own uses. The mushrooms are dried and ground into powder, to make one of the Magdalites' most potent poisons. The powdered beech stalkers cause vomiting, diarrhea and convulsions as they take effect; however, the symptoms disappear after about a day. For a day or two, the victim will appear to have recovered, but then the effects will recur, redoubled in fury. After two to ten days of intense agony, the victim will finally die. There is no antidote to beech stalker poison, and even using the Evan Aspect of Anima is not guaranteed to cure a victim (Threshold 8).

Potency:	10
Effects:	Fatal Toxin
Onset Time:	8-24 hours
Value:	High (7)

BLOODBERRIES

For many years, the bloodberry was a mainstay of Magdalite-Keeper trade; the Keepers smuggled small baskets of the fruit past the Watch to sell at exorbitant prices. After many heated arguments with Keeper merchants, the Magdalites decided to cultivate bloodberries themselves. These fruit are indistinguishable from strawberries; indeed, the only way to tell the two fruit apart is by the color of the flowers on their bushes (bloodberry flowers are yellow, strawberry flowers are white). It is easy for an assassin to secrete a bloodberry or two in a plate of strawberries, turning an otherwise succulent treat into a deadly final meal. The Bloodied Roses most commonly use bloodberries in the assassination of wealthy individuals.

Potency:	9
Effects:	Fatal Toxin
Onset Time:	3 hours
Value:	High (6)

BOWBERRIES

Little do the Joanites know, but the very trees that they harvest to make their finest bows are the source of another potent weapon — the berries themselves. A few brave souls creep into Duskfall and the Hunting Paths under cover of darkness to collect the small, red fruit. The bowberry's juice is sometimes used to poison drinks, but its starchy flavor has been known to give its presence away. Once a common Bloodied Rose poison, its use had waned for this reason.

Potency:	8
Effects:	Fatal Toxin
Onset Time:	20 minutes
Value:	High (5)

FURCLOAKS

Furcloak mushrooms — so called for their shaggy caps — grow in grassy areas in summer and autumn. Their flesh is quite tasty, and the young mushrooms are edible. However, they contain a substance that becomes poisonous if mixed with alcohol; a few people die each year as the mushrooms react unfavorably with their after-dinner glass of wine. Some Bloodied Roses appreciate this property, and try to ensure that some furcloak is "accidentally" included in the meal of a heavy drinker; other members of the Guild, however, decry its use as amateurish.

Potency:	6
Effects:	Fatal Toxin (when mixed with alcohol)
Onset Time:	45 minutes
Value:	Average (3)

YELLOWCAPS

Yellowcaps strongly resemble cooking mushrooms, save that they stain yellow when bruised and have a distinctive odor. A competent cook, however, can easily disguise both of these attributes. The Bloodied Roses dislike its use, as it requires a long infiltration period to gain the trust to cook a victim's meals; yellowcaps therefore find their most frequent use at the hands of jealous lovers.

Potency:	8
Effects:	Fatal Toxin
Onset Time:	8 hours
Value:	High (4)

HOP SCALE TEA

The bitter-tasting hopfruit is one of the many substances that the Gatherers purchase from Squat traders in the Outlands. Although some attempts have been made to use the fruit as a flavoring in alcoholic beverages, the idea has been slow to gain popularity. The fruit's widest use is as an ingredient in a relaxing tea; the fruit's scales are steeped in hot water and then removed. The resultant tea is held to be a cure for insomnia and to stimulate the appetite; there are also claims that it eases bladder infections.

Potency:	5
Effects:	Sedative
Onset Time:	30 minutes
Value:	Low (3)

DREAMERS' MEAT

Not all mushrooms are lethally poisonous; some varieties have long been used to aid dreamers in their vision quests and go by the name of Dreamers' Meat. Unfortunately, most varieties grow alongside beech stalkers, and are difficult to distinguish from their deadly relatives. The most easily identified (and hence, most commonly used) species has a bright red cap with white flecks. Dreamers prepare these mushrooms in all manner of ways; some eat them raw or dried, while others brew the mushrooms into a tea.

Potency:	10
Effects:	Hallucinogen
Onset Time:	1-2 hours
Value:	High (6)

EVA'S BLESSING

The islands of Lai produce a bewildering variety of plant life; not all of it, however, is edible. The Evan farmers regularly throw away rice and wheat heads whose black buds betray a fungal infection within; to the Magdalites, these buds are a bounty worth far more than the plants themselves. In their natural state, the buds cause vomiting, fever and terrifying hallucinations, but under the Ecstatics' careful guidance, they become a Dreamers' drug that the Ecstatics (with no small sense of irony) call Eva's Blessing. The refined powder is usually swallowed, although it can be mixed with drinks or even absorbed through the skin. While the visions that Eva's Blessing produces are among the most vivid that dreamers ever experience, they are not nearly so disorienting as those caused by Dreamers' Meat; it is therefore more popular amongst all but the most dedicated dreamers.

Potency:	8 (6 if absorbed by skin contact)
Effects:	Hallucinogen
Onset Time:	1 hour
Value:	High (5)

WILLOW BARK TEA

This foul-tasting brew is a favorite cure-all tonic of Ecstatic hawkers. Such roadside vendors are often heard to utter "take a cup and come back in the morning;" most Evan healers regard the practice with open contempt.

Potency:	8
Effects:	Analgesic
Onset Time:	15 minutes
Value:	Low (2)

NPC TEMPLATES

The Magdalites are as diverse as the Nation itself; often, the only thing that they have in common is devotion to their Fatima. Nonetheless, it would be a time-consuming task were the Weaver to individually detail every Magdalite in her Cycle; the following templates are given to provide statistics for "average" Magdalites — if such people indeed exist.

BLOODIED ROSE

At the beginning of their careers, most members of the Order of the Bloodied Rose see their task as a sacred duty. However, as time wears on and their victims pile up, many are overtaken by apathy; a few find solace in performing their duties in increasingly sadistic ways.

Highlights: Cynical, detached, silent

Attributes: AGI +2, FIT +1, PER +1, PSY -1, STR 1, STA 25, UD 5, AD 6

Skills: Athletics 1/+2, Combat Sense 2/+1, Disguise 1/0, Dodge 2/+2, Hand-to-Hand 2/+2, Melee 3/+2, Notice 1/+1, Sneak 1/+2, Throwing 1/+2

Equipment: Weapons, poison

ECSTATIC

The Ecstatics concoct all variety of strange brews. Most test their inventions on themselves before selling them on; this occasionally has deleterious effects on their behavior. Each Ecstatic guards his discoveries jealously, to the point of paranoia, only adding to the impression of slight madness that others have of them.

Highlights: Busy, eccentric, suspicious

Attributes: CRE +1, KNO +2, PER +1, PSY +1, STA 25, UD 3, AD 3

Skills: Cooking 2/+1, Craft (choose one) 1/+1, Healing 2/+2, Herbalism 2/+2, Read/Write (Tribal) 3/+2, Trade 2/+2. A few rare Ecstatics may possess Techlore (Life Sciences and/or Medicine) and understand Keepspeak or languages from the World Before.

Equipment: Books, stills or other chemical apparatus, herbal medicines



GATHERER (HERBALIST/TRADER)

The Gatherers not only harvest plants growing in the Outlands, but also trade with the Squats for the herbs that they need. The Outlands can be a dangerous place, and the herbalists' skills reflect this.

Highlights: Energetic, hard working, tough

Attributes: FIT +1, INF +1, KNO +1, PER +2, STA 25, UD 3, AD 4

Skills: Agriculture 1/+1, Boating 1/+2, Cooking 1/0, Etiquette 1/+1, Haggling 2/+1, Herbalism 3/+1, Human Perception 1/0, Melee 1/0, Navigation (Land) 2/+1, Notice 2/+2, Speak (choose a Squat tongue) 2/+1, Survival 1/0, Swimming 1/+1, Trade 2/+1

Equipment: Herbs, trade goods, dagger, boat or other transportation

GATHERER (OBSERVER)

Other Gatherers go undercover to infiltrate Squat or Keeper settlements in the Outlands. They may spend years at a time amongst the Outlanders, sending reports home to Xstasis via their trader allies. They must be very careful in their disguises; their quarries are invariably outraged to find a spy in their midst.

Highlights: Friendly, resourceful, tough

Attributes: CRE +1, FIT +1, INF +2, KNO +1, PER +2, STA 25, UD 3, AD 4

Skills: Camouflage 1/+1, Disguise 2/+1, Forgery (Squat tribal marks) 2/+1, Human Perception 2/0, Interrogation 2/+1, Investigation 2/+2, Lore (Squat) 3/+1, Melee 1/0, Navigation (Land) 2/+1, Notice 2/+2, Read/Write (Tribal) 1/+1, Seduction 1/0, Sneak 2/0, Speak (choose two Squat tongues) 2/+1, Streetwise 2/+2, Survival 1/+1, Theatrics 1/+2, Throwing 1/0

Equipment: Short sword, short spear, body paint, other disguise props

MASKER

The Maskers not only dance before Magdalen and the Tribe, but are also the custodians of the Magdalites' unarmed fighting arts. Many of their dances conceal deadly maneuvers; others are simply for show. They also perform songs, feats of acrobatics and stage magic.

Highlights: Alluring, energetic, vain

Attributes: AGI +2, APP +1, CRE +1, FIT +1, INF +1, STA 25, UD 5, AD 3

Skills: Acrobatics 2/+2, Craft (Couture) 1/+1, Dance 3/+2, Grooming 2/+1, Hand-to-Hand 2/+2, Music 2/+1, Mythology 1/0, Read/Write (Tribal) 1/0, Seduction 1/+1, Sleight-of-Hand 2/+2, Theatrics 2/+1

Equipment: Costume, musical instrument, stage props

SIREN

Magdalen's priesthood leads the Tribe, despite not having a seat on the Masters' Council. Their word is taken as the word of Magdalen Herself, and their influence extends into other Guilds and even into other Tribes. Competition within the Sirens is often quite literally cutthroat, as its scions vie for power and the favor of their Fatima.

Highlights: Arrogant, cunning, ruthless

Attributes: APP +2, CRE +1, INF +2, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL +2, HEA 1, STA 30, UD 3, AD 3

Skills: Dreaming 1/+1, Etiquette 2/+2, Grooming 2/+2, Human Perception 2/+1, Law (Magdalite and Tribal) 3/+1, Lore (Magdalite) 3/+1, Mythology 2/+1, Notice 2/+1, Read/Write (Tribal) 2/+1, Ritual 3/+1, Seduction 2/+2, Theatrics 2/+2, Synthesis (Passion and Treason) 3

Equipment: Fatimal medallions, any other items required

VOYEUR

The Voyeurs are the Magdalites' secret police; they watch closely for any infractions of Magdalite law. Other members of the Tribe hate and fear the Voyeurs, sometimes with good reason; the Voyeurs have been known to fabricate evidence against those who displease them.

