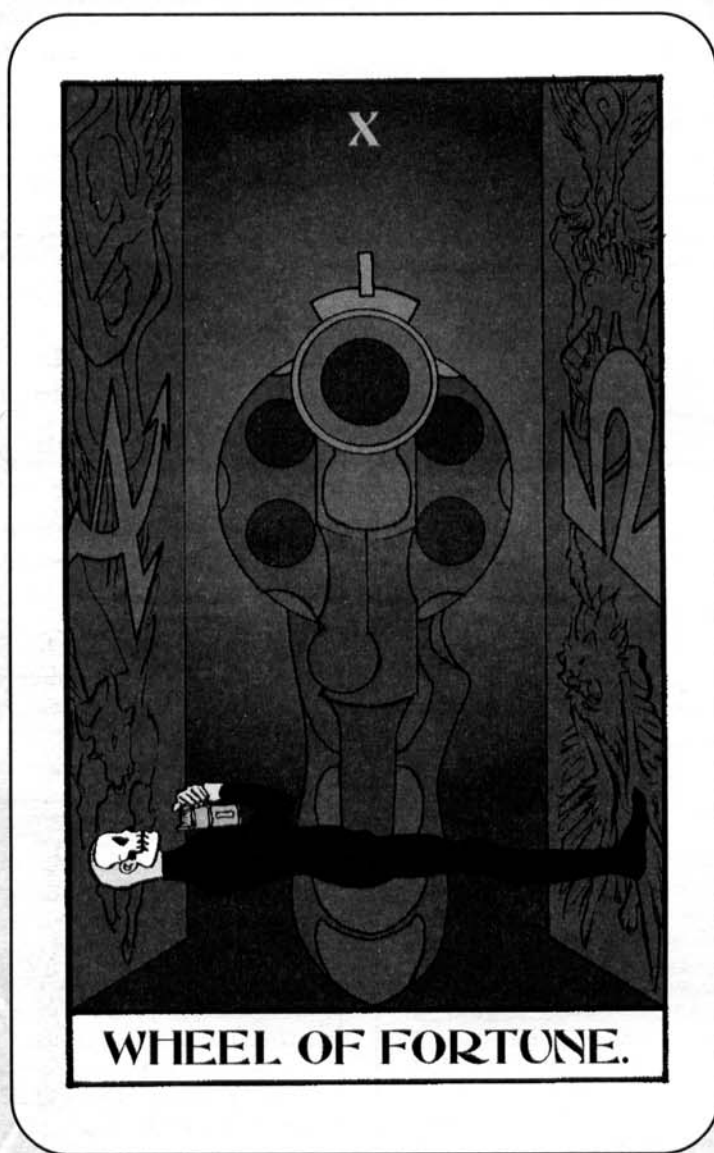


EUTHIANATOS



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EUTHANATOS™



No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

If only you knew the things that I have seen in the darkness of night.

— M.C. Escher

By Kathleen Ryan, Phil Brucato and J. Porter Wiseman, with Clayton Oliver and
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Dedicated with remembrance to Madline Stofka.



PUBLISHING

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Words from the Wolf

It's done! It's done! It's done!

Sorry. This book has been a trial (remind me to tell you about it sometime). Everyone's favorite death mages wanted to stay in the shadows, and it took a lot of effort to convince them to play nice. Chances are, they'll skitter off again before long, so enjoy them while you can.

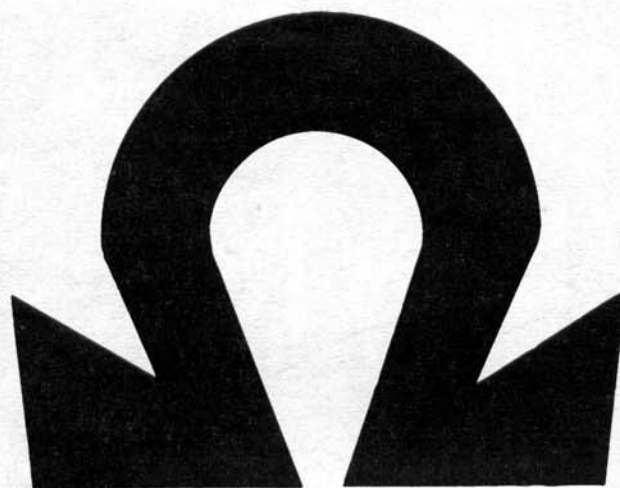
Seriously, the last few months have seen some drastic changes around here. The most obvious one is our change of address (see box); less obvious to you but more drastic to us was the late-December departure of a third of our staff. Lots of good people (see **Order of Hermes**) left last year, and we miss them already. A wave of bad luck and worse decisions made 1996 a year we'd all like to forget. That tide left us creeping around a place dubbed "the Catacombs," a Dilbertesque domicile that truly captures the spirit of the '90s. As the Euthanatoi know, nothing lasts forever. Hopefully, this stage won't last, either.

Yes, both **Euthanatos** and 1996 are now behind us. Let's hope 1997 is a better year — for you, for us, and for the world in general.

Please.

SCANNED BY
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EUTHANATOS™



Contents

Prelude: You Stand Accused	5
Four Turns of the Wheel (History)	9
Tribunal (Inner Workings)	27
Judgement (The Outside World)	39
Walking on Bones (Characters)	45
Appendix: The Jewels of Kali	55



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Prelude: You Stand Accused तमभियुज्जसे

*Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge.
— Jesus of Nazareth, Luke 2:52*

"Theora Hetrick of the Freedom Razor cabal of the House of Helekar, you stand accused of the following crimes:"

The Council Chamber echoed with the voice of Tom Smithson, the Dreamspeaker Primus, standing at the Seat of Spirit at the head of the Table Cenacle and reading from the paper in his hands.

"Gilgul without sanction; mass murder; murder with malice aforethought; murder for pleasure; hunting sentients for sport; sabotage resulting in death...."

The girl listened quietly, white and trembling in a stiff black cotton dress much too large for her. At the word "sabotage," many of the Etherites in the room began to mutter. Theora stared straight before her, over the heads of the assembled Council, neither right nor left, as if she were the only being in the room. Smithson spoke on, ignoring the disturbance.

"Infernalism; treason; maltreating Council, Tradition and Chantry ambassadors; breaking allegiance with both Council and Tradition; oathbreaking...."

In the center of the hall, close to the Table Cenacle, two lesser tables — mere wood and nails, not manifestations of the united power of nine Traditions and five centuries — and their occupants bore witness to the charges. On the left sat the prosecution: The famous

Raging Eagle with his assistants Marcus Tsai and Tanaka Kasumi, nodding solemnly as the reading rolled on. On the right sat the defense: Mitzi Zimmermann and her apprentice Julia Stanislaufsky, the teacher calm and self-assured, the student pale and worried, her eyes growing bigger with the sound of every new crime.

"Harvesting Quintessence from the deaths of others; Node-raiding; using captured Nephandi Talismans and Tass; smuggling corrupt Talismans and Tass; slavery; kidnapping; trafficking in human body parts; torture; mutilation; rape and other sexual violations too numerous to mention here; concealing malefic magickal workings; falsely reporting an Oracle; resisting arrest; and theft.

"Do you have anything to say in your defense?"

Theora's eyes lowered, resting for the first time on her accuser. She bit her lip and sought the gaze of the Euthanatos Primus instead. Indrani Takstang nodded, gestured to the right-hand table, and remained silent. Finally the girl turned, looking expectantly at the two women there.

"I speak for the prisoner," said Mitzi. "She reserves her defense for the formal trial. However, on her behalf I feel I must request a review of these charges before the trial begins."

"On what basis?" asked Master Getulio Vargas Sao Cristavao, the Order of Hermes Primus.

"These are clearly blanket charges, based on the record of the House of Helekar as a whole. For example, Theora is being charged with Gilgul, a magickal feat clearly beyond her capabilities. I ask that the Council reexamine the charges and tailor them to fit Theora instead of her Chantry."

"No." Raging Eagle rose to his feet, holding a hand up to silence the Euthanatos. "This is a war crimes trial, Miss Zimmermann — a war crimes trial held while the battle still rages." The Akashic Brother paused, staring down upon her, then shifted his attention to the gathered Primii: "We cannot waste time reordering these charges. Every man now spent in guarding this girl could be better employed in hunting down the rest of her cabal."

"Moreover," he said, turning now toward the prisoner and the defense, "we **should** not waste time reordering these charges. Every member of this cursed Chantry must be held up and examined in the light of these charges in order to determine their part in these crimes."

He finished and sank back into his chair, his gaze locked with Mitzi's own.

The two counsels continued to stare at each other as the Primii murmured amongst themselves. The prosecutor saw a small, mouse-colored, frizzy-haired woman in her 30s, relaxed and thoughtful in a dove-gray suit-dress. A few wrinkles had begun conquest of the corners of her mouth and light-blue eyes. One hand absently tapped a silver pen on the arm of the chair, the other supported her pointed chin. She had the smallest wrists he had ever seen. The defense saw nothing but muscle, and then a deeply lined face and bare head, dark eyes, and an old man carrying himself in a manner and body far younger. His blue suit fit remarkably badly. She felt that even sitting down, he was terribly tense — more nervous than Theora — and that this trial would cost him something extraordinary, but she couldn't decide what or why.

The hum at the Table Cenacle ceased, and the counsels looked away.

Smithson cleared his throat, and issued his response:

"In consideration of the arguments brought by both sides, the Council has decided to replace the charge of 'Gilgul without sanction' to 'Accessory to Gilgul without sanction,' but not to review or restate the other charges. We will close this hearing and move on to the formal trial. These charges will stand for all future members of the House of Helekar brought to trial before us. This hearing is adjourned."

Mitzi turned to her apprentice, watching the Primii out of the corner of her eye. Dr. Julian Spence of the Sons of Ether quickly joined his clamoring fellow Scientists. Together, they strode off towards their laboratory, talking low, fast and seriously.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Julia.

"Speak up, girl. I know you're thinking. I want to hear it, whatever it is." Mitzi leaned back in the chair. The guards were three deep around the tiny figure of Theora, waiting for Roger Thackery of the Virtual Adepts to open a portal to the prison complex below. "Have some confidence in your opinion."

"Okay." Julia frowned and picked at the tabletop. "It seemed to me like...well...as if what they're doing..."

"Spit it out."

"Who's on trial here? Theora, or the whole House of Helekar or all of us?"

Mitzi nodded, and her slender fingers played nervously with the handle of her briefcase. The room was beginning to clear, but even now there were more mages in the Chamber than usually came to a scheduled Council meeting. Raging Eagle stood at the center of a small, enthusiastic crowd. The attention did not seem to please him.

"All of us," she said. "Let's go."



A Lexicon of the Chakravanti

Like the Cultists of Ecstasy, Euthanatos (or more properly, *Euthanatoi*) draw their formal terminology from Sanskrit roots. Perhaps the Tradition's founders selected Sanskrit over Greek in an effort to balance the awkward compromise they made over their name (see *Chakravanti*); then again, they may have simply found Sanskrit the more appealing language. The real reasons for the preference remain a mystery, and a source of speculation even today.

Acarya — A mentor.

Agama — The journey between the worlds of the living and the dead. *Agama te* refers to the initiation ritual (which sends a *shravaka* through a short death), although it also applies to greater travels beyond the *Pana*. *Agama re* refers to trips of two or more people.

Atman — The Awakened Avatar, the Sacred and Mystickal Self.

Chakravanti — Alternate name for the Euthanatoi, favored by an outvoted faction during the Grand Convocation.

Chodana — The code of ethics all Tradition Euthanatoi are *supposed* to follow.

Coumatha — Literally "Crossroad," the crux where a Euthanatos' old life ends and her new life begins. Sometimes used as a term for the Awakening, *Coumatha* usually refers to some life crisis that leads to a bigger revelation — like an Epiphany.

Diksha — The near-death experience (NDE) that leads a Euthanatos into his new life as a mage. The Thanatoic Awakening.

Euthanatoi — The proper plural form of "Euthanatos." Often ignored, even within the Tradition, in favor of the more accessible common name, but preferred in formal contexts.

Jhor — Death-taint Resonance. Magicks that focus Underworld energies deepen Jhor, as do atrocities that "kill the soul." The "smell of the Wyrn" and "loss of Humanity" that werewolves and vampires speak of are closely related to Jhor; as the Euthanatoi understand it, however, this taint comes from the essence of decay, not from a moral judge-

ment. Even so, they watch those whose Jhor seems too intense, recognizing the difference between someone who is familiar with death and someone who enjoys spreading it.

Marabout — A Chantry. Often refers to one of the ancient ancestral temples in India, although some young Euthanatoi use the name for their own dwellings.

Naraki — The Fallen (Nephandi); also used to denote corrupt Euthanatoi.

Nyasa — The Awakening that carries magickal enlightenment and a greater appreciation of life. Although lesser awareness can invoke lesser powers (i.e., hedge magic), magickal talents come only through a true Nyasa. To the Euthanatoi, the best Nyasa come through *Diksha*.

Ojas — The mystick energy flowing within all things; in other words — Quintessence.

Pana — The Shroud (Gauntlet) between the material world and the spirit Penumbra.

Paramaguru — A Thanatoic master of great ability or repute. Also *Rimposhe*.

Samashti — A grand meeting that most Euthanatoi are expected to attend.

Shravaka — An apprentice who has only recently undergone the *agama* ritual.

Shruti — "That Which is Revealed"; a Time/Mind memory technique that calls up images and sensations of what another person has experienced. (q.v. *smrti*.)

Siddi — A general term for magick.

Smrti — "That Which is Remembered"; a vision technique (q.v. *shruti*) in which a Euthanatos calls up memories of past incarnations.

Thanatoics — A modern, casual term for the Tradition's ranks; disliked by many older Euthanatoi.

Vrata — A formal oath, often bound to a life-promise. To break it is to court disgrace, exile or even death.

Wheel, the — The great Cycle of birth, death and reincarnation. Used as a metaphor for creation and the living world.



a.s

Four Turns of the Wheel (History) चक्रस्य चतुष्परिवर्तः

*When the moon on a cloud cast night
Hung above the tree tops height
You sang me of some distant past
That made my heart beat strong and fast
Now I know I'm home at last
— Loreena McKennitt, "Samain Night"*

"Come in, please," said the **Rimpoche** Indrani Takstang, Primus for the Euthanatos, Lama of Vajra. "I have tea ready for you. I know the journey in from Cerberus is a difficult one."

The two women stooped to enter the hut's low door, then bowed again in greeting to the elderly Indian man who sat cross-legged behind a steaming teapot and rows of sandwiches.

"Michelle Rachel Zimmermann, **bani** Euthanatos. This is my apprentice Julia Agnes Stanislaufsky."

"Yes, of course. I've seen you here before with Senex. How is the Old Man?"