Highlights: Dedicated, furtive, watchful

Attributes: CRE +2, INF +2, KNO +1, PER +2, PSY +1, WIL +1, HEA 1, STA 30, UD 3, AD 4

Skills: Camouflage (Urban) 2/+2, Disguise 3/+2, Etiquette 1/+2, Forgery 2/+2, Human Perception 3/+1, Interrogation 2/+2, Intimidate 2/0, Investigation 2/+2, Law (Magdalite) 2/+1, Lore (Magdalite) 2/+1, Melee 1/0, Notice 3/+2, Read/Write (Tribal) 1/+1, Sneak 2/0, Streetwise 2/+2, Theatrics 3/+2, Synthesis (Manifestation) 2

Equipment: Knife, notepad, incriminating evidence, disguise props



Chapter six: Soul's Sweat

One; for the blood of birth,
Life sprung from deep within the earth.
Two; for the blood of toil,
Life reaped from Eva's bounty and the soil.
Three; for the blood of death,
So the Crone and the Mother can lay me down to rest.
Four for the blood of my soul,
Eva will find for me another role.
-Word of the Evans



TRIBAL CYCLES

What follows is some advice for those Weavers who are interested in running a cycle where the Evans feature prominently. Much of the Weaver's Section is equally applicable to both Tribal Evans as well as their Fallen brethren, and both Players and the Weaver should find useful tidbits to add another dimension to character creation or to further enhance an existing character.

If the Weaver is interested in focusing her Cycles on the Evan Tribe, then the themes and moods that recur should run parallel with the Evan Eminences of Life and Empathy. The Evans see themselves as the heart and soul of the Nation, the glue that holds the Tribes together. The theme of Empathy can easily be tied in to these sentiments, as an Evan character seeks to define her personal role in the tribe and the Nation. Similarly, moods reflecting the ideals of Life should play an important role in an Evan's life. They are the ones who understand the intricate dance of life better than any other tribe, and must be leaders in such matters.

THEMES

There are a number of themes beyond Life and Empathy that should be a part of a Cycle in which Evans play a strong role.

Rebirth: The Tribe of Life regards the act of giving birth very highly. The act of bringing a new life into the World of Flesh is the most sacred act an Evan may accomplish, and the mothers and Nurses of the Tribe are some of the most revered individuals in all of Vimary. Following this veneration of birth, a number of the rituals that the members of the Tribe enact throughout their life try to mimic the glory and pain of birth. Evans continually try to recapture the emotions involved in birth, and seek to constantly redefine themselves. One way they do this is through the many age-related Guilds (see below) they belong to throughout their lives. At each stage of an Evan's life she has an opportunity to be reborn in symbolic innocence and spiritual cleanliness. Children and newborns are recognized as the lifeblood and the future of the Clan, and each Evan venerates that time in a person's life.

This is one reason the Evans constantly try to push their way into the Agnites' lives. An entire tribe of children is a resource in the Evans' eyes, a resource that must be guided by those who respect what that resource stands for and what it can become.

Insularity and Pride: The Evans are a proud people. When they look at the world around them they see one of two things. On one hand, they see a small community composed entirely of Evans. In this case, there is nothing but the Tribe for the Evan to be connected to. On the other hand, if the Evan is a little more traveled, she is able to see the utility that the Tribe lends to the Nation. In both cases a strong sense of community and identity in the Tribe is fostered.

The Evans are an indispensable part of the Nation, and they know it. If one of the other Tribes were to simply vanish, things would be rough for the rest of the tribes, but the void would be filled. If the Evans were to be erased then the Nation would cease to exist. No one would eat in any meaningful way, many of the necessary skills related to healing and childbirth would be gone, and a considerable portion of the Nation (some 80%) would no longer be present.

The Evans see themselves as something more than simply a Tribe; they see themselves as the Nation in a way no other tribe can. Because of this, the Evans have come to rely on each other more and more, seeing the other members of the tribe as the only ones responsible and hardworking enough to deal with.

This pride, however, is also tearing the Evans apart. The sheer size of the tribe ensures that a whole host of conflicting ideas and personalities are contained under Eva's watchful gaze. Instead of turning their problems outward, possibly to potential allies outside of the tribe, and then venting their anger, the Evans bring their full ire against each other. Sooner or later these problems may pull the tribe apart. For the time being though, the tribe is more inclusive rather than exclusionary of its own members.

Necessity: The Evans are led, almost blindly, by an overwhelming sense of love for the Nation (though not necessarily for the individual Tribes). This love drives them to believe that they are the only ones with enough knowledge and expertise to help guide others through the trials of adolescence and transition. The Evans expect a certain level of respect and when they do not receive it they tend to act "in the best interests" of the other person.

The Evans subscribe to ideals of performing acts for the greater good, and an Evan will willingly sacrifice another person or put that person in a very unfavorable position if the Evan believes the act will yield positive results in time. Like any mother, they seem to know what is best for every tribal and are more than willing to act upon that knowledge, whether the person likes it or not.



MOOD

Moods help summarize what each member of a given Tribe is like. Here are a few moods to help define Evan PCs and NPCs.

Secrets and Conservatism: Besides the Yagans, the Evans are arguably the most spiritual of the Tribes and consequently, they often know a number of secrets that are best not talked about in open company. The Shaman and a few of the Clans, in particular, carry a number of secrets such as their association with the silent totem, White Viper. Similarly, the insular nature of the Evans makes it so that they are not often willing to open up to strangers. They will offer the necessary hospitality, but otherwise the Evans are hesitant to speak openly when other tribes are present. Evans value holding one's tongue and talking from a position of authority, rather than speaking from the cuff or trying to change things for the sake of change alone.

The Weaver should emphasize the diversity of the Evan Tribe, using physical differences, cultural differences and spiritual differences, and then counteract that diversity with strong conservative sentiment. The Evans are a varied lot on the surface, but each holds a very similar way of thinking that is not tolerant of outside opinions; even opinions from the other Tribes are mostly ignored.

Portray Evans as a caring lot, but folk that are not willing to mess with tradition. They should be helpful, but unbending.

Dualism and Loneliness: Eva is the embodiment of life and acts accordingly. However, it is a widely known but seldom discussed fact that Her Tribe are some of the least tolerant in the Nation. The Evans see themselves as imperfect and constantly strive to be more like Eva in Her boundless love for life.

Think of the Evans as elder children to an aging mother. The children love their Mother with all their heart and would like nothing more than to be like Her, yet they are grounded in the real world and must act accordingly, occasionally disobeying their Mother to achieve what they see as the greater good.

Evans are also the Tribe with the least direct contact with their Fatima. Most Evans live far away from the blessed lands of Sanctuary and Bazaar and have precious few opportunities to see their Fatima in action. Communities rely heavily on Shaman to create a valuable spiritual bridge between their absent Fatima and their daily life. As such, the Evans who make their home in the fields desperately cling to any spiritual crumbs they receive from their Fatima and are consequently often quite lonely and confused about their role in their Fatima's life.

A result of this loneliness and the lack of their Fatima's presence is that many Evans go out of their way to live in a way they think would make Eva proud. Many are overly pious, going out of their way to make up for the spiritual rift between the Tribe and their Fatima.

TRIBAL LAND

There is nowhere in Vimary that one cannot find an Evan (excepting for parts of the Rust Wastes). In many ways, all of Vimary is the home of the Evans, though in reality they hold certain places more sacred than the rest and consider those places their ancestral homelands.

Sanctuary: Sanctuary is the greatest monument to life that exists. It is a great island that flowers with life at all times of the year, even in the depths of the snows of the Season of Death. It is here that Eva makes Her home, along with many of the leaders of the Tribe. Usually Bazaar is the place to find the leadership of the Tribes, yet the Evans often circumvent the city altogether in a pilgrimage to Sanctuary. All Evans are welcome on Sanctuary for a time, but they are encouraged to leave after a while to return to their duties outside of the blessed island. Only the Shaman are allowed to tend to the bounty of Sanctuary.

All told, there are about two hundred Shaman in and around Vimary. However, only about a quarter of that total (50-60) are on Sanctuary at any given time. Those on Sanctuary spend a good deal of their time farming and harvesting the many fruits and vegetables yielded by the sacred island.

The other three-quarters of the Shamanic Lodge live outside of Sanctuary, among the many villages in the fields and in Evan conclaves within Bazaar, bringing the word of Eva to the Evan diaspora. These Shaman usually return to Sanctuary at least twice a year to meet with the Lodge and commune with Eva.

The Temple: The temple is a great flowering plant that is the home of the great Mother, Eva. If Sanctuary is a great monument to life in general, the Temple is a testament to the power and awe that Eva can instill. There is nothing else in Vimary like the Temple, for the ability to create such a massive living structure and keep it alive requires more Synthesis than any Tribal alone can wield. Only the Shaman are allowed within the Temple and they are not allowed to speak of what they see there. Even Fallen Shaman are tight-lipped as to what the inside of the Temple is like.

Lai: Lai is a collection of five islands that provide the heart of the harvest that the Evans reap. Much like Sanctuary, Lai blooms against the will of the seasons and yields food for the Nation almost year-round.

One of the reasons for the year-round bloom is that the Z'br are unable to corrupt this land. If a Z'br is found wandering about Lai (or Sanctuary) and is engaged by defending Evans, the land and vegetation miraculously aid the tribal warriors. Weeds sprout from the earth and entangle the feet of the Beast, branches move into its path, and unnaturally long vines restrain the creature while the defenders do their job.

The Circle Hall: The Circle Hall is the place where the heads of the Tribe meet and conduct business. The Hall is composed of a multitude of still-living trees that have grown up and around each other to create walls and ceilings. Like the Temple, the structure itself is a testament to the powers of Eva, though in

this case it is the Shaman who are responsible. It is here that the Matrons of the nine clans meet and discuss the matters of the Tribe. The few Grounded Shaman in the area also conduct their business using the Circle Hall as their base of operations.

The Circle Hall was grown a few short years after the Liberation, under the direct guidance of Eva. She wished for a place that would rival the Temple in grandeur, but be dedicated to Her many followers rather than just to Herself and the Shaman. One reason for the sustained growth is the richness of the soil beneath the Circle Hall. Forty-nine Evan heroes from the Liberation are buried beneath the roots here, to grant life to the great trees that compose the Hall as well as to bless the building with the blood of the Tribal martyrs.

The Shamanic Lodge: This is not actually a building, though most in Vimary (including the Evans) believe it is. The Lodge is more a metaphor, used when the Shaman wish to meet and decide on a matter of some importance.

FALLEN CYCLES

Evans can be used in a number of ways in a Fallen Cycle. It should be noted that even though the venue and motivations of ex-Evans are different than of those still in the Tribe, the same themes and moods that were discussed before are still applicable.