"Very well, thank you, Rimpoche," Mitzi said. "He sends his compliments and a few small tokens of his appreciation. I'm afraid they're buried in my luggage at the moment...."

"Time enough to get them once you've settled in. Please, sit down." Takstang began whisking tea leaves together, pouring water and pressing plates and cups into their hands. After an agreeable interval had passed, he changed the course of the conversation to more serious matters. "Now then, tell me what you thought of the hearing, Miss Mitzi."

"I thought it went remarkably well, under the circumstances. I've already weakened the case against the girl by bringing up the flaws in the charges. The important thing today was to point out the injustice and yet keep at least one serious, Gilgul-worthy offense on the record to use if we decide that the girl is guilty."

The Primus nodded. "I have my own opinion, of course, but I feel I should not act upon it yet or discuss it with you. Conflict of interest, you understand. On the other hand, we need to decide this matter very soon. Yes?"

"Yes, Rimpoche. In fact, if you'll excuse me, I want to go visit Theora."

"Wait a moment." He sipped his tea thoughtfully. As he did so, his thoughts coursed across the room, settling into Mitzi's mind like gentle speech. **Give me your message now, he said silently, before the hearing and before you see Theora. We may not have another chance to speak privately.**

Very well. The Old Man says: **In the official lists, the House of Helekar counts 13 Awakened members. They should now list 12.**

Who is dead?

Somnitz. We would rather that this not become public yet, even to the rest of the Council.

Takstang raised an eyebrow. **I won't ask you more. Do be careful with Gillan. He has hunted Somnitz for years, and may know something.**

"Isn't she dangerous?" asked Julia, oblivious to the telepathic conversation.

Mitzi rose to her feet. "Don't jump to conclusions, Jule. It's still possible that Theora is innocent. Anyway, I need to visit her. It's my duty to ensure that she gets the punishment that she deserves — no more and no less. It's also...the respect due to the remains of a noble organization. Before Voormas went mad, the House of Helekar was a great force for good. I wish I'd had the time to tell you more history, to help you understand that."

"Miss Julia is ignorant of our past?" Takstang asked.

Mitzi brushed her hair back, blushing and trying to cover the fact. "I'm afraid we teach ethics and self-defense first on Cerberus. History is advanced study...."

The Primus spread his hands wide. "I have nothing to do today but wait

for tomorrow." He smiled up into Mitzi's dubious eyes. "If you permit, I could perhaps instruct Miss Julia while you tend to the defense?"

Julia's eyes widened in surprise. Her mentor's did the same.

"It...it would be an honor, Rimpoche." Mitzi stammered out her acceptance. "May I have a moment with her first?"

Outside, in the brightly lit garden, the older woman studied her apprentice carefully. "I hope you'll enjoy your afternoon. It's not every day the Primus of the Euthanatoi offers to teach a first-year Adept. The Rimpoche is a remarkable man. You'll be safe here with him."

"Safe?"

"Safe." Mitzi hesitated, then went on. "Stay with the Rimpoche until I get back. If he needs to leave, go to our quarters and stay there with the door locked. Don't open it to **anyone**, even to Euthanatos you've met before or know by reputation. And don't leave Vajra for **any** reason."

"But you're going out alone." Julia's voice broke with worry. "You're risking your life to go see **her**."

"Try to understand, Jule. Whatever her crimes, Theora has lost her home, her freedom, and all her cabal. She's in shock — couldn't you see it? She needs someone to talk to before she dies."

The Arya

*But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.
— Alan Seeger, "Rendezvous"*

"This is **smṛti**, Julia. That which is remembered." The elder spoke in clear, soft tones as he gestured to the suddenly changed landscape. Now pale white walls surrounded them, brightly painted in some places and set with colored pebbles in others. The teahouse pillows were gone, replaced by smooth, damp stone steps. Julia marveled at the transformation, at the caress of scents, sounds and sensations...and noted the disjointed past/present/future fugue that came with Time-magicked perceptions. **Like living your whole life at once**, she mused. **Or many lives....**

"I lived once in this city," said Takstang. "I came every day to bathe in this pool. That sun above us is the sun of India, three or four thousand years before the birth of the Buddha. My people lived here on the banks of the Sarasvati river, and we were civilized long before the Europeans. Soon, we will be forgotten. In much later days, some will call us "the Arya," or **Aryans**. At this time, we called ourselves "the Yehnn," or "people of the great river." We possessed architecture; agriculture; astronomy; learned sages, writers and poets; and a religion in harmony with the Earth and the universe, one such as no longer exists but for the Dreamspeakers and their kin. I was a merchant, and I gave up my wealth to join the madmen priests in the woods.

"Follow me," he said, and they walked outside. Julia blinked in the raw, glaring sunlight. In the distance, there was music. On the next street she could see a procession of men and women walking solemnly, some in robes and some nearly naked. They held colored banners high, the bright flags snapping on poles taller than the houses. A jumbled line of singing, dancing people followed the banners, carrying clay jugs and trays of grain on their shoulders.

"That building on the hill is our temple, but the festival today will not be held there. The procession goes from the forest in the north down to the river bank, and the temple is built halfway between them. It is the summer solstice, and the god we worship, the Lord of Animals and Wild Places, is today an equal match for his consort. Tomorrow his lady, the goddess I will not name, will overpower him, and rule until the winter solstice.

"It is all part of the Great Wheel — the dying of the year, the new life in spring. You know this and they know this, but too often it is forgotten."

The scene changed again, and the two stood on a barren hillside covered with dry, crackling grass. Takstang strode forward, sure-footed, and Julia struggled to keep up with him on the slippery straw. In the distance, another procession threaded its way across the wasteland. A ragged line of walkers driving their skinny animals before them, mixed in with carts, horses and pack animals. As the two drew nearer, Julia could see remnants of banners like those in the great city, now used to tie baskets to the backs of cattle and donkeys.

"These are the remains of the Sarasvati people. It is perhaps two thousand years before Christ. Their river is dry now, and they have had to leave their home to the mercy of the sand. There is a saying: **A thousand years a city, a thousand years a desert**. It is part of the Great Wheel, to lose cities and homes to time and nature. Civilizations have lifetimes, too."

On the side of the column nearest them, an old man in a tattered priestly robe called out encouraging words to the refugees.

"That is myself, in this incarnation," Tankstang continued, "this time I was trained to my calling from birth, in the last years before we left the

Sarasvati. It was a bad time to be a **Rshi** — to be a mage or a priest. We could not stop the desert taking our land; we could not give an easy or comforting explanation for the devastation. Instead, we organized the migration of those who still lived; we had to trust to our visions of better lands to the south, and asked the people to trust us and the spirits we spoke to. To save most of the people, we had to leave behind the ones who would not follow, though it meant their deaths. We had to let the weak die, though they were our brothers and sisters, our parents and children."

The old priest turned from his flock to scan the horizon and the folds of the dry hills. He gave an abrupt shout, then jumped nimbly onto the back of the horse at his side. Bareback, he slapped his mount's flanks with his heels and sped up the column into a group of spear-carrying men. Julia could just see him pointing toward the west, into the low afternoon sun.

"They are about to be attacked," said Takstang.

Julia frowned, shifting her weight uneasily.

"Their animals are still valuable. Slavery, too, is common in this time." He sighed. "I will die today, but the march will continue, and the Aryans — the Noble Ones — will reach the south undefeated in body. They are tough, ruthless and well-seasoned by the time they reach the Ganges. In time, they will discover that they like fighting and storms, sun and the hard wind at their backs."

A dust cloud formed slowly over the sunward hills, and the refugees in the middle of the column doubled their pace. The spearmen in the forward section pushed their way through the cattle and carts, making a stand to the west.

"We will move on. You are young and civilized, and this battle is going to be very bloody. Also, it is not good to relive your own deaths too often."

He waved his hand in dismissal and the grasslands disappeared. Now the two mages sat on the sill of a high window, legs dangling over the edge. A large and busy city street lay beneath them, and Julia wrinkled her nose at the smell rising from it.

"This is their new city. The brown line in the distance, that is the Ganges. Those brick buildings are the rich men's houses. Below us are the markets, and over there are the shacks where the poor men live. As refugees, the Arya had to work together to live. Every man and woman had their task, and they raised their children to do what they did. Here, the people still pass professions down the family line, and the caste system — **jati** — rules society."

He turned to point across the room, to the view from another window. "That is the temple quarter of this neighborhood. You can see that there are many different shrines — that is a new thing. Those many gods hide the cowards behind the conquerors' face." Takstang settled back against the edge of the wall. "The Arya became physically very strong in their journey, and seemed brave to themselves and to the people they conquered for this land. But all are mistaken. The Noble Ones are not brave. Their hearts are afraid of the Great Wheel now. They will not listen to the Rshis who tell them they must die and return, suffer in that life and return again to complete the Cycle. They have created new gods to comfort them and an afterlife of rest and peace, and they say this is truer and better than the old ways."

"Lots of people don't believe in reincarnation," said Julia.

"I know. And perhaps there is nothing wrong with that. But the Rshis here worried that the people would neither rejoin the Cycle nor make it to their heavens, but would stay to haunt the living and upset the Great Wheel."

"Like wraiths?"



"Exactly like wraiths," the old Euthanatos said sharply.

"So." He continued. "The people and their new religion lived in the cities, and some Rshis joined them — the first seeds of the Celestial Chorus in India. The Arya made politics and war on each other and the lands around them, and married locals to end wars and unite little kingdoms. The old-religion Rshis and their families soon left for new lands, east and south, going into Bengal and Deccan, further south into the lands of the Dravidians, and north into the foothills of the Himalayas. Eventually, all the Sarasvati

peoples will forget themselves. The Vedas they compose will record only their "proud" name, and that they came from the northwest. Still later, scholars who study these Vedas will conclude that the Noble Ones were white, that they came down from the northlands as the Greeks do centuries from now, or that they were Asians, crossing the mountains as did the Chinese. Those theories are wrong. Our cycle begins on the Sarasvati. All else is mud from its banks and water from its currents."

Crossroads

*I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.*

— Robert Frost, "Birches"

"Do they teach you much Sanskrit on Cerberus?" Takstang asked.

"No, none at all yet," replied Julia. "I've only been in training for a year or so."

"But you **do** know what **Coumatha** is?" Takstang asked. "Tell me what you know."

"It's like a cusp in **Stranger in a Strange Land**." The Primus stared blankly at her, and she went on nervously. "It's a time where you stand between an old life and a new one, and the decisions you make about both change you. Like your first year of college, or getting married or Awakening."

"Good enough. It means 'crossroads' in the old tongue, 'epiphany' in Greek. I cannot remember what our Mayan brethren called it. The migration of the Arya was the first Coumatha in our history — of the Indian heart of our kind. There have been two others...."

The Himalayan Wars (900 B.C. – 300 B.C.)

The Primus flicked his fingers, and the light changed. In near-darkness, they sat on a cold rock wall dusted with snow.

"This is a religious retreat, a commune something like western monasteries. The monks here are the spiritual descendants of the Rshis who tended the Great Wheel on the banks of the Sarasvati. This **Marabout**, this Chantry, is the home of a renunciate sect of the Rshis who went north."

Takstang fell silent, and Julia took the time to study the landscape before them. The wall ran down at least a hundred feet, but in the dim light the brickwork melted into the natural stone, and she could not tell where the monastery ended or the cliff face began. Their mountain rubbed shoulders with taller ones on each side in a ridge that stretched out as far as she could see. The valley below was dark as a well. Tiny fires shone up through the clear air, and the sun's red corpse languished in the west.

"Come this way."

They left the valley behind them and climbed chilly, narrow stairs to battlements on another level. The Primus gestured to the forbidding rock heights above them, and Julia followed his gaze to a low point, a saddle pass outlined faintly against the dark-blue sky. A few flickering sparks — a line of many torches — appeared on the horizon.

"That is a trading caravan from China. It is not the first to make the journey from Tibet; it will not be the last. This one is important because it carries the first true Akashic Brothers into India.

"It is roughly a thousand years before Christ. Magick in India is very diverse, and it is more important to know the differences between one's own sect and one's neighbor's than it is to know of the similarities between one's own sect and the practices of a stranger in the next kingdom. There are family ties, old alliances, perhaps, but no more. This world is like a floor mosaic. Each tile knows it is red or blue or yellow, and sees the color of the tiles around it, but not how much red is in the pattern. You see?"

"Yes, sir. I'm not sure why it matters, though."

"It does not matter here — yet. The Akashics that arrive today will find that the Indian forefathers of the Celestial Chorus, Verbena and Cult of Ecstasy have little in common with them. Our people, those who will be the Euthanatos many centuries from now, are more familiar. The Warring Hands — as the Akashics are called in these days — are not as peaceful as they someday shall be, but they understand the Great Cycle well. They will make many friends among the Euthanatos sects, friendships based on that common ground. It will be Akashic scribes who identify the similarities between Handura diviners and Idiran luck-priests, Dacoit healers and Supahni warriors. They will do this as friends as they travel slowly further south into India, and as enemies a hundred years from now."

The Reason

Julia blinked in a sudden gust of wind, and when she opened her eyes the scene had changed again.

"We are in the Ganges basin. This is Kanpur. What you see is **shruti**. 'That which is revealed.' I was not here, but have shared the memories of one who was."

The young mage staggered and gagged at the stench enveloping them. The odor of hundreds of unwashed bodies, open sewers, rotting flesh and necrotic sores washed over her, and Takstang slipped a hand beneath Julia's arm to keep her from falling. Recovering herself, she looked around, and the sight nearly made her retch again.

If she had fallen forward, she would have stumbled into a corpse. If she had fallen backward, she would have landed on a heap of them. Weak cries of despair came through the shuttered windows around them.

"My god," she whispered. "What's happening?"

"Plague," Takstang answered. "It is only a small one, but has hit the lowest castes first — those responsible for clearing the streets, handling corpses and so on. When they die, there is no one to take them away, and the plague spreads to their betters."

Takstang stepped gingerly around the body of a small girl and led the way through a tangle of narrow alleys. They stopped in a courtyard.

Two other figures entered the clearing. One was a thin, browned and brown-eyed boy dressed neatly in rough cotton, and the other was an older man, pale, heavily muscled and dressed in patched silk robes. The young man carried a raw jute sack and wore a knife at his waist.

"That is a visiting Akashic Brother, Smoke Tiger," Takstang said. "The boy is a talented Dacoit healer called Ranjit. Ranjit has come to stop the spread of the plague. Watch."

The Dacoit stooped over the first body that lay in his path, tested the pulse at the neck, and moved on. He spoke rapidly and enthusiastically to his companion, gesturing at the victims lying at the other man's feet. Smoke Tiger stooped and began checking them for signs of life. The young one stood again, and pointed to a clear corner of the dirt yard. Smoke Tiger nodded, picked up a limp body in each arm and began a stack of carrion in the corner.

On his third trip he picked up the first fresh body.

With a roar of horror, he dropped it and turned dead white. The woman's corpse fell at an angle, and her newly slit throat gaped open in the golden afternoon sun. Smoke Tiger's knees gave out, and he sagged to the earth beside her, staring.

The healer rushed to his side, concerned and clearly frightened. He wiped his bloody hands on a scrap of cloth from his bag and knelt to catch his companion's gaze.

Smoke Tiger leaped to his feet and staggered back, nearly tripping over a dead rat behind him. He began to shout at the boy.

"I think you know what **he** is saying," Takstang said.

Ranjit stepped back, confused.

"Now the boy is explaining that the woman would not have survived the treatment magicks, and that they must cure or burn as many victims as possible tonight." The young mage clutched his bag tightly in his left hand and waved Smoke Tiger closer to the start of the row of victims, to the people he had not asked the Akashic Brother to move. "He is explaining that these people have strength of spirit; they are already getting better because of the magick of the herbs and rites he has used. They will walk under their own power by the time he has reached the last victim in this section. Now, he says, he must hurry, or perhaps people will pass beyond returning before he reaches them."

Ranjit turned away from the Akashic Brother and began to bend over the next patient, knife and herbs held ready in the same fist. Smoke Tiger sprang forward to keep him away from the child, striking out at Ranjit with a careless backhand. The healer flew clean off the ground and headfirst into a wall on the other side of the courtyard. He slid, sickeningly boneless, to the ground and breathed no more.

Julia covered her face and felt the pillows of the tea room beneath her. Takstang poured her a fresh cup of tea and continued the story.

"Smoke Tiger was called upon to defend his action by the elders of the town, of course. If he had been a humble man, he might have pleaded that the murder was accidental, and the war could have started later, or not at all. Instead, he defended the killing as a righteous act to punish the corrupt and dangerous boy. He described the healer's cold-blooded murder and gave it up as his excuse. The elders nodded and said, 'Yes, that's what we sent him for!' And so the tribunal found Smoke Tiger guilty of a wrongful murder.



"Instead of returning him to the Cycle, the Dacoit decided to hold him in irons until his cabal could be summoned. The Dacoit explained the situation and sadly returned him to his own people for whatever punishment they deemed best. The Akashic Brotherhood being what it is, there was no punishment. Smoke Tiger was set free and cried out for the destruction of this new and terrible sect — a cult all the more dangerous because their beliefs were so subtly corrupt."

"Damn!" Julia exclaimed, and reddened as she realized she had just cursed in front of the Primus. "All because he was sent to jail?"

"No, no. You saw the look on the man's face. He thought Ranjit was playing god. The boy-as-healer decided who to save and who to send on. The Akashic Brotherhood believes that the Great Wheel is so sacred — that life is so sacred — that no mortal, no matter how enlightened, should tamper with it, unless the bearer of that life declares the gift worthless by disregarding it in others. Naturally," the elder's voice took a sarcastic turn "the Brothers have always been enlightened enough to know when a life proves worthless. They offered the Dacoit no such knowledge, and the Dacoit would not claim such enlightenment as their own. Ranjit was merely being practical. If the infection was not stopped by medicine, magick and murder, it would have consumed the whole city. Plague in India is serious, even today."

The Battles

The elder sipped from his cup and pulled his legs into the lotus position. "Forgive me, but I am tiring. Do you mind if I lapse into my own tongue?" He paused only for a second and then continued, "It is easier for an old man to translate with magick than with his mind, you see. I am lazy."

Julia smiled bashfully. The Primus' voice, as he went on, grew stronger, more confident. She realized that his simple words and slow speech had given her a false impression of him; in his own language, Takstang sounded far more educated and intelligent. She wondered, too, how many mages outside the Euthanatoi had heard the "true" voice of Indrani Takstang.

"At this time," the Primus went on, "we have Akashic Brothers living all over India, from the Bay of Bengal and Tamiland to the northernmost border with Tibet. They know what the Euthanatos do not: There are many cabals and sects of our kind — scattered, yet linked by a common philosophy. The Akashics are hierarchical and well-informed, and Smoke Tiger's cabal leader, Chan Ng, proves a capable general. The Warring Hands are students of the mind — skilled telepaths — and can coordinate attacks and send messages between camps and countries easily, without traces. Chan Ng calls for more mages, consors and troops to cross the passes from Tibet, and he sets up camps within the very walls of the hospitable native sects. As links to the traders from China and Korea, the Akashics have influence with the local merchants and governments, as well, and a few fall in to assist him. On one terrible night, he launches surprise attacks simultaneously on such Marabouts as he thinks will fall to the forces he can muster, and leaves the rest for later.

"The healers and sages among us are slaughtered. Every last Dacoit died. This slaughter begins a war which lasts for 300 years. As our friend Raging Eagle shows, the pain of that war still throbs below the surface, 2200 years later."

"Why?" Julia's breath frosted — or seemed to, anyway — despite the fact that she would not live for another three millennia. "Wars happen all the time. Why would this one continue for so long, or be remembered so long afterward?"

"The Himalayan Wars are not simple exchanges of death or soil," Takstang replied. "They are a contest of souls, a small but bitter cycle of their own. Each side knows the Great Cycle so well that when they return, each warrior remembers his former life, and remembers the treachery that ended it. The bitterness outlasts lifetimes, and new blood is spilled to feed that anger."

Julia noted the stress of present over past. "Damn." Her curse was softer this time. Now, she thought, I'm glad lots of people don't believe in reincarnation! The thought of a cycle like that, with the momentum of all the European wars behind it....

Then again, that might explain a few things.

"For the first year," Takstang continued, "we merely defended ourselves. No one had any idea of the scope of the Akashic Brotherhood's betrayal or influence in India. We were accustomed to fighting small feuds with our neighbors, but nothing more. Later, we adopted tactics from the enemy, and I am sorry to say that some of the worst atrocities of those bloody days were ours. It is difficult, when you die at the hands of a merciless enemy, to grant quarter to him in another life. Too many of our ethics fell casualty to the war.

"In the 93rd year, the Idran lost themselves, becoming corrupt in deed — and later, **Naraki** in fact. It is a dark tale, and I will spare you the listening of it today."

The Ahl-i-Batin

"You have heard of the Lost Ones? I do not know whether we should be proud or ashamed to have had a part in their birth, but we cannot escape the responsibility.

"In the 165th year of the wars, in Afghanistan, very near, in fact, to the ruins of the Sarasvati people, the Handura (quiet fortune-tellers before the war, terrible bladesmiths and swordsmen now) ambushed a caravan of Akashic Brothers, consors, Chinese and Tibetan merchants, their servants and slaves. The fighting men among the Sleepers and the few battle-seasoned Akashics in the party drove forward to escape the Handura forces flanking them; the civilians, acolytes and young mages pulled back and fled farther west.

"It was late in the war, and the dead of previous generations were reincarnating as fast as they could, eager for revenge. The fighting attracted mages from other groups, other sects, and they joined one side or the other, or attacked them both. It was a dismal time. Many of the Awakened in this caravan were no more than children, frightened and not yet aware of their true powers, reasons for fighting or past lives. The Handura hunted them down regardless.

"The pursuing Euthanatos herded the fugitives before them, following at perhaps half a day's distance behind, tending to their own wounds as they went. The starving acolytes ran directly into the arms of the Darwushin, an Ecstatic cult of the time. The two groups bonded mystically — I do not understand exactly how — and the Ahl-i-Batin formed that night, the Night of Fana."

The Primus eyed Julia thoughtfully. "You must ask Mitzi to find you a copy of the Ahl-i-Batins' Doctrine of Unity. It is worth knowing, and would help you.

"The Handura pushed forward into the valley from the west, and as they did, Celestial Singers swept down from the east. The merciless fell, I think

justly; the strength of the Handura lay broken on the field before dawn that day. They would have joined the Idran if they had had to fight much longer."

The End

Takstang set his tea cup down, and they suddenly sat on a low wooden bench, gazing out a curtained window onto a dazzling field of snow. A hundred yards away, a bonfire blazed, sending up huge clouds smoke. Red-painted and orange-robed figures jumped around, over and through the flames. Beyond, a large cluster of tents and shacks spread out over the icy ground.

"In the 235th year of the war, a new voice came out of our strongholds in Bengal: Vedavati. She had been a Brahmin's wife, Awakening for the first time attending his deathbed. The Chorister sects did their best to recruit her; she came to us instead. A born diplomat, she convinced mortal princes and some mages — Ecstatic types, mainly — to fight on our side, and drew together the scraps of dead sects and Chantries into a new, more military order: Natatapas, the Dancers of the Inner Fire. That is her camp.

"For centuries, we thought that the Awakened in the kingdoms north of the Ganges had been pacified by the Akashic Brothers and their forces. In the last ragged years of the war, we discovered that this was not so. A hidden resistance came together under the banner of Kali. The Sarasvati peoples' old

goddess recreated herself on the icy slopes you see below us, and five of her chosen Awakened took this heavily manned Akashic fortress in one night."

A small crowd of men and women came into view, crossing the field to join the dancers. Cries of welcome and recognition rang out on both sides.

"Their leader, the Grand Harvester Subramanian, sent messages south to Vedavati, and between them they united the death mages of India. Together, they eliminated the Brotherhood's military influence below the Ganges and reduced the conflict in the north to occasional border skirmishes in Tibet. They called their new alliance the **Chakravanti**, and for the first time the death mages had a name and an identity. The Akashic Brotherhood's crusade created a Tradition where there was none before."

The snowy field faded to tea room.

"Grand Harvester Subramanian and his followers founded a new sect after the truce. He intended it to guard the Chakravanti from any outside threat — the Consanguinity of Eternal Joy, whose leader Helckar would found a Chantry at the entrance to the Shade Realm of Entropy 800 years later. The last 13 mages of that Chantry are traitors and fugitives today."

Takstang waited, watching the girl's face quietly. Julia found nothing to say.

The Chakravanti

To the left of the palace, as one approaches it, a white cypress shades the pool of Lethe, where the common ghosts flock down to drink. Initiated souls avoid this water, choosing to drink instead from the pool of Memory, shaded by a white poplar, which gives them a certain advantage over their fellows.

— Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*

"So," Takstang continued, "our fledgling Tradition struggled now to free itself from the egg. Vedavati's Dancers took a rough census, persuaded rich Chantries to help rebuild the war-torn ones, and led the Marabouts to speak to each other often. We began to look for mages like ourselves in the villages, and found a few among the early Verberna there. We looked outside for mages of the Wheel, and found Greece.

"The Sisters of Kore, the Children of Hecate, the Cretan Sybils, the Dark Maidens of the Caspian Sea, the Nameless Sons — all servants to the Cycle. Reincarnation formed the basis for their religion. Their priesthood and oracles dove back and forth across the Pana into the Underworld like the shuttle of Mother Fate. Twice a year the mages took selected, lesser members between worlds as an honor guard for Persephone on her travels. The acolytes had to find their own way home — by Awakening — and did so in surprising numbers.

"Our contact with them, though brief and rare at the time, changed us forever. The Natatapas seized the idea and made it their own. Pilgrimages to Jama's world became a holy duty; her blessing fell on those who returned. The little death, Julia, is like a winnowing flail. It separates out the weak by killing them. It reveals the cruel by leaving them unchanged. It tests the worthy with fear and pain, and they learn compassion. We must never send another where we ourselves fear to go, Julia. This is our Golden Rule."

Buddhism

"Meanwhile, around us, the kingdoms and city-states of India stopped fighting the mages' wars and fell back to their own."

Julia looked around them, puzzled. This was the most peaceful "history lesson" yet; rolling hills and greenish-brown fields surrounded them. They now rested on a rise above a small village, just outside a crowd of seated peasants. Higher up, a few better-dressed villagers sat apart from the rest, but all were listening intently to a stringy old man sitting under a tree at the top of the hill.

"Hear what he says:

"When once my teacher asked us, 'How long is a man's life?' We all guessed — some 70, some 60, some 50. 'Wrong,' the old man says, 'no.' When we turned the question back to him, we asked, 'How long is a man's life?' The old man pointed to his mouth, and like this," Takstang paused, and put his hand in front of his face in mimicry of the old man preaching, "he says, 'Life is but a breath.'"

A teenage girl near the front of the crowd cried out and rose to her feet apparently dazed. She asked the old man question after question, as if the answers would never come fast enough.

"The girl is an early incarnation of Tum Goh, my teacher in this life. This will be his first life as a Buddhist, and she will travel with the missionaries into Tibet in her 40s. She has just Awakened.

"The man speaking is a disciple of Siddhartha Gautama, Sakyamuni the Buddha. You are very Western, perhaps you are not familiar with his teachings?"

"I had some comparative religion courses in college. Buddha's a lot like Christ," Julia said.



The Primus winced. "Your Christ was a little like the Buddha.

"The Buddha saw war and said, 'desires,' saw suffering and said, 'attachments,' saw the death and sickness raging through the country and said, 'you can escape. You can meditate and cut these painful connections and leave the merciless Cycle behind you.' And the people were sick of wars, disease and burying their children, and listened.

"For the next five or six hundred years, Buddhism spread like fire through the common folk, the nobles, and even the mages — of all sects. It sparked the Hindu reformation; it inspired the emperor Asoka to make just the laws of his reign; it sent missionaries like that girl in all directions to preach peace, meditation and enlightenment; it promised freedom from the Wheel."

Julia raised an eyebrow. "You don't think it can grant freedom?"

"What is freedom? Is it escaping the Wheel or standing beside it? Controlling life or tending it? Is Nirvana enlightenment or oblivion? Is it Ascension? I don't know. I think, myself, that the Buddha became an Oracle without needing to become a mage. Ascension is more than understanding magick," he said, shaking his head, "but so far, I cannot see what else it is that needs to be understood." Takstang smiled. "That is why I am only an archmage, not a holy man.

"I show you this because Siddharta Gautama's teachings affected the Chakravanti profoundly. We began to think differently about the way we moved through the world. We examined the cost of our healings and assassinations, both to ourselves and to the Sleepers, and we changed forever the reasons for which we would do them. In Nepal, our elders considered the nature of the soul and the paths of reincarnation. In Tibet, where we excel at reincarnation, Buddhist-influenced Chakravanti bestowed the first Good Deaths on favored consors."

Julia glanced suspiciously at the tranquil Rimpoche.

"It was now, too, that we realized the soul came in two parts — the *Atman*, the sacred self, the soul that passes on always, the link to the One, the source of our power that haunts our dreams; and the lesser half, the *Jiva* self, that which fuels the personality and can remain without the *Atman* as a ghost or vampire."

"The Avatar?" Julia asked. "Which half is that?"

"I believe," said the elder, "that it is a bit of both."

Invasion (100 B.C. - A.D. 1300)

"Changing times found the Chakravanti adaptable and tough. Around them, empires were born, prospered and died: That of Alexander the Great, bringing fighting men, diplomats, priests and healers east with it, mages among them. The Mauryan, establishing Buddhism as a state institution. The Gupta, last of the great Hindu empires, sparking a Renaissance of that religion and the arts. And finally, dozens of lesser conquerors, the fractious Muslim raiders of the Turks.