EVANS AS ALLIES

Evans are guided by very beneficent motivations and many are sympathetic to the Fallen's plight. Considerable minorities of Evans view the Outcasts on Horn as wayward children and quietly hope for their redemption and re-inclusion into the Nation. The farther one gets from Bazaar the more removed from the 'Fallen problem' the Evans are and the more sympathetic they are likely to be.

Evans make superb healers and spiritual guides.

EVANS AS NEUTRALS

Due to the sheer number of Evans, most of whom live far away from the city center, most of the Tribe ends up falling into this category. Most do not consider it their business until someone close to them is banished. Only then do many Evans make a hard and fast decision about the Fallen. Usually, the neutral Evans lean conservatively and toward continued punishment of the Eighth Tribe until the Fallen repent their heresy.

EVANS AS ENEMIES

The stoic nature of the Evans lends a considerable number of the Tribe to support more hard-line policies towards the Fallen. The Shaman Storm Cry is one such example of those, and there are many more like him, who feel the Fallen are beyond any hope. If it were up to this portion of the Tribe, the whole of Vimary would march against the Fallen again and again until their taint was wiped from the Goddess' graces. Then Horn would be salted, and all records of the Eighth Tribe would be erased.



CHARACTER CONCEPTS AND CREATION

Creating an Evan character should involve careful consideration of what type of background the Evan will be coming from. There are a number of intertwined aspects of Evan life that should be considered to create a well thought-out and believable PC or NPC.

Primary to an Evan's self-definition is the Guild she is currently part of (or was last part of, in the case of Fallen characters). Within the Tribe, Guild membership is decided more by age than talent. Age, then, becomes another important factor in deciding what an Evan does for a living and their vision of self. Remember, the Evans maintain a very structured hierarchy and Guild system, which is part of the importance of selecting a Guild.

Beyond her Guild membership, the Evan character should also identify with one of the Nine Clans. An Evan's Clan identity is very dear to her, more so than any other personal identification, even superseding personal names at times. Family names are often considered garnish and useless to an individual's personal identification, since there is a myriad of families and the names have become practically indistinct. An Evan's Clan helps define the character's personality. Similarly, her Skills and Attributes need to be considered in light of her Guild and Clan affiliations.



SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

Here are a few guidelines that an Evan PC or NPC may follow regarding attributes and skills.

Attributes: Evans tend to have good INF, PSY and WIL. Older Evans tend to increase in INF as well as gain high ratings in KNO. The Nannies and Tenders tend to also have above average physical attributes, particularly FIT.

Nannies are known for exceptional acts of stamina, and should have an accordingly high STA (calculated on BLD and HEA, HEA stemming from FIT, WIL and PSY. See **T8 Rulebook**, p. 121).

Skills: Evans tend to have very utilitarian Skills, ones that will help them in their day to day work in the fields and their roles within the Guilds. Skills commonly found in the Tribe are: Agriculture, Animal Care, Cooking, Dreaming, Etiquette, Herbalism, Navigation (the fields of Vimary), Read/Write (Evan), Survival and Teaching.

All Nurses need Herbalism of at least 2 to represent their studies and knowledge in the use of the many flora about Vimary.

Nannies need to be versed in some type of combat, usually Melee.

The perk Green Thumb (**T8 Rulebook**, p. 196) is a greatly admired trait within the tribe. In fact, if Green Thumb and Authority are both purchased by a beginning Evan character, the two perks only cost a combined total of 6 points (rather than 8), representing the fact that the PC is looked to as a leader and expert regarding matters of harvesting and growing.

Evans from the Tal'on Clan may (and Shaman characters from all Clans must) buy Lore (Totems), a Skill that allows them a deep and rich understanding of the role of totems in the Nation as well as knowledge of the existence of White Viper.

Induction into the Shamanic Lodge brings with it a number of benefits. First, a Shaman gains the Perk: Spiritual Siren (**T8 Rulebook**, p. 198) and a +1 to her Synthesis attribute. Furthermore, the Shamanic Lodge maintains a secret communication style focusing on hand gestures and non-verbal communication as well as utilizing very specific and archaic words referring to the River of Dream. This speech is represented by Speak (Shamanic). Also, Lore (Shamanic) and Lore (Totems) are necessary to realize that the Lodge is not a specific place, and to have some idea about the existence of White Viper and its role towards the Evans.

Synthesis: Prominent use of Synthesis is usually left to the Shaman, though it is not unheard of for many Pal'ons or Cov'ons to have high Synthesis ratings and ability in the various Evan Aspects.

Equipment: Equipment is usually ascribed according to age and Guild affiliation. However, the Evans have a very open concept of ownership and almost everything in a house is considered community property. It is not unheard of for an Evan to simply take a set of pots or equipment from another family's home. As long as the Evan doing the taking actually needs the items, there is little problem. However, if the Evan is looking to gain materially or refuses to loan out those same items when they are needed by another, then there is cause for the Matrons to look into the situation.

Most Evan equipment is made from materials on hand. Wood, leather, clay, grasses and reeds all compose a good portion of Evan equipment. Metal is rarer within the Evan Tribe than in any other Tribe.

EVAN SOCIETY

The Tribe of Eva does not have a distinctive system of separate Guilds and Orders as many of the other tribes do. Every stage of an Evan's life involves a rebirth and a new role taken. Due to this, much of what could be seen as a distinctive Order (such as the Yagan Pellis Artisans or the Joanite/Sheban Watch) has merged with an age-defined Guild structure. Each Guild requires a certain level of maturity that must be met before a village's Matrons will approve a Guild change.

Each Guild carries with it a level of responsibility that increases as one grows older.

Seeds: The Seeds are the young and growing children of the Tribe. Seeds are expected to do the less labor-intensive work in the fields as soon as they are able, usually entering the fields at the age of three or four. Other than their daily chores and duties in the field, the Evans allow their Seeds to be children, to learn lessons and to act in a carefree manner. All too soon, the Seeds will have heavy responsibility upon their shoulders. It is Eva's way. Interestingly, most Evans consider the entire Tribe of Agnites to be Seeds and treat them accordingly.

The children of the other Tribes that are tended in the crèches are considered Seeds until they enter puberty. At that point, they are asked to leave the crèche and return to their respective Tribes.

Tenders: Tenders are the youngest Evans next to the Seeds. The Tenders are the workhorses of the Tribe, the farmers and gatherers who grow and harvest the food of the Nation. Tenders are usually just past adolescence but not yet ready to assume the responsibilities of being a Nanny or a Nurse. However, it is not unusual to find an aged Tender, one who never moved up any farther through the Guild system. These older Tenders are often still considered little more than children by the rest of the Tribe, but some clans consider remaining a Tender a very noble calling. The Tenders are some of the most proud and venerated of all Evans, though outside of the Tribe they are seen as the most simplistic and rustic of all the peoples of the Nation.

The Tenders compose over fifty percent of the tribe.

Nurses: The Nurses are master herbalists and ritualists. Whereas the Shaman focus on spiritual rituals, the Nurses focus on the more mundane rituals and processes of life. They are experts at making all sorts of balms and healing potions to aid the ill and infirm, and are storehouses of knowledge about the body and its functions. They are most often recognized in their role as midwives, and no Tribal wishes to give birth to a child without an Evan Nurse on hand. Still, the Nurses are more than just midwives and herbalists; they also fulfill the roles of doctors, advisors, and counselors within the Tribe (and the Nation). It should be noted that to become a Matron one must first be a Nurse.

Nannies: Alongside Nurses in age are the Nannies. Nannies are experienced Evans who have advanced past their growing stages as Seeds and Tenders. Evans far and wide respect the Nannies for their work, for not only do they continue to work in the many fields of the Evans, but they have also undergone rigorous training as hunters and defenders of the Tribe. The Nannies serve as the Evans' hunters, and help augment the bounty brought forth from the soil. More than hunters, though, Nannies are also the protectors of the Tribe. Often, Joanite and Watch patrols are many hours away from an Evan settlement and so the small isolated communities must come up with their own protection. The Nannies work in the fields alongside the Tenders and Seeds but always keep a watch out for any dangers. At the first sign of danger, the Nannies spring into action, arming their bows, spears and shields and moving to intercept the problem. Because of their taxing work in the fields as well as their extra training, the Nannies are known for their exceptional stamina. It is not surprising to hear of Nannies who can run at full tilt for the entire day or one who stayed awake on watch for three days straight.

Matrons: The Matrons are the elders, leaders, and advisors of the Tribe. They have lived to an advanced age and this simple fact demands respect from all younger Evans. The Matrons are the leaders of the Tribe, often forming the heads of specific families and Clans. Matrons serve as village and community heads as well as advisors and adjudicators. They are the last word on almost all matters within a village or specific family, and their word is law. Only when a Sheban is present does the Matron bow to a higher authority. On the same note, Matrons have little say on spiritual matters, for which a Shaman's word is required.

There is a hierarchy within the Matrons as one moves higher and higher within the clan. On the lowest rung are family Matrons, of which there are hundreds, one for each family found within a village or town. Above the family Matrons there are the village Matrons, who lead an entire village. All villages (including Griffentowne and Westholm) contain a single Village Matron who acts as the mayor and judge. In Bazaar however, there are four 'village' matrons, corresponding to the four points of the compass and dividing the city accordingly. Beyond the village Matrons are the Clan Matrons, who preside in the Circle Hall on Sanctuary. Above the Clan Matrons is the greatest Matron, Eva Herself.

6. Evan Resources

The selection of a Matron is a relatively simple process. The oldest female in a given family is elevated to the status of Matron upon the death of the previous Matron. Similarly, the Matron of a Clan is the eldest living woman that claims that Clan as her own. The Matron of a Clan must remove herself from her former family as it is assumed all her family loyalties are now transferred to the Clan; a new Matron is selected to fill the gap.

Of course, there are occasionally extenuating circumstances. A family Matron normally looks after at least twenty people, including her extended family. When there are a number of viable candidates for a new Matron, the local Shaman is called upon to make the final decision for the good of the village, Tribe, and family.

It is not unheard of for new members of a family to be adopted with little fanfare, adding valuable new blood to the line. Many Evan orphans, Agnites, and young Magdalites from the crèches are adopted into a family in this way.

Those who stand outside of the age-defined nature of the Guild system are:

The Forgotten: The occasional sterile Evan is often seen as someone to be pitied at best, and someone to reviled at worst. Most times, the sterile are sent into Bazaar to aid the large children's crèches there, helping to raise other Tribe's children in absence of their own. Many Magdalites' and Agnites' first and fondest memories are of one of these Forgotten.

The Forgotten are also sent into the Outlands on many of the gathering expeditions, since they are quietly looked upon as expendable.