"We kept ready. Our Marabouts were either light and mobile or deeply secret and secure. A mage might spend his entire life in one kingdom, or might change his home as often as the seasons passed. Like a fine net, our league spread over the continent, anchored in Tibet, Baghdad and Bengal, touching mages and un-Awakened ones. As the Tantrik practices grew and then were persecuted, the mundane worshippers, Ecstasies and our own Tantrikas, relied on each other as lookouts, as allies. In the end, we needed them all.

"Because with the Muslims came the Ahl-i-Batin, Celestials and other, more warlike wizard-priests. To them, we were demons in human guise. Islam is no more forgiving of the Craft than Christianity or Judaism, and when the offender is also an assassin...." Takstang spread his hands wide. "It nearly started another war. The Consanguinity saw all Muslims as devils for a generation. With time, though, the Muslims learned to tolerate the Hindu religion, and we all learned to avoid each other."

First Samashti

History is the essence of innumerable biographies.

— Thomas Carlyle, *On History*

Takstang and Julia sat on a low stone bench, shaded by a blue-and-white striped awning. Before them lay a hot, sunlit courtyard bounded by stuccoed and tiled buildings on all sides. Julia sneezed.

"This is the western year 1313, in Isfahan, Persia — what you know as Iran," Takstang said.

To their left, just off-center in the wall, was an elegant, painted double archway (with practical, foot-thick wooden doors). Through these arches came one man on a horse, dusty and trailworn. He called out and was answered by cheerful shouts throughout the compound. One voice kept on yelling, becoming clearer. Smiling and laughing, the red-bearded speaker bounded down a stairway opposite the watchers.

"Sirdar Rustam, the Amir al-Karwan, Pyrrhus Zagreus — patriarch of a Zoroastrian merchant house, and the greatest traveler of our kind in this era. He has journeyed as far south as Chibucene, as far north as Scarborough, as far east as Kyoto. If the New World had been recorded at this time, he would have gone there also. His was the inspiration that led to our Chodana."

The visitor, on his own feet now, stood by Rustam watching a stream of camels, horses and donkeys file through the gate. Skipping children herded the animals to a lesser gate at the threshold of a hard-packed dirt floor scattered with straw. Rustam waved the newcomers into wallhouses.

"The Sirdar Awakened on his first trading voyage to India. An Untouchable woman healed a sword cut that should have taken him. Her cabal taught him basic magick, and a little of our history."

"Throughout our existence, outsiders entered India and joined our sects — Greeks in Alexander's embassy, heretics hidden among the Muslim warriors, Africans with trading vessels on the Indian Ocean. The hints and legends fired Rustam's imagination. He was among the first of our kind to think of a **world** of mages, rather than a country or sect. He set out to find the Tenders of the Wheel wherever legend hinted at them, hoping to create a network between Chantries and divisions around the globe...or rather, around Europe, Asia and Africa. His Earth is flat, you see."

Takstang snapped his fingers, and the courtyard flickered with lamplight and torches. Rings of cushions, small chairs and rugs dotted the pavement, surrounding braziers and platters of meat, fruit, flatbreads and pastries. Representatives of at least three cultures that Julia could recognize, more that she couldn't, sat in the circles. There were Indians of every shade in everything from gold robes to loincloths; olive-skinned Greeks in close-fitting work clothes, Turkish garb or white toga-like dresses; red-faced, sweaty Celts in deerskins and wool plaids.

"It's a party?" quavered Julia.

"Of course. Persia is renowned for hospitality. Rustam is a rich man of a generous household — and he has an agenda. No business will be discussed

tonight, but he has separated the delegations and his own consors and family among the circles. Many bonds will form as they chat and drink together." He stood up, waiting for her to follow, and commented:

"It is not for nothing that the founders of your Sons of Liberty were a silversmith, a doctor and a **brewer**. Also, you must know," he said, "half of white necromancy is throwing a party good enough to raise the dead."

He smiled and led her between the rings of feasters, singling out delegates along the way.

"Chalech, from India." Dark, hawk-nosed, dressed in tight indigo robes, the Chakravanti peered suspiciously at a lump of green vegetable, then bit it. "Ancient now, he will retain this incarnation for another two centuries at least, and lead the Euthanatos at the Grand Convocation." Chalech nodded, chewing with an expression of pleasant surprise. The watchers moved on.

"Penthilus," said Takstang, pausing by a middle-aged, bearded man in brown leather and unbleached linen. "A healer. Nearly drowned off of Crete five years ago, he was rescued by an unknown mage. Rustam recruited him as a scout, and he convinced the Greek Underworld cults to come here. He goes to India afterward, to see Calcite. He decides his heart lies with the Ecstatics, not us, and joins the Seers. They name him Teiresias."

"Persephatta." Julia looked down on a dark-haired, pale girl in her teens. The Greek's eyes were large, black and sunken, her aspect gloomy. "Very prophetic, very wise, but always a little touched with **Jhor**, with the death-taint." Takstang gestured to the next ring.

"Sean Gallagher." A young, nervous man with red-gold hair sat watching Persephatta in stunned, worshipful silence. "He, Polig Wightbinder and Ian-from-the-Rock claimed to be the only members of the Celtic cults present. However, in their retinue, the true heads of the delegation hide: Genevieve Hartshorne and Bened of the House of Pwyll, disguised as servants for fear of witch-hunters and betrayal. This does not endear the Celts to the Greeks, but the Sirdar and Indians applaud them for their caution."

"Aganippe." An angular, coltish woman in her 40s looked up, almost at them. Her grizzled hair hung plaited down her back, and as she turned back to her companions it thumped solidly on the strong muscles of her shoulders. "A farmwife and fighter from Albania. She says little here, and scholars are wont to ignore her. I think this is a mistake; the Pomegranate Deme chooses its **Triops** wisely — there must be a reason she was sent that we are missing."

"Chlidanope." Wispy gray hair wreathed a face made entirely of wrinkles and smiles. Two jet-black eyes twinkled out at the rest of her circle. "She dies on the journey back to Greece and never sees the document confirmed. The Sirdar feared for her health and offered her comfort and rest as his adopted mother, but Chlidanope returned to her duties. His heart broke at the news, and he left on for Africa in the hope of finding forgetfulness and the mages of Great Zimbabwe. He never returned."

"The samashti lasted 18 months. The messengers and debates lasted far longer — each sect had other values or concepts they wanted defined or required within the Law. You should know that at the beginning, most of the delegates agreed on the basis of these principles, but they took the next decade to be **ultimately** certain that the other sects understood them in exactly the same way. The version of the Chakra-Dharma written here stands for a century. It is broken open and revised at the Grand Convocation."

The Eight Spokes of the Wheel of the Law: The Chakra-Dharma

Before the eyes of heaven we write this code: We, who know the dance of life and death, and who have been chosen to guard the Wheel of the world, do avow before all powers that this is our Law, to be held sacred forever.

Prevabhnavā

We testify to the existence of a Cycle of birth, death and rebirth that pervades the cosmos with its rhythm. We testify that the souls of humankind and all animate beings are conducted through this Cycle toward an eventual end. We testify that this Cycle is the Law of the universe. We swear to support this Cycle, and prevent its stagnation or corruption.

Hiranyagargha

We believe in the fundamental unity of all that exists, and that Creation springs from One original source, to which it will return. We further state that all animate beings carry within them the pure seed of this original source, no matter how corrupt their outer shell might be.

Kala

We avow that Decay and Entropy are part of the natural Cycle, and that all things must eventually decay to dust so as to return to the womb of the universe. We accept this as part of our existence, and vow that we shall not cause ourselves undue pain in a futile battle with this principle. Rather, we shall harness the endless Wheel of Time and the secret Web of Fate as our allies in guarding the structure of the universe.

Gopaya

We have been given our insight and power for a purpose: to be guardians of humankind and of the world. This is our sacred duty from which we will stray only on pain of death and the loss of our souls. We will guard the Wheel and those caught in its thrall, regardless of the danger to our mortal existences or the suffering it may cause us.

Sadhana

One can not remain pure without being controlled of the senses and the spirit. Hence, we vow to always seek our own spiritual betterment. We shall practice the rites, sing the sacred songs, and subject ourselves to trials to strengthen the body and will. We will resist the temptations of desire, no matter in which form they come to us.

Daya

It is impossible for us to complete our duty if we close our hearts to the suffering in the world around us. To attempt such would be to open our doors to corruption and evil. Thus, we must never close our eyes to the pain of others, or to the pain our own actions cause.

Tyaga

Since action done for pleasure and one's own gain carries with it always the danger of corruption, we shall forego such action. Our duty shall be done in the name of the cosmos, and offered in sacrifice to the cosmos. We shall eschew action that is created purely by our desires, for such action would threaten our souls and our duties.

Diksha

One can not properly enter a new life without a death, and one can not serve that which one does not understand. All who care to join our number, as part of their rite of entry, before they receive their names, or their mantras, or their sacred tools, must walk on the other side of life. They must lay curled within the belly of death and return to us before we will count them in our number.

Council

Stagnant is dead.

— Ninja proverb

"Outside our ranks, the world does not stop; the Convention of the White Tower organized the Order of Reason in the late 1320s. The forces of stagnation gripped the Gauntlet between the shadow worlds and our own. In Europe, the Ascension War devoured its first victims.

"In 1447, while visiting the Deme Chantry house in Corone, Greece, Chalech received a visitor, Teiresias Penthilus. He asked to arrange a meeting between the Indian and an Ecstatic seer whom he would not name. He did not explain how he knew the archmage was there, but Chalech trusted him and agreed.

"The seer was Sh'zar. His message: In ten years, there would be a gathering of mages to form a government. Those who joined would grow, those who did not would dwindle. 'You must make the first step,' he said, 'or you will never be accepted. Our two lineages have grown together with the years. They cross now, and I hope forever. I want you to walk forward with us. Go to Rome, Chalech, and wait upon our coming; go to Rome and we will meet you there.'"

The Grand Convocation

Takstang's voice reverberated through empty marble halls. The hot, noisy courtyard had vanished, and Julia had hardly noticed. Her tutor found a seat on the edge of a stone planter and fell silent.

The apprentice glanced around curiously. "I know where we are. This is the corridor between the Archives and the Great Hall. We're back on Horizon. I think I know this part, if the Council formation happens next.

"Everyone talks for nine years, figuring out who's in what Tradition and what Sphere they specialize in, who's going to be in what seat on the Council and so forth. Then they each pick a representative to join the First Cabal, which goes out to find mages around the world and recruit them to one Tradition or another. The Solificato betrays the Nine, and the Solificati dissolve into history."

She shrugged. "Senex bought six dozen copies of *The Fragile Path*."

"That will do," remarked her companion, leaning against the polished wall. "But there are gaps in Master Porthos' history, things only the Euthantos remember. Let me show you more faces. Come sit here."

Julia hopped awkwardly onto the ledge. Echoes of footsteps and words pattered down the hall.

Unexpected Friends

"The first new allies of the Chakravanti were the Africans," said Takstang.

A tight cluster of some 80 black men and women walked into view, some dignified, some timid, some belligerent. Tourist-like, a few near the rear of the procession tapped the walls with curiosity. Julia glimpsed red and yellow striped drapery, complex wooden ornaments and white and blue flapping robes. Gold flashed on wrists, ankles and foreheads, as the procession passed.

"I remember this from the day the main group arrived, sticking together out of familiarity — and in answer to the open racism of some of

the white mages. These people come from the Ivory, Grain and Gold Coasts. There were several civilizations close together there, quite complex, with cities. It puzzles me, but though the Arya were close to the Earth and kin to Dreamspeakers, those who join the Chakravanti always begin in cities. We are born of plagues.

"Chalech and Master Baldric of the Order of Hermes had succeeded in sending word throughout Africa by way of the trade routes. West Africa's mages answered the call. Half of these mages joined the Dreamspeakers, Verbena, Cult and Ahl-i-Batin. A large number formed their own Tradition — the Ngoma — which did not survive the Convocation. A handful of others came to us.

"Four necromancers came from Great Zimbabwe. Their Ngoma cousins avoided them, even as we were shunned. These delegates arrived late, speaking only broken Arabic and their own tongue. They asked repeatedly for *ziirdah rostum* — the Sirdar Rustam, who had never returned. The four stayed long enough to join in the name of their entire sect. Then they left, promising more contact later. There was none."

"What happened?" asked Julia.

Takstang shook his head sadly. "No one knows. They tell me the city had died by 1500. Later, their descendants took the name **Ta Kiti** and joined our fellowship."

Softer steps came toward them. Seven red-skinned, black-haired men in loincloths crept along the corridor, nervously watching their reflections in the floor. Each carried a cloth-wrapped bundle on his back.

"Those are the Mayans. To this day, the archivists don't know exactly how they learned of the Grand Convocation, nor how they made their way to the Paths the Verbena opened in North America.

"When the language barrier had fallen, they made it understood that they and the majority of the Mayan mages had broken with the nobility and priesthood of their home — kings and priests who sacrificed civilians to the gods by the thousands. The Convocation sympathized heartily, throwing a few harsh looks at us and the Verbena. The Dreamspeakers welcomed them as their own.

"In time, a few Choristers approached the Maya, comforting them for the terror they must have felt while participating in such horrendous crimes. Gradually, the Choristers realized that the Mayan mages weren't shocked by the sacrifices themselves — the newcomers objected to the scale and scope of the carnage, not the ritual itself. Ritual murder, they claimed, was often the will of the gods. The Chorus denounced them, the Speakers politely withdrew, and the Chakravanti embraced them."

The Leaders

The line of walkers filed away, leaving one man behind. Takstang waved at the man's image, and the Mayan came closer, changing. Half his facial scars and piercings disappeared. The phantom rippled, and now wore tight-fitting, black, European clothes with his old jewelry, weapons and fetishes over top.



"Black Jaguar," said Takstang. "He adapted quickly to life on Horizon — by far the best linguist and diplomat of his delegation. The others learned Arabic and Latin only through his persistence."

The American faded away. Julia recognized the next man immediately. Gray-haired yet unbowed, the hawk-nosed Natatapas had changed little since the First Samashtri. "Chalech. Old in Isfahan, ancient here. First Primus of the Euthanatos, and the cement holding our creed solid before the opposition of the other Traditions."

Three women replaced him. The oldest stood austere and queenly to one side, draped in deep-gray damask. Over her deep-set eyes and high forehead, her hair grew pure white. The middle, gently rounded figure half-folded her arms, conversing with some unseen person. Suddenly, she stamped her foot and waved her free hand, shaking her kerchiefed head emphatically. The youngest, dark and shapely, looked on, smiling at the invisible one with carnivorous overtones.