Shaman: The other exception to the rule of age that dominates the Evan Guilds is the Shaman. The Shaman are selected based on potential skill in Synthesis and understanding of the River of Dream. Unlike the other Guilds, the Shaman require an extensive apprenticeship program to prepare an aspiring Shaman for her Ascent. The Shaman are the Chosen of Eva and are Her links between the World of Flesh and the River of Dream. Where the Yagans focus on the spirits of the dead, the Shaman focus on living and vibrant spirits. They are experts in their field and, along with the Matrons, are the leaders of the Tribe. However, their expertise, while extensive, is called for only in matters regarding the Spirit World and so the Shamanic Lodge has surprisingly little say in the day-to-day affairs of the Tribe. Once an Evan is adopted into the Root Clan (as the Shaman call themselves) there is no more Guild advancement. The Evan will live and die a Shaman.

Shaman are the representatives of Eva. Due to the Tribe's large numbers and scattered nature, the Shaman fill a needed bridge between the people of the Evan Tribe and their Fatima. Eva only rarely leaves Sanctuary, making any contact with Her by Her Tribe intermittent at best. The Evans are a very spiritual Tribe; however, they are often very withdrawn from their Fatima in all but the fulfillment of Her largest ideals and the fact that they work Her soil. The Shaman serve as a tangible link to an otherwise intangible deity; this is their greatest gift to the Evans.

Nurses are normally the best candidates for becoming Shaman. Nurses, due to their extensive studies about the physical body, are regarded as the best prepared to begin a Shaman's study of the spiritual body and the world of the River of Dream.



CLANS

There are Nine major Clans in the Evan Tribe. Each one is represented in the Circle by its Matron. The Matrons are the final leaders of the Tribe. Ties to one's Clan are the most important aspect of an Evan's life; her family is a distant second. The collected Nine Tribes are often just referred to as "the Nine."

Aria'on: The Aria'on are considered some of the most capable leaders in the Evan Tribe. They are also considered one of the most moderate Clans and help to organize the moderate clans on political issues. Many Aria'ons are from Griffentowne and have been instrumental in its growth, something that has gained them the enmity of the Clans based around Bazaar and Sanctuary. The Aria'on and Trav'on often face off against each other.

Chop'on (Chopin): Hunters and frontier folk dominate the Chop'on Clan, which was once a simply a large Evan family like the Gravkin (see below). They are known for their wanderlust and ability to survive where others fear to go. Many Chop'on become Nannies or remain Tenders, and jump at the first opportunity to enter the Outlands or to establish a new village within the vast plains of Vimary. The members of this Clan are rightly considered the most adventurous of the Nine.

Pal'on: This Clan has many Dreamers who specialize in the rituals of Eva (both Nurse and Shamanic). The Pal'on are often considered quite esoteric and emotionally removed from the rest of the Nine, though the Aria'on often count on their support during Tribal functions and within the Circle. More than any other Clan, the Pal'on are in tune with Synthesis and many are found within the ranks of the Shamanic Lodge.

Trav'on: The Trav'on are some of the most charismatic and vocal leaders in all of Vimary. Within the Nine they are some of the most conservative and fanatical voices and often oppose the more moderate initiatives of the Aria'on. The Trav'on have a number of allies outside the Evan Tribe and are secretly both reviled and admired by the other Clans for these non-Evan connections.

Gravkin: Once a family, the Gravkin have been elevated to full Clan status by Eva. Eva took notice of the Tribe's most populous family because of their years of loyalty and steadfast work in the fields of Sanctuary and Lai. In an effort to pay homage to their Fatima, many of the Gravkin refused to move up through the Guilds, preferring the simple and glorious work of a Tender. Not surprisingly, they now associate closely with the Tenders and are the Clan most devoted to Eva and Her ideals.

Cov'on: The Cov'on maintain close ties with the totem Den Mother and are experts on the spiritual flora and fauna found in the River of Dream. Where the Pal'on are experts in Synthesis and rituals, both of which focus on bringing Spirit into Flesh, the Cov'on focus on exploring the River of Dream on its own. Many Cov'on are also considered excellent diplomats, since the narrowness of their focus on the River of Dream allows them to

be fairly objective about more mundane matters.

The Aspect of Piggyback (see p. 112) is very popular among the spiritual Cov'on Clan, allowing them to haphazardly travel about the River of Dream in their explorations as well as to commune with the many spirits of Vimary.

Wild'on: Along with the Aria'on and the Trav'on, the Wild'on are seen as the leaders of the Evans. They are a small but politically strong Clan that dominates Westholm; they have done all they can to bring prosperity and life to that isolated town. The Wild'on are the balancing factor between the more fanatical Aria'on and Trav'on, doing their best to weigh the evidence and possible implications of all problems brought before them. Among the Nine, the Wild'on are usually seen as a bit slow and determined.

Deth'on: The Deth'on are often found in Bazaar and are the most 'urbanized' of all the Clans. The Clan maintains very close ties with the Joanites and a number of the most well-known Nannies are from the Deth'on Clan. The Deth'on are the most martial of the Nine and often side with the Trav'on in political matters. Crossover between the Deth'on and the Tribe of Joan is very common and many individuals from both Tribes share Clan names with each other. Thus, is not uncommon to find a Deth'on that has taken the Ben'on Clan name and vice-versa.

Tal'on: The most mysterious of the Nine Clans, the Tal'on operate according to their own rules. They are the Clan most closely associated with the totem White Viper and even the Shamanic Lodge does not know of the depth of their connection. The Tal'on are the silent killers and executioners of the Evan Tribe, often acting upon their own judgment and without any prompting from the rest of the Tribe. Few, even in the Evans, know of White Viper; fewer still know of the Tal'on's closeness to that menacing totem.



6. Evan Resources

THE RIVER OF DREAM

An Evan's connection to the River of Dream is usually no deeper than that of any other average Dreamer except in a few cases. The Shaman, Nurses, Pal'on, Cov'on and Tal'on are all remarkably adept at navigating the River of Dream, all for their own specific purposes. Many Evans see their Tribe as liaisons between the World of Flesh and the River of Dream and go out of their way to increase their ability and knowledge regarding the Spirit World.

EVAN RITUALS

Rituals often mark a change in station or outlook within the Evan Tribe. The ideals of rebirth and life play a major role in the performance and maintenance of rituals. Most rituals performed by an Evan are executed with a number of observers and aides; little is ever done alone.

There are two major rituals associated with birth, the most sacred of all events in an Evan's life. The first ritual, called the Reconsumption, involves the ritual cleansing of the newborn and the feeding to the child of its own dead skin mixed with sacred water. The second ritual, the Prime Communion, is performed in tandem with the first. The Prime Communion is the partaking of the mother and aunts of the baby's skin-paste. In this way, the parents along with the newborn are symbolically cleaned and reinfused with the purity of the child.

There are numerous rebirth rituals and ceremonies associated with the changing of Guilds. An Evan is expected to go through at least two Guilds (and usually more) throughout her life. As each new Guild is adopted the Evan is expected to undergo an emotional and spiritual chrysalis and emerge a different, more mature member of the community. Each Clan maintains a number of different rituals for each Guild station, though almost all the rituals involve ritual cannibalism coupled with a more traditional feast.

A secret ritual maintained by the Shaman is that of the Culling. Those children who are born with some form of physical deformity are seen as potential dangers to the Tribe and Nation. The Shamanic Lodge argues that physical corruption often reflects a deeper, spiritual corruption, and that the Culling is necessary to keep the Tribe pure and strong. Obviously, if the Shaman's actions were made known to the Tribe at large, there would be a huge public outcry. So, in the best interests of the Nation, the Shaman continue the Culling in secret, often using the Aspect of Euthanize (see next page) to quietly slay the newborns.

Along with the spiritual cleansing that comes from the Culling, there is another goal of the ritual. Before a birth, the Shaman communes with Den Mother or one of her spiritual servants. Den Mother can tell whether the newborn will be physically malformed, and warns the Shaman. Furthermore, Den Mother can see whether the newborn has the spiritual potential to become a Guide. If she discovers that the child could become a Guide, the Shaman Culls the child as a 'corrupted' newborn.

ARTIFACTS

Evan artifacts come from the Earth or from Eva Herself. The artifacts of the Tribe are powerful things, for they have been passed down within the Nine Clans for generations.

Sanctuary Water: Often referred to as *sacred water*, the water from Sanctuary is imbued with many of the same properties that allow plants to grow there year-round. A Shaman blesses the Water before it is uncorked from its special glass container. Drinking the Water increases the drinker's STA by +5 and HEA by +1 until the water is passed, usually in a day or so. If there is no Shaman present to bless the uncorking then the water is merely exceptionally clear and tasty.

Eva's Toenail: Not actually a toenail, but rather a piece of Eva that was shed or that broke off. Most pieces are nondescript lumps of gray flesh. The Toenail never spoils nor goes bad and if a portion of it is eaten, the eater gains a +1 to all Synthesis rolls for a week. Eating multiple portions of Eva's Toenails does not confer a cumulative effect. Apparently, the power of the Fatima flowing through the eater also makes Z'bri more likely to notice anyone that has partaken of a Toenail.

If a Character carrying a Toenail is within sight of a Z'bri, the Z'bri immediately notices an aura about the Character reminiscent of the Fatimas. Furthermore, a Z'bri gains a +1 to detecting any Character with one of Eva's Toenails on their person.



TOTEMS

The Evans are especially blessed due to the fact that the Tribe is associated with not one, but two totems. Any person who has studied the totems of the tribes knows of Den Mother and has at least an idea of what the great bear totem embodies. Much rarer is knowledge of White Viper and the role it plays.

DEN MOTHER

Den Mother is the embodiment of Life and the love that such life carries with it. In almost every case, Den Mother appears in visions accompanied by her eight beloved cubs. When she does appear by herself, it is usually a sign that the visionary is ready to join the Shamanic Lodge. Den Mother is closely associated with protection and warmth, a calling that goes beyond life and love.

Den Mother is a caring totem, going out of her way to protect those she communes with like her own cubs. She never speaks, but communicates in mind-to-mind contact that leaves the contacted with a sense of peace and inclusion in something greater than themselves.

Interestingly, the Auburn Fold recognizes a certain closeness between Den Mother and the Goddess not present in the other Totems, and revere her accordingly.

Highlights: Spiritually strong, imposing, caring

ATTRIBUTES:

BLD	+6	CRE	+1	FIT	+2	INF	+7	KNO	+5
PSY	+8	WIL	+4	STR	+10	HEA	+3	STA	70
UD	25								

SKILLS:

Skill	Level	Attrib.	Skill	Level	Attrib.	Skill	Level	Attrib.
Combat Sense	4	+0	Dodge	3	+0	Hand-to-Hand	6	+0
Healing	5	+5	Herbalism	6	+5	Intimidate	3	+6
Lore (Vimary)	4	+5	Notice	3	+0	Survival	3	+1

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Bear Hug (upon a successful attack Den Mother may try to hug the target. The target is allowed to roll their BLD vs Den Mother's STR. If Den Mother is successful the target loses her actions until she can free herself. Den Mother can continue to attack normally), **Sacrifice** (Den Mother may take any wounds upon herself with a successful Healing roll vs a threshold of 4 for a flesh wound or 5 for a deep wound), **Cubs** (considered part of Den Mother, the cubs allow up to 4 more attacks with UD ratings of 6).

WHITE VIPER

White Viper is a relatively unknown totem that associated itself with Eva many years ago. White Viper embodies the cold necessity of Evan love, the need to perform vicious acts in order to prevent even more horrendous events. White Viper's role in the Evan social structure is not even known to many Evans, for

it is often difficult to reconcile the acts that White Viper advocates with the veneration for life that the whole of the Evan Tribe maintains.

It is whispered by some that certain medically-oriented Keepers also know of White Viper and worship the totem as a god.

Highlights: Deadly, emotionless, rational, insightful

ATTRIBUTES:

AGI	+9	CRE	+8	INF	+1	KNO	+4	PER	+10
PSY	+5	WIL	+8	STR	+4	HEA	+5	STA	50
UD	+6								

SKILLS:

Skill	Level	Attrib.	Skill	Level	Attrib.	Skill	Level	Attrib.
Camouflage	5	+8	Combat Sense	5	+10	Dodge	3	+9
Hand-to-Hand	5	+9	Notice	3	+10	Ritual	3	+4
Sneak	3	+9						

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Venom (after a successful attack the target must make a HEA test vs a threshold of 5 or take a flesh wound each round until they pass the HEA test or they fall dead), **Snake Eyes** (any attacker targeting White Viper must pass a contested roll using their WIL roll the totem's PSY).



NEW ASPECTS

The diversity and sheer number of the Evans have, over time, aided in new spiritual growth. One part of this growth has been in the slow but eventual manifestation of new Aspects. Two new Aspects found within the Tribe are described below.

EUTHANIZE (EVANS; WIL VS. TARGET'S PSY)

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 Euthanize. Euthanize allows the user to make an attack directly against a target's soul. It is a subtle and often horrific attack that will kill another Dreamer with little more than a look. 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.

The user of Euthanize can wield this Aspect in the River of Dream against spiritual opponents.

PIGGYBACK (EVANS; PSY VS. TARGET'S SPIRITUAL INS OR CRE)

Known by a number of Evans, particularly Nurses, Matrons and Shaman, 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 the River of Dream. From there they can search the immediate environs to see if there is a spirit nearby that they can attach themselves 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 the Evan's 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. Beyond giving occasional suggestions as to direction (INF opposed by WIL) the Evan has little say in where the spirit travels (or even if they travel) 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. The Aspect lasts as long as the user sleeps.

NPC TEMPLATES

Insular and withdrawn, Evans tend to keep very much to themselves. That's no guarantee, however, that the Characters won't run into a few on their travels.

TENDER

The Evan Tenders are the lifeblood of Vimary, working in the fields and harvesting the food that feeds the Nation. They are a quiet lot, often looked down upon by non-Evans as slow or even dim-witted. Regardless, the Tenders know they have a vital role in the Nation and dutifully perform their jobs

Highlights: Quiet, strong, loyal

Attributes: FIT +2, PSY +1, WIL +1, STA 30, UD 5, AD 4

Skills: Agriculture 2/0, Cooking 1/0, Hand-to-Hand 1/0, Herbalism 1/0, Mythology (Evan) 1/0, Survival 2/0

Equipment: Farming implements, rough-worn clothes, Evan luck trinkets

NANNY (WARRIOR)

Some Nannies spend the majority of their time tending to the Evan communities in and around Bazaar. Due to their contact with the Joanites, as well as their less-demanding duties, many of these Nannies become more active in seeking combat when compared to their field-working sisters. Not surprisingly, many of these Nannies are part of the Deth'on Clan, and some work with the Watch, serving as combat medics or rear-guards.

Highlights: Proud, thrill-seeker, respectful

Attributes: BLD +2, FIT +3, KNO +1, WIL +2, STA 45, UD 8, AD 9

Skills: Combat Sense 2/0, Dodge 2/0, Hand-to-Hand 1/0, Lore (Evan) 1/+1, Melee 2/0, Survival 2/0

Equipment: Rudimentary sword (x7), rudimentary medical supplies, leather armor (AR 5)

NANNY (FIELD-WORKER)

Most Nannies are normally found working in the fields alongside the Seeds and Tenders. It is only when a threat arises to the community that the true calling of the Nanny becomes apparent as they spring into action, leaving their farming tools behind and grabbing their spears. These Nannies are known far and wide for the ability to work for hours under the most extreme conditions and still be able to enter combat without batting an eye.

Highlights: Tenacious, resourceful, tough

Attributes: AGI +1, FIT +2, PER +1, WIL +2 STA 35, UD 6, AD 6

Skills: Agriculture 1/0, Athletics 1/+2, Combat Sense 2/+1, Dodge 2/+1, Hand-to-Hand 2/+1, Melee 2/+1, Notice 2/+1, Ritual 1/0, Synthesis (Smothering) 1.

Equipment: Spear (x6), leather armor (AR 5), farming implements

NURSE (CARETAKER)

These Nurses are slightly different from the Nurses found in the **Weaver's Assistant** (p. 41) in that they dedicate their time toward raising the children of a crèche. These Caretakers are often seen as the truest embodiment of Eva, concentrating all their efforts on raising Seeds, orphans and the Adopted in order to build a solid future for the Nation.

Highlights: Loving, conservative, tired

Attributes: INF +2, KNO +1, WIL +1, STA 25, UD 3, AD 3

Skills: Cooking 2/0, Healing 1/+1, Lore (child rearing) 2/+1, Lore (Nation's history) 2/+1, Read/Write 1/+1, Speak (Joanite, Agnite, Evan) 1/+1, Teaching 2/+2,

Equipment: various books and instructional materials

MATRON (FAMILY)

The Family Matrons are the most numerous Matrons and have the most direct influence on everyday life within the Evan Tribe. They are the community leaders to which most Evans turn in matters of agriculture or advice. If a Matron's family grows large enough and if she is an effective leader, she may one day be selected to lead the community.

Highlights: Wise, demanding, caring

Attributes: CRE +1, INF +1, KNO +2, PSY +1, WIL +1, STA 25, UD 3, AD 3

Skills: Agriculture 2/+2, Etiquette 1/+1, Hagglng 1/+1, Human Perception 2/+1, Intimidate 1/0, Law 1/+2, Leadership 2/+1, Lore (Family) 2/+2, Read/Write (Evan) 1/+2, Teaching 2/+1

MATRON (VILLAGE/CLAN)

The highest level a Matron may aspire to, the Village or Clan Matrons are the leaders of the Tribe as a whole, maintaining an overall picture of the welfare of the Tribe.

Highlights: Knowledgeable, political, far-sighted

Attributes: CRE +2, INF +2, KNO +2, PSY +2, WIL +3, STA 25, UD 3, AD 3

Skills: Dreaming 1/+2, Etiquette 2/+2, Hagglng 2/+2, Human Perception 2/+2, Law 2/+2, Leadership 3/+2, Lore (Evan) 2/+2, Read/Write (Evan) 1/+2, Ritual 2/+2, Teaching 1/+2, Synthesis (Anima) 1.



Chapter seven: Mortal Coil

We are the Light in the Darkness.

We are here to show the way,

To the past and to the future.

Know Life and Death are one.

Know Flesh and Spirit must part.

- Word of the Yagans



TRIBAL CYCLES

If it is the Weaver's intention to run a Yagan Cycle — that is, a Cycle where the Players are part of the Yagan Tribe — the themes of Destiny and Fate, as expanded upon below, can be used to bring the PCs together and give them purpose. This should be fairly easy at the beginning, as Yagans tend to be much more accepting of the 'winds of fate' than members of most other tribes. Signs and omens can therefore be used to great effect to bring the Characters together. PCs who question their elders about their visions could be instructed to become a Questing Circle to try and understand and fulfill their fate. If the reasons given to the PCs for forming the group are themselves mysterious, it will reinforce the aura of strangeness that surrounds the Yagans.

THEMES

Fatalism: Yagans believe at their core that life is but half of existence, death being the other part. Yagans usually have little fear of death, since loss of life is but part of the eternal cycle of death and rebirth. It is easy for Yagans to become gloomy and morose as they mature, because many of the entertainments beloved by the other tribes are considered by the Yagans to be a distraction from the study and service to the Goddess. Such temporal things as beauty, fine clothes, perfume, sexual attraction, grand homes and furnishings, physical gratification and jewelry are all considered potentially spiritually harmful distractions from a life focusing on the spirit world. Objects of spiritual meaning and importance are the only ones revered, or even truly accepted, by the Yagans. They believe that the flesh and bones of the dead tell much about the person and retain memories of them. Flesh- and Bonecrafters see more than just the surface features of these creations, sensing at a deeper level the nature and secrets of their previous owner.

Destiny: Yagans believe that all actions come about as they were destined to. Following one's set path is vitally important, because to try and defy fate will only lead to worse consequences. The faction or guild that a Yagan is admitted to is decided by destiny. Guilds are therefore more important to Yagans than their families. Trying to understand one's destiny is a preoccupation of many Yagans, and different means of seeing the future form an important part of Yagan custom. This focus on fate also means that signs and omens are carefully and thoroughly interpreted, and such things can easily lead Yagans to make drastic changes in their lives.

MOOD

Mystery and Death: Yagans are the most spiritual of the Tribes. They spend much of their time learning about death and the spirit world, which means their understanding of this material existence is highly colored by ideas and symbolism that others will find disturbing. Their devotion to the whim of destiny gives the Yagans a very different set of values to judge others' worth and a casual ease around the dead that others often find unsettling. Yagans find frivolity, superficiality and self-indulgent actions wasteful and even threatening to their personal spiritual maturity, and they will likely avoid people who practice those interactions, or lecture them on the importance of reverence for the spirit world.

Fear and Horror: The Yagans are closely associated with death and the supernatural, and for this reason are often feared by outsiders. Yagans are a constant reminder of human mortality, and seem to regard death more highly than life. Yagans live in crypts and their Fatima is a being of bones. They take bodies and peel their skins off and remove their bones to be made into admired tools. They have in their midst elite killers. Their curses can reach far to punish those that offend them. Their insights allow them to discover secrets and personal fears about others. All these things create an aura of fear, respect, and sometimes horror around the members of Baba Yaga's tribe.



TRIBAL LAND

Most Yagans live on, under or around Mortuary and the Great Hill (see *Vimary*, pp. 36-37). Here in the Grave Fields or amid the thick woods of the hill, the Yagans live a life rarely glimpsed by those outside their own tribe.

The Great Hill: Those families living on the lower slopes and at the base of the Great Hill are mostly Fleshers and have regular contact with the other Tribes. Their little cottages appear very cozy, and are set amid gnarled trees and small glades where animals are kept in pens. Deeper into the woods and further up the hill, the ruins become more prominent. The families living here inhabit the ruins and the tunnels in the hillside. On top of the hill, the vaults and mausoleums are used by the major clans and families as their hearths, and here the Old Ones and Little Crone elders can be found. The twisting trails under the shadowy canopy are guarded by the Mordred and special spirit guardians, who protect the paths and warn the Yagans of intrusion. The crows and giant ravens are also the eyes of the Mordred and Baba Yaga around Vimary.