"The Triops of the Pomegranate Deme, Persephatta, now the Crone and still more a Cassandra; Metiadusa, the midwife gossip who made us so many friends among the Verbena; Phedora, the girl, companion to Cygnus Moro and the last person to make a significant change to the Chodana.

"Fate and Karma were separate ideas to us before her debates. Only 15 when the Convocation began, she would stand in the middle of the East Court taking any questions, refuting all objections thoroughly." Takstang turned to Julia and continued sternly: "She would be worth your further study. The Old Man does not teach her speeches the way he should."

The apprentice nodded, but when she looked back to fix the Greek mage's face in her memory, it was gone. An older, plainer girl in a faded green and yellow dress stared back at her shyly.

"Our Celtic allies could not attend in great numbers or for very long. All their lands had been conquered. Though older mages came as they could, the only one who lived here was one eighteen-year-old orphan spinster with poor fighting skills and little magickal ability.

"What she did have were thousands of questions and an eidetic memory. The Thistle of Pwyll sat silent for the entire first year, listening intently. She learned Latin, Greek, Hindu and Arabic without saying a word. Then, one evening in February, she started throwing contradictions back at their creators. She never abandoned an idea until she thought all the loose ends were free of it, never let the Chakravanti wriggle away until the conflict was solved, never backed down for fear of confrontation or loss of face. An open battle erupted over the question of her right to accuse a fellow mage of Nephandism. Each mage she questioned thought she was accusing someone specific, perhaps himself, you see. A frustrated, paranoid mob marched her to Chalech, who had the wits to ask if the question were rhetorical."

"Was it?" Julia asked.

"Then, yes. But she picked out 20 suspicious people outside the Tradition and found five spies among us — one Templar, three *barabbi* and a Hermetic from Doisetep — over the course of the Convocation. After that, Persephatta taught the Thistle to be discreet when she found them. It saved us trouble with the other sects, but in the end, I think it killed her. She was found beneath the stairs to the observatory with her throat torn out, and no ghost remained to answer Chalech's questions. The Thistle had found one contradiction too many, and kept it to herself."

The Welsh devil's advocate disappeared.

"Even with our newfound solidarity, a finished and signed document attesting to our ethics, and the leadership of these you have seen, we had a hard fight for a seat on the Council. Fortunately, Chalech and Pheodora provided us a secret weapon."

Out of the shadows to their right strolled a tall, slim man. He paused to gaze down at Julia with deep, liquid-brown eyes. The apprentice caught herself blushing, then forced herself to stare back analytically. It wasn't, she realized, that he was particularly handsome. It was more that his whole soul seemed to surface in his face, defenseless yet overpowering. Julia shook her head to clear it.

"Haroun — Cygnus Moro," Takstang said. "Helpful in persuading the necromantic factions to work together, essential as an ambassador to the other Tradition leaders — even those who disapproved of his lifestyle. His charisma struck like lightning."

"When it came time to name our alliance, early on, some of the Chakravanti leaders balked. They held that, as the Hindus were the largest

and best organized shard of the whole, the others should join them and keep the old title. Moro soothed their wounded pride. He suggested that the Chodana be written officially in Sanskrit, then invented a name that all the sects would vote for: **Euthanatos**, the Good Death.

"He convinced the Indians to share their wisdom. He praised the Greek cults and their custom of choosing leaders only for specific locations and occasions. He adopted the Thistle as a kind of sister, and coaxed the Africans into sharing their ghost-calling tricks. All of these things became cornerstones of our Art and culture."

"Even with all these things on our side, the Convocation would have rejected us. Only when the Seers of Chronos and Verbena spoke for our cause did the tide turn. Years of goodwill, charity and individual friendships, not magickal feats or pretty oratory, won us the seat. Remember Gopaya and Daya from the Chodana, Julia, and never miss a chance to help another in need." The elderly Euthanatos paused. "And keep an eye on them while you do."

Euthanatos

The tearoom manifested around them. Outside its walls Vajra's day had ended, and the sky shone a dusky, radiant blue. Takstang set a match to an oil lamp hanging by a chain from the ceiling.

"The Euthanatos elected Cygnus Moro to the First Cabal unanimously, and he fulfilled our trust. Necromancers and healers flocked to our banner — not in great numbers, for there are few of our kind anywhere, but enough. With the Ahl-i-Batin and others still actively working against us, every single mage was a gain. It was very exciting. The consors and apprentices followed reports of the Nine like America's children follow the World Series. And so, when the heralds brought the news of the Betrayal to Horizon, a virtual army volunteered for the rescue mission. Behind Akrites Salonikas and the others we stormed the Order of Reason's stronghold, but it was already too late. Akrites, Chalech and Metiadusa picked the Balance Bringer's body out of the wreckage — cold and stiff, long gone for his next life."

"To our astonishment, he was a hero. Tortured, Haroun had not broken. Even dying he kept the Council's secrets. By association, the entire Tradition was vindicated. Nonsense, of course, but we were not ones to complain! Hermetic mages and Ahl-i-Batin, who never spoke to 'the murderers' otherwise, attended the funeral in tears. Cygnus Moro had won one last battle for Chalech."

"The third Coumatha, begun at the Isfahan Samashti, was finally over."

Rebirth (1466 - 1900)

"Twenty-two years later, Columbus sailed to the Americas. Colonialism gripped Europe. Explorers set out to the New World, Africa and Asia for god, gold and glory. The fever for discovery and conquest drove the 'enlightened' men of the Renaissance to crimes as terrible as any Crusader's confession. And this was the world we were born into."

Takstang angrily flicked his wrist. Suddenly the two sat high on the vertiginous edge of a tall stone platform, looking out on red-painted

pyramids. Julia grabbed for a handhold and stared. Jungle strangled the city below; moss grew beneath her fingers.

"This is a Maya city. It has no name today. The year is 1680, and the Maya have been nearly wiped out. Just as the Euthanatos had begun to gain ground against the massacres, just as they spread the lessons learned at Council north to the Aztecs and south to the Inca, the Europeans came. Now betrayed by the conquistadors, wracked by disease, the people work for Spanish masters. They forget their culture in hard labor and pain. The Catholic priests burn the native scrolls, destroying any hope that the remnants of this society will remember how to read the ancient language. The Christians lead the people to churches, and the old gods sicken. Even their Underworld warps and dies, and the mages can do nothing to save the dead."

A lone figure strode out of the thicker jungle behind the pyramid. He rattled a gourd in one hand and a string of bones in the other. He walked a circle in the middle of the plaza. The grass in the circle vanished, and he cried aloud words not quite in Spanish.

"In West Africa, the Ibo and Akan Euthanatos struggle with slavery. Thousands die on their way to market. Mages cannot be caught for long — not while Entropy and rust exist, not while the ghosts of their ancestors watch over them. At the beginning, they concentrate on fighting their people's abductors."

Slowly, other people left the shadow of the forest. They were blacks, amerinds, and a few whites. The men carried loose fistfuls of sticks, small sacks, and dark bottles. The women carried small children on their backs and hips, leading older ones by the hand.

"Then, one by one, the bravest among them make the greatest sacrifice of their lives. They let themselves be taken, smuggling Talismans and healing aids onto ships, ministering to the dying. Some fall to the same trials that doom their patients. Some find allies as Sleepers Awaken in fever dreams."

The men dropped their sticks in to the center of the cleared space and stepped back. The women loosed the children and arranged food on fallen



masonry. The first man began to chant, and the pile of wood blazed up as a bonfire.

"The Ibo and Akan keep their faith alive and hidden in the New World. On plantations above and below the equator, the West African slaves meet secretly to worship without the knowledge of their masters. Eventually, the religion is forgotten in the North, but on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico it changes and thrives. Ibo, Akan, Maya and Aztec work with each other. In time they blend. A hundred local cults spring up — never wasting any good god they find and yet making each their own — and Euthanatos watch over them with care. You have heard of these, *shravaka*, as Santería and Voudun. A new Craft, the Bata'a, rises from these ashes, but our people are among them, too. Wherever death holds sway, we endure."

The Old World

Takstang waved away the jungle. "Greece, Macedonia and Albania fell to the Turks even as the Grand Convocation ended. This saved them from the Inquisition, but not from the Moslem rulers. The pagans were converted or killed. Sacred groves were cut for timber, and caves into the Underworld were turned into shrines or blocked away.

"India, too, was ruled from Constantinople. For us, it was a blessing; the Turks practiced more tolerance here, where so many of the Faith already lived. But first the Portuguese and then the British bought, stole and conquered Mother India, and we suffered.

"Perhaps you know of the Thuggee myths? Demon-worshippers strangling for pleasure and sacrifice? Mad, Kali-worshipping members of the Indian resistance? Mercenary robbers and murderers, killing for the highest price and lowest motives? We fell among the second breed. I cannot tell you for certain who the rest were. Ordinary rebels must have been the greater part of them, but the Sleepers have other allies and...shepherds...in India. The shapechangers, vampires, demons and ghosts had their hand in those dark dealings — they still do and always have. The Consanguinity broke away from our leadership and took up the noose and the knife. Although some of us grew concerned, we had many other worries.

"To our shame, many Chakravanti stopped testing their victims' hearts. They assassinated for revenge, killed to control, and murdered in large quantity. When challenged, they started leaving, quietly, in tiny clusters. At a secret samashti, they formed a new society, the Bombay Apad-Dharma, which means 'the necessary laxity of the Law when survival is at stake.' Founded with the best of intentions, the new group abandoned the Chodana without creating a new ethic to limit their actions. They slipped very slowly into corruption, but in the end, only five good souls escaped the Fall. The Apad-Dharma are our most personal enemies among the Nephandi. Kill them if you find them, or they shall certainly destroy you."

Industrialization and the Romantic Rebellion

"The Celts had been conquered but not defeated. Converted to Christianity, they gave their old gods halos and feastdays. In Scotland, the subject people provided royalty for their conquerors. When Irish Gaelic was outlawed, the people of Eire taught their children to speak in the hedges. But one plague bested the Euthanatos of the north, the worst in history: Progress.



"Science itself, Julia, is not evil. Remember that. Technomancy is only another magick, used without wisdom; technology is another hedge sorcery common to the people.

"The purposes to which the Order of Reason's advances were put **were** evil. Faith became the only defense the Sleepers had against slums, pollution, factories, child-labor, disease, poverty and ignorance. The Potato Famine overcame us in Ireland, and the second wave of Euthanatos landed on the Isles of St. Brendan.

"The clockwork world hit all Euthanatos hard. Paradox grew; our cures turned back upon us. Technology's medicine was more expensive than witching, and our poor patients died. As leaders became committees, it became harder for us to find the men who gave the orders to kill us. With the Order of Reason entrenched in the schools of Europe, more and more of our enemies became simple Sleepers who knew no better — people we would not kill.

"Then one ray of hope appeared. Listen:

"The Order of Reason holds the world like a fistful of sand — it trickles between their fingers and moves faster the tighter it is held. The Age of Enlightenment strips superstition and old wives' tales from the civilized.

Yet in their hearts, most Sleepers know there are things in the Darkness, and their monkey-nature both fears them and longs to learn enough to defend itself. Perhaps we can steal the sand without opening the hand.'

"Those are Senex's words from the Samashti of 1832. He was inspired by the young men — and women — who refused to bow to progress' gods, who held up the skull, the cup and the poet's heart as shelters against the cold iron of industrialization. With their tales of passion, death and longing, these writers brought the shadows to plain paper and passed them to the Sleepers.

"And the Sleepers responded. They rioted. They wept. They drowned themselves in absinthe and dusted off dark secrets. They rebelled. The Romantics, as these writers and artists came to be called, inspired Senex with a plan to weaken the Order's hold. Few things survive Time well. Stone, yes. Art, sometimes. Literature, **always**, even if it is broken and reused by other nations. We found painters, poets, playwrights and novelists with 'old souls' and helped them in small ways — luck, patronage, a sympathetic ear, encouragement without interference. To this day, the rebellion continues. If it's true that the Hollow Ones are spiritual descendants of T.S. Eliot, we may someday find we have birthed a second Tradition.

"Pray it fares better than the first," finished the Primus darkly.

Last Coumatha

*The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!*

— William Wordsworth

The air grew still, dark and foul. A burning mist scorched Julia's throat and nostrils. As her stomach spasmed, caught between breathing and not breathing, the Primus spoke.

"The followers of Kali speak of the Age of Iron, the final era when the Dark Mother walks, destroying what is and making way for what is to come. Some say that Age is upon us now, and I will not say it is not. The iron the sutras foretold is everywhere these days, and it grinds bodies even as it pulps the souls left behind. There are those who claim the world is run by the Technocracy. I believe they are wrong. Behind the grit of smoke and ash, I hear the laughter of Naraki.

"World War I puts machine guns, mustard gas and grenades in the hands of men. These soldiers and their leaders refuse to understand that their new-found toys mean death on unimaginable scales. In one day — **one day!** — over 10,000 men are killed. The Wheel tilts on its axis, then, and it slips from our hands. The hands of Euthanatos, and the hands of all mankind.

"A storm of unimaginable size begins in the Shadowlands, and it picks up strength in a way no other MacIstrom ever has. The Chakravanti knew of small storms, black typhoons that raged through the ghost kingdoms; the surviving Maya recalled strange turmoil after the coming of the whites and smallpox; the Celts and Greeks remembered greater tempests, but nothing compares to the ghost-whirlwinds that spin in the wake of World War I." Time buckled and shifted beneath Julia's feet again. "As Restless souls sought shelter in our Marabouts, we learned what we could from them.

"In 1942 one of our number, Michael 'Firecracker' McPherson, gave sanctuary to a strange ghost, an Austrian wraith fleeing the Shadowlands of the Continent. Tattooed on the wraith's body were words in archaic French, English, Italian and Greek, but with new names and modern things in the text.

"**'The children of Abraham and of Daenna,' read the tattoos, 'are dying before their time. They are shorn, naked, whipped, starved, frozen and broken. Their bodies smolder even beyond the grave. The Germans have slaughtered them by gas and slavery. These two peoples will be destroyed. I have writ this on the body of Fritz Auchmann in hope that one who can See will know.'**

"McPherson came to Council with the news. They turned him away, preoccupied with the split in the Traditions...."

"The Council broke?" Julia blurted.

"For nearly five years, we stood at odds with our cousins," Takstang said, nodding. The air had taken on the black reek of burned skin. "As a





Tradition, we could not wait for the others to rally. What the Traditions would not do united, we did as individuals. The Euthanatos scattered into hunting parties and began to prune the tree on all sides. We had plenty of work to do, and many of our kind died.

"As medics, spies and soldiers, Euthanatos entered the field. We forgot our feuds with the Akashics and the Order of Hermes; we fought side by side with the Ahl-i-Batin. In time, we discovered the Naraki dancing up to their knees in blood, tugging robes on all sides of the war and leading hateful men to greater and greater horrors. Still later, we wove a great ritual in a German castle, a ritual that funneled the energy of a thousand angry souls into a spirit-fire that swept the Nephandi masters away. I was there for that great battle, and was the eldest of our kind to survive."

Takstang bit his lips, frowning thoughtfully. "Tomorrow, Julia, you shall hear terrible things about us, and many will be true. When you cannot think of a reason to be proud of us, or of what lies between your Tradition and the Abyss, remember that our necromancy uncovered the sins of the Third Reich. Remember that every one of us came willing to die to put an end to it.

"Except the House of Helekar," finished the Primus bitterly.

Now

"And so, today.

"The Technocracy's beneficence grants genocide in Bosnia, Rwanda, Iraq, China, so long speeding lives into the world, struggles to rid itself of the excess. Miracles of science keep souls past their time in one building and design new weapons to destroy them in the next. Drugs mad Tantrikas would never dare to consume are sold to infants every day. The poor suffer; technology is rich magick. The wealthy prosper and grow dryly old, self-absorbed, incapable of understanding why their children don't wish to live.

"Worst of all, strange hunters walk the streets. The soullessness of vampires I can understand, but the empty hearts of this new breed, the serial killers, mystify me. Are they ours — the descendants of the Bombay Apad-Dharma? Some other *barabbi* we have forgotten? Ghouls or werewolves? Creations of the Nephandi or the Technocracy, perhaps? Or are they human agents of the Age of Iron, mortal children of Kali? I cannot say.

"Among the so very *enlightened* ranks of mages, the news is as bad. The Council may have nine Primii around the Table Cenacle, but we play musical chairs with the Seats. I could understand this, if the Tellurian held enough players for the game. Tomorrow Helekar's misdeeds will be draped around our necks, and I cannot see whether the weight will overcome us. The Euthanatos position on the Council is in danger, and not only have I not accomplished my goals, I no longer hope that I shall live to see them realized. My visions fade."

Julia shook off her fatigue, confused. Had she, she wondered, just heard the Rimpoche predict his own death? The ancient Indian sighed, got to his feet wearily, and opened the door of the tearoom. He waited to face her.

"You are going to have to tell *me* the future, little *shravaka*, not the other way around."



Tribunal (Inner Workings) रूपरसम

Thou shalt not kill.
— Exodus 20.13

At long last, the cell fell silent. Theora, at first shy and suspicious, had found her voice. Under Mitzi's gentle prompting, she spun out the story of her life. Four hours had passed, and now the torrent of words, terror and hatred ceased. Theora sat quietly on her splintery wooden chair, hands limp, eyes fixed hopelessly on a point in empty space. Mitzi suddenly realized that this was probably the first time in the young woman's life that anyone had ever listened to her.

Mitzi made her decision.

Apprenticeships

"Were you initiated through near-death experience by Voormas?"

Pain swept over Theora's face, and she nodded.

"Were you taught the Chodana?"

The prisoner nodded again.

"Recite it," commanded Mitzi, digging in her briefcase, "please, as close to the words he taught you as possible."

Theora sat up straight, clasped her hands together, closed her eyes, and recited in a monotonous drone. The silver pen flashed six times, hastily recording changes, omissions and alterations. With each note, the writer's frown grew deeper. Gone was all mention of "guardians of mankind," "never-closing hearts," or "danger of corruption." After the eighth Spoke of the Wheel, she laid down her pen, composed herself and turned back to the girl.

"Does that help?" asked Theora.

"No, actually, it doesn't," Mitzi grimaced. "By initiating you into the Euthanatos, Voormas made himself responsible for your actions; he was your teacher and advisor and could be held criminally liable for any wrongdoing of yours, particularly if they were committed under his direction. Our Tradition believes in very long apprenticeships and close relations between master and student — there's always a danger that a newly initiated mage may go rogue. The teacher is responsible for tracking down and destroying his own mistakes.

"But once the new Euthanatos has been taught the Chodana and has demonstrated that he or she understands it **completely**, she's considered a full member of the Chakravanti community, and is held responsible for her deeds."

She paused, biting her lip. "I was hoping you'd never heard of the Chodana so I could get by on the technicality — claiming that you were still an apprentice. Unfortunately, you have your Chodana memorized."

Theora narrowed her eyes, hesitant but curious. The girl was very observant.

"Yes, Theora. **Your** Chodana. It's nothing like the real thing. Strictly speaking, neither you nor any other of Voormas' followers are Euthanatos."

The young assassin's eyes brimmed with tears.

"Oh, no, no!" Mitzi exclaimed. "Don't get upset." She knelt down beside the old chair and patted the girl's shoulders. "We won't abandon you. That's not our way."

Visions

I never lock the dogs when the wolf is in the darkness

— White Zombie, "Real Solution #9"

Most folks call them "death mages," and with good reason. But what binds a Euthanatos to death? The answer, frightening as it may be, is simple: He has already died.

Diksha: Awakening Through Death

Most Euthanatoi first peek through the Curtain on their deathbeds — their *first* deathbeds. Near-death experiences (N.D.E.s) are common in the World of Darkness, and many Chakravanti recover from some near-fatal encounter with a new lease on life and a new twist on reality. Chakravanti mentors watch for potential recruits near battlefields, hospitals or suicide "hot spots," looking to turn a wasted life around.

Other Thanatoics come to a deliberate end through initiation. Sought out by Euthanatoi mentors, they undergo an initial Diksha rite, passing down through magickal or mundane means. When the initiate returns, he's greeted by the mentor and given a "rebirthday party"; there, he chooses a new name and begins his mystick training.

Some Chakravanti mingle mystery with N.D.E.s. Fatal brushes with vampires or ghosts, mystickal assassinations and other supernatural "bad deaths" kindle a connection to the Underworld. A person brought back from the dead under such circumstances might gravitate toward the Euthanatoi on principle — or might find them waiting for him. (Look out, Fox Moulder!)

Regardless of the Diksha, a reborn attitude is essential. Council Euthanatoi require a commitment to life sparked by the nearness of death. Sometimes the Jhor is too strong or the vision too warped to create a good initiate. In that case, it is the mentor's responsibly to ensure that the corrupted initiate never awakens — magickally or otherwise — again.

Avatars

There's a voice lingering by the "tunnel of light" so many see before the Underworld opens; sometimes the voice is soft, melodic and comforting; other times, it's

harsh, demanding, terrifying. In either case, that voice bespeaks the Thanatoic Avatar, a death figure who returns to the living world alongside the reborn mage and councils him throughout his new life.

Some Thanatoic Avatars appear as dead siblings or beloved grandparents, particularly if the mage Awakens while fairly young. An older Euthanatos may be pushed around by ancestral spirits, especially if he belongs to a tribal society. The vast majority of necromancers, however, sees its Avatar as a god or death spirit: the angel Azrael, the raven Badb Catha, Orpheus or Charon, Valkyries or devas, the skeletal Reaper or Baron Samedi, Shiva or Kali. Some Euthanatoi even see their Avatars as totem animals or Vertigo Comics characters. The theme of death is a common link, but the spirit's faces are as varied as the mages themselves.

Keeping the Edge

Euthanatoi searching for enlightenment usually try another Diksha, traveling to the Shadowlands through the agama te (see Appendix). While some enter simple meditative trances to bring new visions, most prefer to touch the Twilight Lands again, if only to appreciate the taste of life when they return.

The appreciation of life is a vital part of the Thanatoic outlook. Death is a whirlpool; until you've put your toe into it, you can't really understand what it is to fight the current and return. Thanatoic magick relies heavily on the philosophy that balance comes through shoving perceptions around. Things that stimulate life keep Jhor at bay. So, many Euthanatoi enjoy themselves when their duties grow too stifling. Discipline is important, of course, but letting loose (often in ways only Cultists of Ecstasy would understand) is just as vital. To sharpen the edge, most Chakravanti take a break to study some new language, follow some new path or undergo some new (often wild) experience. The results may not show for days or weeks, but the "vacations" drive the taint of death from the mage's mortal life — an essential safety valve if he wants to survive. (See "Jhor" in the Appendix.)

Testimony: Internal Affairs

*And now our minds are naked
as the paradise we stripped
And our reward is our entropy
our emptiness is our gift*

— The Swans, "God Forgive America"

Tom Smithson's voice rumbled like an approaching storm: "Before we start, the Council has asked me to make clear the scope of this hearing. Because evidence presented here may prove useful in the trial of the entire House of Helekar, certain questions not directly related to this particular case may be permitted."

Julia glanced sardonically at her teacher. Smithson sat down, and the great mass of spectators settled in for the show.

"Raging Eagle, you may begin," Smithson said.

The prosecutor muttered abruptly to his companions. Tanaka escorted in a young man in space-going coveralls. His pale, emaciated face was marked with fresh scars; his steps were slow and uncertain. The Akashic Brother led him to the witness chair and returned to her post.

Raging Eagle stood slowly, with dignity, and when he spoke his grave voice rumbled in the dome of the hall.

"You are Michael Fitzgerald of the Ethership **Thunder Child**?"

"Yes, sir. What's left of her, anyhow," answered Fitzgerald.

"Will you please tell the Council what happened on the last voyage of the **Thunder Child**?"

"Yes, sir," said Fitzgerald, eyeing the prisoner uneasily. "I'd consider it a duty to my shipmates...."

The next hour was a horror show, a detailed account of the betrayal and destruction of a fine, proud Ethership, the torture of her crew and the savagery of her attackers — the mages of House Helekar. Fitzgerald, the only survivor of the carnage, spoke in soft, insistent tones; he spoke of his ship's battle with Void Engineers and the damage it sustained; spoke of Helekar's offer of shelter and hospitality; spoke of the rituals that inverted that hospitality, turning guests into desperate prisoners; spoke of leaving the Realm as the ship disintegrated around him; spoke of three months trapped with the rotting corpse of his best friend. Worst of all, he spoke of Theora Hetirck, an accomplice to it all.

Even Mitzi seemed horrified. Theora's face betrayed nothing.

At last, Smithson called a recess. The hall exploded into speech and rang with accusations.

"This," whispered Julia, "is going to be harder than we thought."

The Good Death

His name was Murphy, and his anger was plain. After an altercation on the Council floor, Tom Smithson had led him to the witness chair. "We're not murderers," he'd insisted. "The Good Death isn't dealt carelessly, angrily or spitefully. We don't kill people for fun; most times, we don't even kill for sacrifice, unless that sacrifice is ourselves."

"That stands against your Tradition's known reputation," said Raging Eagle as the witness sat down. "I myself can attest that your kind kill, kill often and kill for duty if not for sport."

"I didn't say we didn't **kill**," Murphy did some raging of his own. "I said we didn't **murder**!"

"What is the distinction?" This came from Mitzi, who hoped Murphy would offer the right answer.

He did: "Murder is a crime committed for greed, lust, wrath, et cetera. It's essentially corrupt — the killer puts his own goals before the actual life of another."

"What we do — what we **try** to do, anyway — is assassination: One person takes out another person to save the lives or souls of innocents. No personal interest in the death. None. If you find a man you think needs killing, and you or yours have been hurt by him, you go find someone else to look the situation over before you go for your gun. Only by being completely detached can you escape the bad karma."

"And what gives you the right to judge?" asked Nadja Bantu.

"Ah. That's the question, isn't it?" Murphy straightened in the chair. "First of all, we've all half-died before. Never send another where you haven't gone. Second, we justify the choice of victim pretty damn carefully. It's got to be someone who's worse for the world in it than out of it. No redeeming qualities whatsoever. If he's sending money from his drug sales to support his sainted mother, you'd better be sure she has another source of income. Third, since, if you get caught killing, you're imprisoned, killed or worse, you've got to be sure that the assassination is worth your own life. Never do anything to another you wouldn't be willing to have done to you."

"Have you ever killed a man?" asked Dr. Spence.

"I fail to see how that question is relevant to the trial of Theora or the House of Helekar," said Mitzi.

"It's all right, Mitzi. Seventeen men, Doctor — all serial killers the police couldn't catch. I've offed a few vampires, too." A heartbeat's time went by. "Have **you** ever killed a man, Doctor?"

"I...I don't think...yes, under fire. Never in cold blood."

"Madam Bantu? You?" Murphy smiled sweetly. The lady said nothing. "Raging Eagle. I'm sure an Akashic Brother like yourself has a lot of blood on his hands. Awakened blood, too."

"Stop it, Murphy," commanded Mitzi. "This won't prove anything."

"I have killed," said Raging Eagle slowly, "when my own life or the lives of others were in danger. I regret that I was forced to."

"And Mitzi," drawled the witness, "have you ever offed a bad guy?"

Mitzi blinked. To Julia's astonishment her teacher's gaze rested on Raging Eagle, not Murphy, as she softly spoke: "No. I have never killed anyone."

Second Day: The House Exposed

Mark Hallward Gillan, a Hermetic outcast who'd exposed the archmage Voormas, walked casually through the assembly to the witness stand. He nodded smugly to the defense and smiled wickedly at Hermetic Master Vargas Sao Cristavao. The old wizard glared back, hawklike, implacable. Mitzi watched Gillan, carefully, respectfully. **He's got us right where he wants us**, she thought. **Is that such a bad thing, considering?**

Raging Eagle spoke: "Your name, rank, sect and Tradition, please."

"Gillan. Mark Hallward Gillan. Exiled from the Order of Hermes for being right three years ago this January. Forgive me if I don't give my rank; it'd be like telling my enemies how many rounds my clip holds."

Raging Eagle nodded to Tsai. The young man picked up a huge stack of folders and delivered nine to the Table, two to the defense and three to his own. After catching his superior's eye, he gingerly offered the last to Theora.

"If you will all please open your folders," began Gillan, "we will start with Helekar House Capetown. In 1990 I stumbled across the first body — a ten-year-old girl lying in pieces on a dump in the Cape Flats...."

The first and second pictures were disturbing but inconclusive. The third one was damning: Theora Hetirck, dancing up a channel of poisonous Quintessence from a Node at Dachau. The swirling faces of disturbed souls howled silently in the glossy photo. Gillan's voice droned details, self-righteous in its vindication. For him, the moment was triumphant.

Julia took a deep breath and turned the page. Mitzi, whose mother carried scars from the Polish ghetto, stared at the picture for a very long time. Gillan's mordant exposition rattled past her, unheard.

Much later:

"I'd tried three times before to interest my **superiors** in the bloodbath. They told me I needed proof. I gave it to them. I also offered the bloody "Good-deathers" a chance to explain themselves. The Hermetic Grievance Committee confirmed that everything I'd said was true, and under the estimable leadership of Master Cristavao, they covered it up." Gillan ignored the angry outburst from the Table. "Then they exiled me and put a price on my head. I got no reply from the Euthanatos. Oh, well, no reply I could quote you, anyway.

"The reply I got was this: Seven of my contacts died the week after I spoke to the blasted necros. Sixteen more of them are gone now. I want to know **who** knew **what**, **when**; I want to know what they did about it. I want to know **now**! I want to know why this was allowed to continue — and why no one in the Euthanatos Grand High bleedin' Command took any notice!"