Mortuary: Along the north slope of the Great Hill wind a series of funeral towers and an extensive graveyard, all of which are riddled with subterranean tunnels. This area encompasses several distinct areas, including Baba Yaga's Great Dome, the Grave Fields, The Crone's Library and the Catacombs.

The Great Dome and Burial Pile: The Great Dome is the most visible part of Mortuary, a huge ruin that still has its towers and a half-complete broken dome roof. Hundreds of crows and ravens live here, sometimes feasting on the bodies of those brought to them as part of the Rite of the Raven. Within the ruin lies Baba Yaga's Burial Pile, a huge collection of bones and other artifacts from which Baba Yaga occasionally manifests. In this most sacred area can be found many Old Ones and other mystics who have come to listen to the whispers of great Crone. Mordred guards watch this place closely, although they need not do so, for few are brave enough to venture here with ill intent. The Cult of the Raven have their sacred meeting place on the roof of these ruins, a place where they can also see their brethren sacrificed to the ravens.



The Grave Fields and The Raven Trail: The most mysterious and sacred part of the above ground Yagan lands, the Grave Fields are an endlessly changing place of gravestones, bone fields, grazing areas, trees and tombs. The sigils on the stones alter with time, giving the Yagans signs and omens of the future. Various winding paths cross the Grave Fields, bringing those who walk them visions and a nearness to Dream. Some also bring danger, leading to traps laid by malevolent beings from the spirit realms or Z'bri who inhabit the place, drawn by dark desires and fears. Other secret paths can slip the walker into Dream itself or take her to other places in Vimary and the wilds. The most challenging and sacred path is the Raven Trail. This is the trail that young Yagans walk to become full Witches, worthy of their tribal place. It is a harrowing experience when first walked and most only walk it once. Old Ones walk it frequently, to keep in touch with themselves and the realms of the dead.

The Crone's Library: This building lies at one end of the Raven's Trail, accessible by that path or through the catacombs. Carefully guarded, it is filled with the works of the Pellis Artisans, and features huge chambers full of hanging skins taken from tribal elders and heroes. These records create a history of the Tribes, as well as providing translations of maps, sacred rites, and other secrets. The Reapers have a trophy room that acts as a sort of meeting place; it is also a place where they bring those they need to torture for information, a process that can take mere hours under their skilled hands. Deep under this library are the chambers of bones, where Bonecrafters work their art on the skeletons of the dead. Many of these bones become instruments or are used to record Yagan mysteries.

The Catacombs: All throughout the Great Hill lie the catacombs, a system of underground pathways that varies from crude earthen tunnels to ruins from the World Before, to stone- and bone-walled passages. The lower outer passages are used by the Yagan Fleshers as dwellings, while the deeper passages are the domain of the Mordred. Many of these deeper passages are hidden from one another by secret ways or are guarded by Mordred watchers. Some parts of these deep passages are considered lost even to the Mordred, who keep watch upon them lest some beast or Z'bri try to pass into the inhabited areas. Some Yagans venture into these lost ways as part of a personal trial and it is believed that many of these passages lead to dark places in the spirit realm. It is well known among the Mordred that the Zom control an extensive area underground, although the Old Ones have ordered the passages to such places sealed; the presence of the Zom is a closely kept secret.

FALLEN CYCLES

The three perspectives from which Yagans can be used within a Fallen cycle are each broadly described here. They should by no means limit the Weaver's use of the tribe, as their motivations and objectives are typically diverse. Consideration should be given to the aforementioned Themes and Moods of the Yagans when representing them to Players.

YAGANS AS ALLIES

Yagans hold agendas that are themselves obscure and carefully hidden. Their sense of time is very different as well; they see things in terms of years, or even lifetimes. Given this, it is very easy for Yagans to assist Fallen PCs in the short term if the Yagans' actions will eventually result in the meeting of their own goals. Yagans can provide insight into the future to help, and can also provide powerful assistance with spirits and the dead. They are also an excellent source for information on unusual deaths and ancient tribal knowledge, if they can be convinced to help.

YAGANS AS ENEMIES

While Mordred can be as dangerous to PCs as the Watch itself, Yagans really come into their own as enemies when they use their curses and abilities to haunt dreams to strike out at the PCs. Using these powers, Yagans can do their damage from unexpected quarters and from afar. Such mental attacks and real spiritual dangers can of course be followed up with the deadly physical presence of the Reapers or Cult of the Raven.

YAGANS AS NEUTRALS

Yagans are likely to appear to be neutral for the most part when dealing with Fallen PCs. Their secret agendas and self-seeking service, along with their insights into death and the spirit realm,

tend to make them oblivious to the details of daily life. A good number of Yagans will provide assistance to Fallen, as long as the Fallen have something interesting to tell them in return.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS AND CREATION

When designing a Yagan character, the following things need to be considered, preferably in the order given. Firstly, all Yagans think of themselves in terms of what they do for their tribe and, by extension, Baba Yaga. A character's place within the Orders thus needs to be determined first to know whom they have studied under and what specialized skills they have.

Closely coupled with this should come thoughts on what particular motivation and goals the Character will hold. This is a very important step, because such sources of drive for a Character will influence how the Character will be played and what they will be looking to do during a game. Such goals should also fit into the long-term plans of the Weaver so that they can be incorporated into adventures or the Cycle. Some suggested goals include: gaining a deeper understanding of the spirit world, death and the cycle of life of the Tribes and other groups; trying to uncover the true destiny of the Tribes and Fallen and guiding them on the way; trying to fathom the mystery of the Z'bri and what they really are, and perhaps ways to vanquish them.

Hierarchy, Clans and families form the third step; such detail places the character into the loose clan structure of the tribe. PCs are only likely to be playing Mystics, Daemonseekers, Witches, Sisters or Brothers, at least to begin. The family details should add color and connections with more important personalities within the tribe. Since the Yagans are so centered on their work and not on their families and clans, these connections really provide a reference point and limited help for Yagan characters.

Skills and Attributes should be heavily influenced by the first and second choices in the character design.



YAGAN SOCIETY

The Yagans have several groups of specialists who form loose Orders within the Tribe. To come of age as a Yagan is to be chosen to enter an Order and train to walk the Raven's Trail. Some Yagans are chosen young, some after their birthing years, and some are not. Those that are not chosen tend the gardens, beasts and bone fields, praying that their next incarnation might allow them to serve the Tribes with distinction that has not blessed them this time. All are assured that the great Baba Yaga will see them through the endless circle of life.

Pellis Artisans: The Pellis Artisans are the skin branders, piercers and tattoo artists. They are also the ceremonial painters, skimmers and tanners. Exceptional crafters, Pellis Artisans are recognized and employed throughout the Tribes. Their other claim to fame is the Crone's Library on Mortuary Hill where the Artisans keep most of the skins taken from prominent and famous Tribal members upon their deaths as a lasting record of their lives and times. Prominent Pellis Artisans include Grandmère Decembre, Old One Wend Cerekin Venu'on, Old One Viven Pryns Pri'on, Little Crone Gene Sabathkin Mata'on, and the Pri'on and Mata'on clans.

Fleshers: Fleshers keep and tend the herd animals for funeral services and meat. Their attendance at funerals is highly sought after, and the meat they prepare is considered even better than that of the Evans. Fleshers are by far the largest Yagan Order and many families are made up entirely of Fleshers, keeping family ties strong in their day-to-day life. They have the most contact with the other Tribes and are held in good regard by the Nation. Most non-Yagans think of Fleshers when they think of Yagans. Fleshers tend to live on the outskirts of the Tribal land on the slopes of the Great Hill, where their beasts can graze. Their families and clan leaders tend to live closer to or in the Grave Fields. Most families and all clans have here their main hearths, typically in great underground crypts or mausoleums. Prominent Fleshers include Old One Jacqui Pryns Ih'on, Old One Jacyn Verkin Lanig'on, Reverend Mother Jaky Astarkin Bel'on, and the Bel'on, Dian'on, Ih'on and Lanig'on clans.

FleshSeers: Within the ranks of the Fleshers and Pellis Artisans are the FleshSeers, mystics who can read signs in the flesh to divine the future and signs of Z'bri taint. FleshSeers often work as guides to Mordred Daemonseekers, secretly seeking out

Z'bri-worshippers and possessed individuals within the Tribes. Jewlya Astarkin is reputedly the greatest of the FleshSeers; a master Pellis Artisan, she wanders in disguise through the Tribal lands seeking out the dark touch of the Z'bri.

The Reapers: Called Flesher Assassins by those few who know of them outside the Tribe, the Reapers are assassins drawn from the ranks of the Fleshers (and occasionally from the Pellis Artisans) and used against the Yagans' enemies. They are skilled in killing with bone blow-darts, hand scythes, knives and poison. The Reapers are only sent to kill infrequently; their existence is a well-kept secret. Most of their time they stay in Yagan territory, protecting the Old Ones and other important Yagans from harm. They have been known to come into conflict with the Mordred, who see protection of Yagans as their own personal duty. The Reapers' real intra-Tribe conflict is with the Cult of the Raven, a largely Mordred group which has its own mystical agenda concerning the timeliness of deaths and fate. Why Baba Yaga allows both groups to exist and fight between themselves is one of Her many mysteries. Fortunately, the Reapers mostly focus outside of their Tribe, choosing their targets from among the assassins and murderers in the other Tribes. Reapers have a real hatred of those non-Yagans who would try and deal in secret killing, for death is sacred to Baba Yaga and must always be sanctioned by Her. The Reapers carefully seek these killers out and slay them in ways least likely to draw attention. The Reapers currently have investigations in progress looking at the Magdalite Bloodied Roses (p. 93) for activities outside of their own Tribe and the Sheban Black Owls (*Children of Lilith*, p. 92). They also have a special eye on the Fallen - notably the Guides.

There are in fact seven large circles of Reapers, all controlled by Old One Jacyn Verkin Lanig'on and also through the second in charge, Old One Wend Cerekin Venu'on (who is, rather unusually, a Pellis Artisan). The Reapers devote themselves to death and, after a special ritual, are considered dead to their clan and family. While records are kept of those who become Reapers, they are kept locked away in the Crone's Library. From the moment of their death rite on, they take on guises as their orders require. Reapers are trained to be skilled in stealth and surprise attacks. They learn to use poisons that paralyze, kill and inflict pain. They are also good at interrogation. (See *Trial by Fire*, p. 109). They should not be permitted as Player Characters, but rather used as NPC foils for PCs involved in assassination or secret murder.