"Why didn't we?" Julia asked Mitzi, sotto voice.

Mitzi's reply passed unspoken: **We did. We just didn't want others to find out before we'd handled it ourselves.**

Third Day: War Within

In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman

Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

— Sylvia Plath, "The Mirror"

The last of the lesser witnesses, called by suggestion of the defense, arrived. A slender black woman in her late 40s, she wore a dark gray pantsuit, a bright kente-cloth scarf and a gray fedora with a band of the scarf's pattern.

"Name, rank, sect and Tradition, please," Raging Eagle asked.

"Latishia Jones-Carrera, **bani** Euthanatos. I am the speaker for the Moranga Chantry in Gilmer County, Georgia."

"Please tell the Council what happened there the night of August 7, 1996...."

Latishia's account was as chilling as the Ethernaut's, and far more surprising. The Moranga Chantry had left its guard down, anticipating some Celestial Chorus emissaries. They received an ambush instead. Attacked at her own Chantry by assassins from Helekar, Latishia and several companions were paralyzed by death magick as their fellows died and their sacred tree was cut down.

"By her." Latishia's finger damned the prisoner. "Cut down by her.

"They laid us down bound and gagged next to the tree as they cut off all its branches, and they spat holy water in our faces." Jones-Carrera stared daggers at Theora. "They told her to cut the throats of all our wounded, and she did. Then they let my friends loose and hunted them down like animals. Myra, Louise and I were raped. After that, they stabbed us in the guts, turned each of us over on the knife, and left us to die. The Choristers found us half an hour later. If it hadn't been for the reverend, I'd be dead now."

Raging Eagle sighed as she left the stand. "I rest my case," he said.

Smithson called for an hour's recess, and the chamber slowly emptied.

Mitzi tapped her notepad. Her strategy was working. The roundabout defense, rather than a direct attack, was often the better way to handle a tight situation. "Get down to the Archives," she told Julia, "and **politely** ask Archivist Mulhouse if he would mind pulling any records he has on consor criminal Tribunals." Her apprentice rushed off into the crowd.

"Miss Zimmermann."

She looked up into the ancient eyes of the prosecutor. "Raging Eagle."

"Why did you send me that witness?" He seemed genuinely confused.

"Why should you add to the evidence against the girl?"

Privately? thought Mitzi. Raging Eagle felt her gentle, somehow familiar mind, and was disturbed by the contact.

Very well.

Latishia went to Calcutta and Horizon with her story. They didn't believe her. She came to us, to Senex, and what she said confirmed the Old Man's suspicions about the House of Helekar. **We simply didn't have the strength for an open assault, and the House has allies in Doissetep. YES**, she insisted over Raging Eagle's quick objections, **we know this to be true. All we could do was wait and plan. A frontal attack would've been suicide. Instead, Cerberus donated Tass and guards for Moranga, and Senex promised Latishia a chance to bear witness against Helekar.**



Mitzi continued slowly: Theora was a pawn of Helekar and, I think, of Doissetep, too. A pawn being sacrificed in Helekar's place. If she is to die, now at least she has done some good for Moranga. Latishia will be able to sleep now that her testimony is on record, and the House should be too busy now for revenge.

Raging Eagle nodded. It is admirable, he thought coldly, you have managed to extract some good from the girl's inevitable end.

Fourth Day: Addressing Misconceptions

"Your name, sect and Tradition please, for the record," Mitzi asked the witness.

"Jefferson Gatlin, bani Euthanatos, Knight of Radamanthys." The witness grinned pleasantly, a youthful, well-built man with brown hair and a Victorian mustache. Quite a few of the spectators smiled back; "Gentleman Jeff" Gatlin was well-known — and well-liked.

"Yesterday," said Mitzi, addressing the Council, "we heard testimony from several witnesses about the House of Helekar's certamen rites, sacrificial murders, slavery, Infernalism, vampiric alliances, and treatment of members of, and ambassadors from, other Traditions. As this Tribunal has been stretched to include — justifiably or otherwise — investigations into the normal, internal workings of the Euthanatos Tradition, I think it necessary to establish what our policies and philosophies are on these matters. Will you accept Mr. Gatlin as an expert witness?"

Smithson and Raging Eagle nodded and Mitzi turned expectantly to the Knight. Gentleman Jeff did not disappoint them.

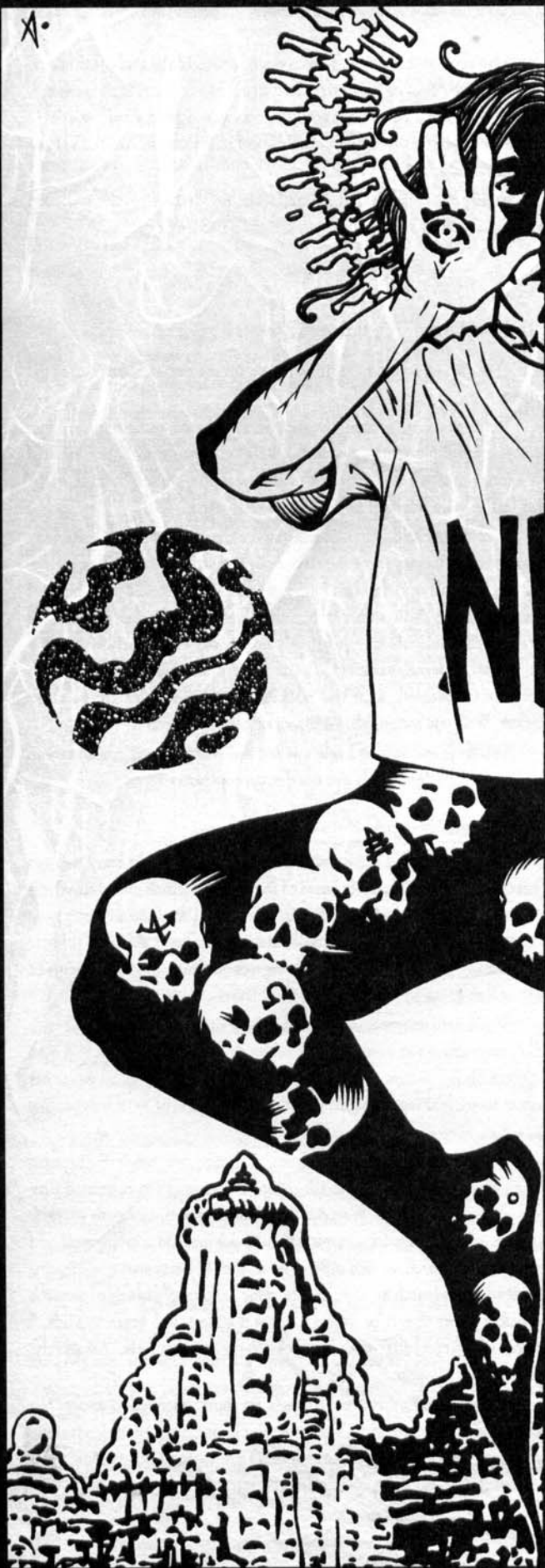
Disputes

"Point one: I have served with Euthanatos from nearly every sect and Chantry, and I have never, *ever* heard of any of group which used death duels to resolve arguments. Even certamen is very rare — I'm afraid we don't agree with the idea that the accumulation of magical power is the same thing as the accumulation of wisdom. We do practice certamen and other forms of dueling, but do so for training and self-defense.

"For future reference, we encourage each other to solve disputes with talk, compromise and kindness, not knives or complicated rites, and with the occasional coin-toss, too. If you meet a death mage who tells you it's his custom to settle things by fighting, either he's not one of us or he's feeding you a line.

"Point two: Any Euthanatos can challenge any other Euthanatos' actions at any time, and outside allegations are supposed to be treated with the same careful respect. We take the Vrata Navarati, our oath of ever-vigilance, seriously. Ignoring suspicious behavior is as bad as crying wolf, and we keep a close watch on each other. I hope, should I ever start to slide, that my friends would catch me and either help me back to my old self or dispatch me before I did myself or others harm. Of course, if I began to slide, I suppose I might feel differently, but we all know how that feels." Amazingly, some spectators laughed.

"Point three: Euthanatos Tribunals are short, intended to resolve the accusations quickly and fairly. The accuser picks one judge, the defendant the second, and the two judges pick the third. This doesn't always ensure a fair trial, but it does cut down on conflicts of interest."



Consors

"Point four: I assure you, keeping slaves runs against everything we stand for. We come from the Untouchables of India, the poor Irish, the blacks transported to the Americas against their will, even from the Maya. Our people have **been** slaves, friends, and we **detest** slavery in all its forms. To us, freedom — and the heavy responsibilities it entails — is the greatest gift of magick. I'm sure you'll agree.

"Point five: Ritual killings among my kind are not unknown. Our friends among the Verbena," he said, looking at Lady Charlotte Quay, **bani** Verbena, "understand the difference between blood sacrifice and murder. Faith and the gods are not always kind, and sometime they demand heavy prices. When this becomes necessary, the victims are often animals or volunteers from within our own ranks who wish to return to the Cycle. Consors **do** occasionally ask for this release." He glanced at Mitzi. "But we do not kill them without reason or permission."

Death and the Underworld

"Point six: We do indeed study ghosts and the undead. Some of our fellows have long connections to vampire families like Giovanni, Cappadocian and Samedi, not unlike the history between the Hermetics and House Tremere." Several wizards glared but kept silent. "We do not consider these ties 'alliances,' but the Kindred and Euthanatos sometimes do each other favors, if only out of curiosity. If we Euthanatos are to study the Great Wheel, we must, after all, occasionally investigate the cogs that seem broken. We aren't alone in that, either," he said, turning to Dr. Spence. "**Paradigma** publishes a paper on the Leeches almost every month."

"Point seven: We do not condone Infernalism. Mages should think for themselves, not for masters. As I said, we detest slavery, willing or otherwise, and we avoid evil spirits...."

Julia's attention wandered — surely some of these things were obvious? Perhaps it would do them good to clear them up in the Council Chamber, where the Saxum Oculorum guaranteed truthspeakng, but she suddenly felt Mitzi was stalling.

"Point eight: We do indeed recognize the death-taint. We call it **Jhor**, and most of us guard against it with meditations, activities and Seekings. I will not deny that Euthanatos hold death's hand. Most of us have overcome its touch, though, and the rest of us police our Tradition for the ones who love death too much. That, as a member of my sect, is my job. And there are many like me."

Hospitality, Titles and Leadership

"Point nine: Genuine Euthanatos recognize the laws of courtesy set down by the Council during the Grand Convocation. A mage's Sanctum is inviolate; ambassadors are off limits. What happened to the **Thunder Child** is as much a crime to us as it is to you. In some ways, it's even worse. Our people come from lands where hospitality is sacred. To betray a guest is a serious offense, even a terminal one.

"Point 10: Though we may use titles like Master, Adept and so forth when dealing with outsiders, within our Tradition there are only three ranks that count: apprentice, member and leader. Nicknames come by merit, fancy titles are for special occasions or offices only — usually at the Chantry Council level. Our 'government' is very democratic. A man who works his craft well gains a respect from other members. He starts to speak for himself

and his cabal, then for two or three cabals at Chantry meetings — called **samashtis** — then speaks for a sect or Chantry altogether. If at any time he stops speaking truly for the people under him, they'll find someone else to do it."

"Surely, this creates conflict?" asked Master Sao Cristavao.

"If the speaker's doing it for the power, he's doing it for the wrong reasons. Leaders ought to represent the people under them, not other leaders," he said, eyes boring into Cristavao's, "and they shouldn't manipulate their followers or use them for their own ends. Greek philosophy. Haven't you read Cygnus Moro's **Diaries from the Grand Convocation**?"

Gentleman Jeff closed his notebook.

"Thank you, Mr. Gatlin. Any questions?" Mitzi asked Primii and prosecutor together.

With none forthcoming, Julia escorted the witness away. Mitzi, she thought, had the gambler's eye today — not stalling, but biding her time. The apprentice looked at the slip of paper in her hand. Wildly curious but businesslike, she walked up to the Table Cenacle and whispered in Lady Charlotte's ear. The Verbena Primus read the note, glanced at the defense oddly, and passed the note to Smithson. He stood.

"One hour recess," Smithson stated.

Lady Charlotte and Julia sped away while the crowd wondered, and the Medeans put the prisoner back in her cell.

The Cost of Corruption: Theora

"Lady Charlotte," Mitzi asked, "will you please tell the Council what you did this last hour?"

"I went to the detention area and examined the prisoner, at your request."

"As an expert healer, what is your opinion of Miss Hetirck?"

That "expert opinion" was the last in a long list of horrors. With a tight voice and narrow eyes, the Verbena Primus described burns, flays, cuts, welts, gashes, and bullet holes. Some of the scars were old, some recent. Most had been healed by magick, but some had been allowed to fester, as if Theora had been immobilized while the wounds bled and throbbed.

The Chamber was aghast. Tortured. Brutally. Systematically. By her own Chantrymates. For years. Even the Hermetics looked appalled.

At last the Primus returned to the Table. Mitzi walked over to the prisoner's chair.

"Name, rank, sect and Tradition for the record, please."

"Theora Hetirck, **bani** Euthanatos, of the...of the Consanguinity of Eternal Joy."

The Chamber rustled.

"Theora, have you ever killed?" Mitzi asked.

"Yes," whispered the prisoner.

"Have you ever killed because you were threatened with death, torture or Gilgul by members of the Freedom Razor — your own cabal — or others in the House of Helekar?"

"Yes."

The Chamber murmured.

"Have you ever killed **without** being in mortal fear by the other members of the Consanguinity of Eternal Joy?"



"Yes. Once. Only once." Theora answered.

The Chamber fell silent.

"Please describe for the Council that once."

"It was when I was 12," she began childishly. "My father came into the mortuary while I was dancing with my friends, the dead bodies. They scared him; I didn't know he was watching. He grabbed me, took me into the preservation room and started laying into me with a splint. He'd beaten me before, but this was worse than ever. I thought he would beat me 'til I died. So I picked up the closest thing — it was a scalpel — and struck out at him. There was blood in my eyes, and I felt his blood spurt out at me, and he fell over. I wiped my eyes, and saw that he was dead. I ran out into the street and never came back."

"You were homeless for a year after that. Voormas found you in Nebraska, and sent people who took you to Miami and then to Helekar. Did you want to go?" Mitzi asked.

"Yes. But when I knew them, I hated them and I wanted to leave."

"Did you ever try to disobey them to leave the Consanguinity or talk to other mages?"

"Yes, at first. And I obeyed them as little as I could — like at the Plantation, I was supposed to cut **all** the wounded people's throats, not just the first ones. But after I'd..." Theora winced. "Once they'd let Joseph put me in..." The girl gasped and clawed at her chest. "I can't tell, Mitzi. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, **I'm sorry**," she screamed. "Please don't punish me! **Please**, don't punish me...."