Mordred: Also known as witch-kin, the Mordred are the keepers of hidden secrets, potent curses and rituals. They are experts at the use of the Aspect Curse of Dream. They are the ones who best know the tunnels and tombs of Mortuary. A large number are Bonecrafters who make sculptures, ritual objects and weapons from the bones of the dead beneath the Grave Fields. Witch-kin are knowledgeable about Z'bri demonic possession and how to exorcise it. The handful of renowned exorcists work closely with Pellis Artisan Flesh Seer guides to secretly seek out corruption in the Tribes, outside of Tera Sheban involvement. A handful of the most militant and experienced Mordred fighters (and a tiny number from other Orders) take on the mantle of Daemonseekers to rout out Z'bri possession and infiltration within the Tribes. Prominent Mordred include Old One Kaye Morkin Cia'on (nominal leader of the Cult of the Raven), Reverend Mother Morag Morkin Athen'on, and the Kajkin, Stant'on and Luna'kin family lines.

Bonecrafters: A subset of the Mordred, the Bonecrafters are masters of bone sculpture, tool making and carving. Many are male, and it is a male-dominated Order. The Order is part of but not subservient to the Mordred. They have a particular and dangerous interest in Skullers and Zoms — creatures of walking bones. Bonecrafters tend to Baba Yaga, bringing Her new pieces to add to Her whole, through which She gains more memories from those who have lived. They have a special knack for defleshing bones with Synthesis. They also make up the best of the Daemonseekers who seek out Z'bri taint.

Daemonseekers: Daemonseekers are small in number; they are mostly Mordred, and like Mordred, are mostly male. They have dedicated their lives to seeking out and destroying Z'bri, and to saving or killing those among the Tribes tainted by the Z'bri. Like Joanite Hermit Blades, they leave their Tribe's formal structure to satisfy their pursuits, but unlike the Hermits, they are willing to travel with others like Flesh Seers, who can help them in their task. Daemonseekers only hunt the Z'bri based upon signs and omens they receive. Daemonseekers train with Joanites to perfect their martial skills and they are well respected for their life's purpose, especially by the Templars. Their role has not gone unnoticed by the Tera Shebans, who have begun attempts to manipulate the group to the Shebans' own ends. The nominal leader of the Daemonseekers, Old James Kajkin, has a reputation that extends even into the Outlands for his insight and valor in fighting against the Z'bri.

Daemonseekers usually do not make their profession obvious to any as they go about their business, but are usually easily identified from their tattoos. The symbol of the Daemonseeker is the "X" or cross, a mark that they place on their own arms and also upon people who are marked by the Z'bri. The mark is typically placed after the victims are killed, although sometimes it is also applied by branding during torture. Daemonseeker interrogatory skills are a match for even the Shebans.

Cult of the Raven: The Cult is a large and secret association of Yagans who ensure that the signs and omens are watched, and that fate is given a helping hand should others try and interfere with the proper course of events. Some of those chosen to be Ravens resist the calling and deny the visions with which they are gifted. Other Ravens seek these individuals out and bring them into fold; those who continue to defy fate become Outcasts. Ravens are mostly Mordred and Pellis Artisans, although all factions are represented. They have a dislike of the Reapers, who take life when it is not due to be taken. There exists a very low-scale secret war between these two Orders. The Cult of the Raven's nominal leader is Old One Kaye Morkin Cia'on. Since Fate guides the Ravens, they do not rely on Kaye as a leader except when the signs require deep interpretation.

All Ravens undergo an initiation ritual. The ritual is a test of the candidate's faith, and some of those who have failed have lost their souls. Candidates that are successful are granted special abilities by the Great Raven. From then on, they are connected with the Raven, who sends them signs and punishes them if they ignore their duties. A follower of the Cult of the Raven gains Animal Kinship (Ravens and Crows only) and Lore (Omens). Characters with a PSY of 2 or above may acquire the Animal Companion Perk (Raven), at the Weaver's discretion. Connection with the Great Raven also has the effect of giving Cultists an appetite for raw red meat, preferably human. At least once a month, a Raven must eat such a meal or lose her benefits and possibly incur the wrath of the Great Raven.



7. Yagan Resources

YAGAN HIERARCHY,
CLANS AND FAMILIES

Yagans are principally led by the **Old Ones**, priestesses of Baba Yaga. They are chosen from among the clan leaders and family heads that have proven themselves worthy. **Grandmère Decembre** is the most honored of the Old Ones, her great wisdom a blessing to the Tribe. Each clan leader is called a **Little Crone**, and many of these are also Old Ones. The larger clans include the Athen'on, the Bel'on, the Dian'on, the Gia'on, the lh'on, the Kell'on, the Lanig'on, the Pri'on, and the Venu'on.

Within the clans are the major families. Their eldest women are given the title of **Reverend Mother** if no higher title is due. Family blood can appear in more than one clan, which at times causes trouble. Some major families lines are Astarkin, Cerekin, Demekin, Harhakin, Harper, Kajkin, Lunakin, Matakina, Morkin, Robkin, Sabathkin, Sarrikin, Verkin, and Yagakin.

Crones: Crones are the Eldest Yagans. They possess special knowledge of the past and future, for which they are revered. Only a handful of Crones live, at present. They are considered retired; they have been relieved of all Tribal duties, and have relinquished their Tribal, clan and family status to their eldest living daughters. They spend much of their time in Dream. On occasions, their help is sought when no answers can be found elsewhere. Sometimes one awakens with important news for the Tribe, an event as important (at least for the older Yagans) as when the Great Baba Yaga Herself stirs. Retirement to be a Crone is another mystery, a calling that these few have heard.

Old Ones: Old Ones are the leaders of the Yagans, representing the clans in tribal council and tending to most inter-tribe affairs. From their ranks are chosen those who represent the Tribe at the Grand Council. They are knowledgeable about many of the great mysteries and are masters of Dream Travel.

Little Crone: The Clan leaders of the Yagans, the Little Crones are always postmenopausal females. Sometimes a clan leader must wait to receive this recognition because she is still fertile. Little Crones are the day-to-day organizers of Yagan tribal life. Although the Orders are more important than blood, most Yagans, especially the younger ones, are coordinated by the learned wisdom of the Little Crones. Little Crones act as contacts to the Old Ones when important clan problems arise.

Reverend Mother: This is the title given to the eldest female of a family line, if they are deserving of no higher title. Any female Yagan called a Reverend Mother, even if she possesses a higher title, is not offended, and this title has become common label of respect to Yagans from those outside of the Tribe, used in the place of "Witch" for an older Yagan woman. Reverend Mothers are the matrons of the tribe, seeing that their children and grandchildren who are not involved in Orders are working and studying. Reverend Mothers are the primary authority in the lives of young Yagans, as well as for those older Yagans who have not been accepted into an order.

Mystic: Mystics are Yagans renowned for their understanding of omens and signs. Mystics are often asked for opinion and judgement on tribal affairs. Many Mystics are also secretly followers of the Cult of the Raven. Men can be Mystics, and this is one of the most respected positions a male can hold. Mystics are known to leave the normal Yagan areas and live among the other Tribes. They also accompany larger Dahlian caravans.

Witch: This is a term of respect used by Yagans to address those who have matured and served the Tribe well. A Witch is one who has mastered the Raven Trail. Those Yagans who have not mastered the Raven Trail may be called Witches by those outside the Tribe, but are never addressed as such by another Yagan.

Sister/Brother: A title used in common parlance by Yagans to refer to one another when no other title is appropriate or deserved. "Brother" is used for almost all male Yagans, although sometimes **Father** or **Little Brother** (and **Little Sister** for a female) will be used when an age difference is apparent.

SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

The Yagan Tribe's guilds are a good guide to the types of attributes and skills a character should have. The NPC examples in this and other **Tribe 8** books are a useful guide this way. Here are some guidelines:

Attributes: Yagans tend to have good CRE, PER, and WIL. Older Yagans have high KNO and PSY. Mordred guards are physically focused, like Joanites, although their Attributes are more likely to follow the patterns of their tribe.



Skills: Yagans are trained in skills such as Animal Handling and Care if they are Fleshers, Craft (Cooking, Tattoo, Bone), Herbalism, Lore (Bone, Death, Flesh, Omens), Ritual, and usually Synthesis. Older Yagans have Dreaming. All Yagans are taught to read and write Tribal and Yagan; most also learn Evan. Old Ones and Reapers both have their own secret dialects.

Synthesis: Yagans, out of all the tribes, are the most prevalent users of Synthesis. Despite the fact that almost every Yagan has some measure of Dreaming and/or Synthesis, however, only the older Yagans and those especially chosen by Baba Yaga receive Synthesis at significant levels (3+). All Cult of the Raven followers have Synthesis.

Equipment: Pellis Artisan flesh clothes are prized and most older Yagans have one or more family items. Bonecrafter bone bowls, skull lanterns, canes, and rings are highly valued. Travelers often carry bone knives on their person, and wear tanned leather as clothing and light armor.

THE RIVER OF DREAM

The Yagans' connection with the River of Dream is deeper than that of the other Tribes. Expertise with Synthesis and the Dreaming skill comes with age and devotion to Baba Yaga. Those that abuse their powers can expect warning omens, and if those fail to deter their actions, the Reapers or Cult of the Raven will speed them on their way to the Fold.

YAGAN RITUALS

Rituals are numerous and varied among the Yagans. Like the rest of the Tribes, they are performed to signify special events, dedications, deaths, thanks and other important moments. Yagans have a propensity for death-related rituals (see page 73, *Baba Yaga's Great Gift*). In Robyn's story, the Ritual of Skinning and Curing was performed. The Yagans also have a great many rituals to see the future, like reading tealeaves, bone dice and entrails. Many rituals are done to ward off or remain invisible to evil spirits, or to summon or allow contact with friendly spirits. Since slaughtering and cooking is a big part of Yagan life, there are special rituals used to thank the spirits of those beasts they kill, and to bless the food. In many cases, dream-related rituals require the imbibing of drugs. See *Tribe 8 Rulebook*, page 174, for more information of Rituals.

Although Yagans tend to sport plenty of tattoos related to important death-related ceremonies, they are also known to paint temporary masks and other details on to their bodies. There are some ties between the Yagans and Magdalite Maskers, although recently these have gone stale with the growing tension between the tribes. Common Yagan masks include the **Death Mask**, worn by Mordred before going into battle; the **Execution Mask**, which is worn by Reapers to help protect their identities when they conduct their killings; the **Raven Mask**, which is not required but is often worn by followers of the Cult of the Raven; the **Suicide Mask**, which is worn by a Yagan who expects to meet her death in the action or trial she is

about to endure, and which is also seen in battle in place of the Death Mask; and **Bones on Flesh**, which is worn by Yagans at large ceremonies, especially ones involving other Tribes, in order to remind everyone of the inevitability of mortality. Properly prepared masks add +1 to any Synthesis use that is part of the specific ritual activity or dedication.

Of note, a still-unidentified Yagan serial killer has begun killing while wearing — so witnesses claim — the Suicide Mask and Bones on Flesh. Her targets are all males, either Outcasts or members of other Tribes. She has left a bone taken from her last victim at every killing, which seems to have also been used as the murder weapon. The Reapers and Cult of the Raven are both secretly investigating, while the Shebans are conducting a formal inquiry.



7. Yagan Resources

ARTIFACTS

Yagan artifacts are almost always made from body components, mostly bone or flesh, but also blood and organs. Pellis Artisans and Mordred Bonecrafters produce most of these items.

Bone Weapons and Equipment: Bone knives, spears and bows are the most common Yagan bone weapons. Crafted from human bones in most cases, they capture part of the essence of those from whom they are crafted, and if they are specially blessed from the Burial Pile, they have an aura of Baba Yaga Herself. They provide +1 ACC and +1 Damage. Light from Skull Lanterns will reveal ghosts trying to remain invisible to the physical world, and will sometimes reveal Z'bri-possessed people, by reflecting strangely in their eyes.

Flesh Clothes: Pellis Artisans are known to enchant human flesh and prepare it to be worn by Yagans. The most commonly seen items include gloves (made from human hands), armor (typically faces, scalps and large tattooed sections) and pouches (made from hairless flesh sections). These items are known for their physical durability. Leather armor provides an additional 2 points of protection and +1 against Sundering Attacks and Atmospheres, and faces have been known to cry out faintly when their wearer is being attacked (Weaver's discretion).

Blood of Baba Yaga: The Blood is a mysterious draught that aids Yagans in dream travel (+2 to Dreaming Skill and Dream Travel Synthesis). It is given to those about to die to aid them in departing this world and to bring them to the attention of the Raven Totem so that they will be guided through the afterlife. If taken in large quantities — several mouthfuls — it is lethal. It also acts as a soporific drug. Potency 8, Onset 3 rounds. Its origins are a mystery known only to the Old Ones.

TOTEM: GREAT RAVEN

The Great Raven Spirit is the Yagans' guide, its form so intertwined with Baba Yaga as to be almost indistinguishable from Her. It is, like Her, regarded as the embodiment of fate and the servant of death, and for this reason it is regarded as one of the most powerful dream spirits. Among the Old Ones, a secret — and highly heretical — debate exists as to whether Baba Yaga is merely the physical manifestation of the Great Raven. The Raven is seen primarily in dreams, and its presence in the physical world is a sure sign that death is near. The Great Raven has been embraced by the Cult of the Raven faction within the Yagans - see Cult of the Raven p. 119 for more details.

Highlights: Feared, Powerful, Mysterious

ATTRIBUTES

CRE	+5	INF	+5	KNO	+5	PER	+5	PSY	+5
WIL	+13	STR	+5	HEA	+9	STA	113	UD	20

SKILLS:

Combat Sense	5	+5	Dodge	5	+5	Hand-to-Hand	4	+5
Lore (Spirit)	8	+5	Mythology	5	+5	Notice	4	+5
Sneak	3	+5						

SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Peck (UD+20), Spirit Flight (carry up to thirteen people, and can cross the Fold), Silent Stare (paralyze with fear until stare broken on an opposed WIL roll; Raven's MoF then acts as a penalty to opponent's actions, reducing by one each round until completely worn off), Sense Death (knowledge of location of all dying and destined to die in the near future).



NPC TEMPLATES

Stepping into the world of Dream is a certain way to get yourself noticed by the Yagan community. Whether they react as allies or enemies depends entirely on how you conduct yourself while there...

MORDRED GUARD

Mordred are the main guards of the Yagans. They watch over the sacred places and paths around Mortuary. Most Mordred guards are male, and a good number have had at least minimal training with the Joanites. Mordred tend to lie in concealment or unusual places when watching over the sacred lands.

Highlights: Grim, silent, intimidating

Attributes: AGL +1, BLD +1, FIT +1, PER +1, WIL +1, STR +1, HEA +1, STA 35, UD 6, AD 6

Skills: Animal Handling 1/+0, Athletics 1/+1, Combat Sense 2/+1, Dodge 1/+1, Hand-to-Hand 2/+1, Intimidate 2/+1, Lore (Tattoos) 1/+0, Melee 2/+1, Navigation (The Great Hill and Catacombs) 2/0, Notice 2/+1, Ride 1/0, Read/Write (Tribal, Yagan) 1/0, Sneak 1/+1, Speak (as written, Evan, Joanite) 2/0, Throwing 2/+1, Tracking 1/+0

Equipment: Bone spear, short sword, light flesh armor (+2 AP), dark cloak, skull lantern.

MORDRED BONECRAFTER - RAVEN CULTIST

A Bonecrafter follower of the Cult of the Raven is a disturbing figure, caught up in a love of bones and seeing the hand of fate in everything. Bonecrafters are normally reclusive; a Bonecrafter who chances to leave Baba Yaga's sacred hill is usually destined to give fate a helping hand - usually with a well-placed bone blade.

Highlights: Haunted, intense, mysterious

Attributes: AGL +1, CRE +2, INF -2, KNO +1, PER +2, WIL +1, STA 25, UD 4, AD 5

Skills: Archery 2/+1, Athletics 1/0, Combat Sense 1/+2, Craft (Bones) 2/+2, Dodge 1/+1, Hand-to-Hand 1/+1, Lore (Bones) 3/+1, Lore (Omens) 2/+1, Melee 2/+1, Navigation (The Great Hill Underground) 2/+1, Notice 1/+2, Read/Write (Tribal, Fanzay, Yagan, Old One) 1/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Sneak 2/+1, Speak (as written) 2/+1, Animal Kinship (Ravens and Crows), Synthesis 1.

Equipment: Bone short sword (+1 ACC), bone knife, bone bow, bone-tipped arrows, light armor,

REAPER (FLESHER ASSASSIN)

Flesher Assassins, or Reapers (as they are known within the Yagans), are an elite within the ranks. Since the Reapers are only rarely employed, and spend most of their time in practice and meditation, many grow old and extremely talented. Reapers are sent on the most important tasks for Baba Yaga. They have an enmity toward murderers and assassins from other Tribes, seeking them out and killing such individuals as it becomes necessary.

Highlights: Secret, Deadly, Feared

Attributes: AGL +2, FIT +1, INF -2, PER +1, WIL +2, HEA +1, STA 30, UD 5, AD 6

Skills: Animal Handling 1/+0, Acrobatics 2/+2, Archery 3/+2, Athletics 2/+2, Camouflage 2/+0, Combat Sense 2/+1, Craft (Flesh) 2/+0, Dodge 2/+2, Hand-to-Hand 2/+2, Herbalism 2/+0, Lore (Poisons) 3/+0, Melee 3/+2, Notice 2/+1, Read/Write (Tribal, Evan, Yagan, Reaper) 1/+0, Sneak 3/+2, Speak (as written) 2/+0, Synthesis (Curse) 2, Throwing 2/+2.

Equipment: Bone Longsword (+1 ACC), bone blowpipe, poison darts (POT 12-15, Onset: Instant, Lethal)



DAEMONSEEKERS

Daemonseekers are dedicated to the identification of Z'bri and Z'bri taint within the Tribe. They are a very infrequent and feared sight among the other Tribes, and are known to conduct impromptu trials when they discover Z'bri taint. Shebans are, for the most part, reluctant to intervene when Daemonseekers are trailing a person, for fear of being seen as protecting the tainted.

Highlights: Intimidating, Respected, Feared

Attributes: AGL +1, FIT +1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY +1, WIL +2, HEA +1, STA 30, UD 4, AD 6

Skills: Animal Handling 1/+1, Archery (Crossbow) 2/+1, Combat Sense 2/+1, Craft (Bone) 1/+0, Dodge 2/+1, Hand-to-Hand 1/+1, Herbalism 1/+1, Interrogate 2/+1, Investigation 2/+1, Lore (Z'bri) 2/+1, Melee 3/+1, Notice 2/+1, Read/Write (Tribal, Fanzay, Yagan) 2/+1, Riding 2/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Sneak 1/+1, Speak (as written, Evan, Sheban, Joanite, Squat) 2/+1, Synthesis (Curse) 2, Throwing 2/+1.

Equipment: Bone Crossbow, poison bolts (POT12, Onset: 2 rounds, Paralyze) Short Sword (from the Bone Pit, +1 ACC), poison darts (POT 15, Onset: Instant), Heavy Armor, survival gear, horses.

PELLIS ARTISAN - FLESH SEER

Flesh Seers usually move around under the guise of being an Artisan, looking for signs of Z'bri taint among the Tribes. Sometimes they will set up shop and draw in clientele from the other Tribes and even the Fallen to try and detect the tainted among them. They will then curse them so that they can be found by a Daemonseeker or draw them to the attention of the Fleshers.

Highlights: Disturbing, Artistic,

Attributes: AGL +1, CRE +1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY +1, HEA, STA, UD, AD

Skills: Animal Care 1/+1, Craft (Tattoo) 2/+1, Dodge 1/+1, Herbalism 2/+1, Investigation 1/+1, Lore (Flesh) 2/+1, Lore (Z'bri) 1/+1, Melee (Knife) 2/+0, Notice 2/+1, Read/Write (Tribal, Fanzay, Yagan) 2/+1, Ritual 1/+1, Speak (as written) 2/+1, Synthesis (Curse) 1.

Equipment: Knives, Bone Pit spike (+1 ACC), curing equipment, tattooing equipment.

FLESHER - DIPLOMAT

Typically middle aged or elderly Yagan women who wander the Tribal lands seemingly at whim, Fleshier Diplomats often stop to pass on words of wisdom or to do readings. They are known for their curses against those who are disrespectful to them or Baba Yaga.

Highlights: Engaging, Mysterious, Knowing

Attributes: CRE +1, KNO +1, PER +1, PSY +1, INF +1, HEA, STA, UD, AD

Skills: Animal Handling 2/+1, Animal Care 2/+1, Craft (Cooking) 2/+1, Dreaming 1/+1, Etiquette 1/+1, Herbalism 2/+1, Human Perception 2/+1, Investigation 1/+1, Lore (Death) 2/+1, Lore (Omens) 2/+1, Navigation (Vimary) 2/+1, Melee (Knife) 1/+0, Mythology 1/+1, Read/Write (Tribal, Fanzay, Yagan, Old One) 2/+1, Ritual 2/+1, Speak (all written, Evan, Magdalite, Squat) 2/+1, Synthesis (Curse of Dream) 2, Trade 2/+1.

Equipment: Bone Staff/Cane, Heavy Black Traveling Cloak





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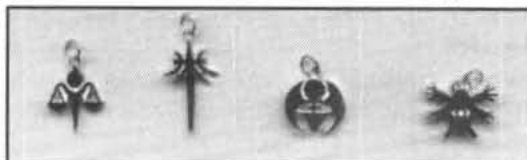
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