Smithson said, "You are safe here and now, girl," but caught Mitzi's worried eye. Both knew the girl's pleas weren't to anyone present in the room.

"Theora has done almost everything she is charged with," began the defense solemnly, "enough that deserves Gilgul and death that the lesser crimes make little difference. Yet the only murder that was her own was in self-defense."

Mitzi's voice rose. "Can you hold her accountable for crimes performed out of terror of Voormas and the rest of the Consanguinity? Can you hold her accountable as a free and responsible mage when she Awakened so young and was trained only by madmen? Can you hold her accountable when

her only examples have been her monstrous father and the Grand Harvester Voormas? Even under their warped tutelage, she found the courage to disobey and rebel, and was tortured for it. The proof is on her flesh.

"If you wish to stamp out the House of Helekar completely, without concern for the lives of innocents trapped in the Consanguinity's web, then vote to rip the soul from this girl's living body and kill the empty shell. If you wish to salvage what you can from the wreckage, then vote for clemency — let her live, and mend the damage." She paused, scanning the eyes of the Primii, and caught a half-wink from Takstang.

"The defense rests."

The Chamber clamored with comment and confusion. Julia patted her teacher on the shoulder proudly. Raging Eagle waited until the last whisper had died out to speak.

"It has not been said during this Tribunal, but I know our Thanatoic brethren often liken themselves to doctors. The cancer of corruption, they argue, needs a good surgeon to find it and to cut it out. It is essential with cancer to be sure no trace escapes to colonize other parts of the body — to be sure all the evil is rooted out.

"For once I agree. The House of Helekar is as sick and twisted a Chantry as any in history. Voormas himself may be the center of the disease, but the corruption has spread to each of his followers. As Miss Alhambra's evidence shows, the Grand Harvester has recruited his minions for those qualities that will feed his hubris and work his will.

"This girl was **chosen** by him. For more than 10 years, she has been taught, healed, and trained by the Grand Harvester and his people, and the stain on her soul is very great. Clearly the House still has geasa laid on her, oaths we cannot guess and should **fear**. If you agree with me that Voormas' taint may be dormant in this girl, waiting for our guard to drop — now, or a century from now — vote for Gilgul and execution. How else can we be sure? If you do not agree, at least kill her, as the Euthantos themselves agree is just, and release her soul to the Great Wheel. Give her a new life, a second chance — but not on our doorstep. Not now."

Sects

We must indeed all hang together, or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.

— Benjamin Franklin, upon signing the Declaration of Independence

Unlike many other Traditions, the Euthanatoi do not maintain a rigid structure. Many different sects, each carrying its own rank and title, operate within the Tradition's framework. Although they're more structured than the scattered Cultists and Dreamspeakers, the death mages keep their own counsel. A delicate system of checks and balances keep most Chakravanti honest — and deals with those who are not.

Most Euthanatoi work on their own or join tolerant cabals. Their practices (see Appendix) vary wildly, but focus on mortality and rebirth. Some Chakravanti prefer like company, though; over 100 Thanatoic sects exist across the world. The groups below account for the majority of the ones associated with the Euthanatos Tradition. Three others, the **Order of the Black Willow** (an English dark Romantic cult), the **Apad-Dharma** and the **Tal'mahe'Ra** (see *Beyond the Council*), have old links to the Chakravanti. The corruption of these latter sects — who live up to all the worst stories — smears the Tradition's reputation. Few outsiders realize these necromancers are not true Euthanatoi.

The organizations below require background checks. Senior members verify a newcomer's mentor, apprenticeship, active history and assassinations, if any. If he isn't really one of the Chakravanti, the sect is responsible for re-educating him — or disposing of him.

Veterans of the Himalayas

The **Natatapas** constitutes the oldest existing sect, one founded by Vedavati during the Wars. Tantrik in practice and militant in custom, the sect restricts its activities to India. The Natatapas acts as an aid society — India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka teem with dangers, diseases and Awakened threats. In theory, it splits its time between fighting and healing. In practice, many elder members drift to Council administrative duties. The "central" Euthanatos Chantry in Calcutta is a Natatapas stronghold. Once arguably the heart of the Chakravanti, the proud Natatapas now willingly endures the red tape of Council membership. Some say this sacrifice is a measure of its devotion to the Tradition as a whole; dissident whispers hint that fear has taken the Dancers of the Inner Fire, making them feeble and insincere.

The Natatapas chooses its initiates from Shaktas and Shaivites (devotees of Kali and Shiva), Hindu and Buddhist westerners and bureaucrats. Initiation comes through the agama te, and involves many formal rites.

The **Consanguinity of Eternal Joy**, so victorious at the end of the Wars, has been cast out by both Council and Tradition. Even so, the Brotherhoods of Consanguinity (founded by the Consanguinity of Eternal Joy during the Thuggee resistance) were never disbanded. The cults in Baghdad, Capetown and Miami (see **The Book of Chantries**) were still active when the Traditions kicked down the portals to Helekar's Realm. As of yet, no one has defanged them; the Capetown, Miami and Baghdad Chantry Houses are still linked to Helekar's Realm. Council shocktroops have yet to uncover enough volunteers to stage a complete assault.

Archmage Voormas remains free. His followers worship him as the manifestation of Kali's dark side, and seek to throw the Wheel out of balance — not a difficult feat in the World of Darkness. Advancement comes through assassination, either outside the cult or of one's superiors.

The Ancients

The **Madzimbahwe** (courts, in Shona) are unconventional sects based in old Thanatoic magickal lineages: The Ivory Coast mysticks and the mage-priest-royal elite of Great Zimbabwe. The only magickal remains of the latter culture are, *apparently*, the name of the modern group and the Old Man of Cerberus — though he's not talking.

The modern Madzimbahwe follow a cross between high magic and voodoo. Most Ta Kiti belong to this African sect, which includes vigilantes, doctors, social workers, Christian clergymen, civil rights reformers, voodoo mystics, rappers, journalists, lawyers and detectives. Diverse as their professions might be, these Euthanatoi prefer to stay on the living side of the Shroud; to them, the mortal world is ill enough already.

Though membership is open and there are no racial or religious requirements, the group tends to attract many African-descended mages. Most members follow a deeply spiritual belief in which healing, charity and

vengeance are sacred duties. Despite their resemblance to the Bata'a Craft, the Madzimbahwe firmly stand with the Euthanatoi. The Tradition's ideals keep the sect together despite the religious differences within.

The **Pomegranate Deme** (DEH-may), a loose group of Greco-pagan ritualists, may be the oldest non-Indian cult. Holdovers from the pre-Christian Mediterranean faiths, the mages of the Deme practice ancient mysteries of Persephone. Through Egyptian and Mesopotamian trade routes, the Deme met East Indians before Alexander the Great crossed the Hindu Kush. The Chakravanti recognized their Black Mother in her aspect as Kore, Persephone and Hecate, and forged strong, if distant, links with Greece, and through Greece, with the Celts.

To join the Deme, a mage must be a Persephonist. In modern times, the sect's membership peaked with Neo-Classicism and dwindled as the Industrial Age tore through the sacred places. Now the Dark Queen's followers are few, and the older mages lose apprentices to the Knights of Radamanthys and the Aided. Although Persephonist mentors seek students among neo-pagans, some Verbena feel (quite understandably) that the Deme are poaching.

The **Aided** (AYE-ded, literally *death-tale* in Old Irish) represents the last of the ancient Celtic Underworld magickal cults. The Romans, Christianity and the Inquisition whittled these death mages to splinters. The Order of the Black Willow fell into Infernalism during the 1800s and nearly finished the process through duels and feuds. Only a few scattered Euthanatoi survived in Scotland, Ireland, Breton and Wales to reconstruct their traditions.

Fortunately, Celt-chic in America has swollen the Aided's ranks in the last decade or two. Today, the sect grows swifter than any other. Mages with cultural and/or stylistic ties to Celtic culture are welcome, but "baby witches" are quickly shown the door.

The Techies

The **Lhaxsmists** sprang from Hindu mages in Bombay. Organizing only a century before the warning of the Seers, the sect members (worshippers of the Goddess of Luck) flipped a coin to decide whether to join the Euthanatoi, rolled dice to figure out how many representatives to send to the Conclave, and have knocked haphazardly through history ever since. Today's Lhaxsmists retain their free-wheeling attitude, but their sphere of influence has changed.

They are the gamblers, the thieves, the lucky stiff, the computer programmers of Death, the accountants of Entropy. "Locksmiths," as the Virtual Adepts call them, are always ready to chase numbers through the Digital Web, hunting down Nephandi viruses by the patterns they make in probability fields. Net-hopping Euthanatoi watch over Sleepers, particularly children, on the Web. Several would-be molesters and stalkers have met a just-death at their hands, and there's talk of opening an online chapter of Lhaxsmist Knights of Radamanthys. Membership is not exclusive, and most Locksmiths join just by being in the right place at the right time.

The Byzantine **Golden Chalice** developed from nervous alliances between Greek, Persian and Arab mages fighting corruption in the court of the Holy Roman Empire. Named after their trademark method of assassination (poisoned goblets keyed to the victims' bodily humors by sympathetic magick — a rote still used by the Chalice today). The mages were forced out of the city by European vampires during the First Crusade.

Now very modern, high-tech and efficient, the sect sees itself as the primary assassination wing of the Euthanatoi. It targets corrupt politicians and the mundanely vile, but its members prefer challenging assignments — *barabbi*, Nephandi, Technocrats and especially vampires. Though secretive, the sect supposedly maintains a strong Net presence; its members share a single identity, simply called "Iago."

Chalice membership is by invitation *only*; prospects must demonstrate cleverness and subtlety. Rumor has it that the Chalice has invited Senex to join in each of the last three centuries, an invitation that's been declined each time. Perhaps the Old Man prefers working alone. Or perhaps something else is wrong....

The Kindly Ones

The **Knights of Radamanthys** take their name from the Greek judge of the Asian dead, but get their mission from Minos (the judge of difficult cases). Reputed (truly) to include some of the best magickal fighters outside the Akashic Brotherhood, the Knights are mercenaries for other cabals and Traditions. Their terms are few but stringent: The fight must be in a good cause by *Euthanatoi* definition, and the clients must field an equal or greater number of their own forces in the battle. The Knights charge no fees, but accept donations. From time to time, an organization has abused the Knights' trust, sending them on murder or suicide missions. The offenders usu-

ally "disappear" soon after the incident. It never happens twice.

Since their founding in Greece in the 1700s, the Knights have spread world-wide. Multi-ethnic and outgoing, these death mages get along better with other Traditions than most Euthanatoi do. Anyone with good fighting skills and a clean record (by Thanatoic standards) may join. Weak sisters and reckless wildcats are ejected after a run or two; the Knights are warriors, not suicide commandos.

The **Scholars of the Wheel** number a dozen or less, but the importance of their work grants them authority and influence within and without their Tradition. Simply put, the Scholars track souls and Avatars through their varied lives. Records of Rustam's samashti show that after the initial linguistic difficulties had been overcome, the Scholars dragged out their books, memories, abaci and (in one case) quipu and began enthusiastically filling in the holes in each other's genealogy of souls. Formed by reincarnationalists from *all* of the five cultural hubs of Thanatoic mages, the Scholars were the first Euthanatoi (rather than Chakravanti) sect.

Currently, the Scholars are debating three important questions: Whether to begin tracing the Hollow Ones' incarnations (whenever possible) and accept them into the Euthanatoi; whether to copy their records into the central Council Archives (under the supervision of Archivist Nicodemus Mulhouse); and whether to exchange information with the Akashic Brothers (the only other Tradition known to keep soul chronologies) in bulk instead of on a question-by-question basis.

Most members possess three things: Past life memories, Time and Spirit magicks, and patience. It takes a certain quirk of personality to *want* to go through old diaries, records and minds looking for descriptions of

Avatars to figure out who you've been before, let alone to trace the paths of other people. The Scholars accept anyone who has such patience, and the discretion to keep his findings to himself.

Albireo, named after the star that forms the bill of the swan in the constellation Cygnus, was founded after the Fall of the Nine. In a moving speech before the entire Council, the original members swore to continue the diplomatic work begun by Cygnus Moro. Since then, the Albireans have good-naturedly shared information, set up joint cabals, helped multi-Tradition Chantries and become reasonably welcome. Though no Euthanatos will ever be quite trusted by outsiders, the silver swan pin (with an authentication spell woven in to prevent counterfeits) is recognized throughout Awakened society.

This sect has a deeper purpose, though. While the founders were truly bound by their oath, the Albireans had earlier taken a different oath — to watch over the other Traditions for signs of the same corruption (or hubris) that overcame Heylel and killed Moro. So far, only well-seasoned, stable Euthanatoi have been selected to join the hidden backbone of Albireo, and few non-members, even within the Tradition, know of it. Takstang and Senex *do* know of it; the one question Mitzi cannot allow in the Council Chamber is: Have you killed a mage of a different Tradition. The Euthanatoi *do* police the other Traditions with daggers drawn, and they don't dare let this secret out.

Any diplomatic (preferably charming) Euthanatos can join the Albrians, but membership in the core group is by invitation only. Ambassadors receive the swan pin only after an indefinite probationary period, and are carefully watched thereafter.



Judgement (The Outside World) निर्णयपादः

"It is easy to judge evil unmixed," replied Gwydion. "But, alas, in most of us good and bad are closely woven as the threads on a loom; greater wisdom than mine is needed for the judging."

— Lloyd Alexander, *The Black Cauldron*

Morning came quietly to the guest quarters of Vajra. Mitzi and Julia, tense and sleepless, rose with the sun and were ready hours early. Mitzi checked her watch for the third time, shook her head and pulled a small brown and tan case from her baggage.

"Here. Set it up," she said to Julia.

"Backgammon?" Julia asked and flicked open the catches obediently.

"I've been neglecting your training," Mitzi picked up her dice and held them under her apprentice's eyes. "Dice are easy. I want you to cheat as hard as you can — telekinesis, altering chance, illusion, sleight of hand — whatever you can do. It'll settle your nerves." She picked up her own cup. "Our nerves. I'll play fair and blind the first game, try to catch you the second, and fight you for the third. Ready?"

Julia nodded and rolled. The first game passed in trivia, but by the middle of the second her thoughts strayed.

"What do you think's going to happen?" Julia asked, sliding her pieces along the points.

"The verdict, you mean?" Mitzi asked, and her dice clattered down.

"Yeah."

Other Traditions

"Well, Master Hyemyōng will probably vote guilty." She watched as Julia inexpertly turned a three to a six, and tapped it back. "Most Akashics still consider us enemies. They're always out to 'teach us a lesson' in battle or on the streets; I guess he'd try to do that here, too. But the Brotherhood believes in reincarnation just as much as we do, so he may not sentence her to Gilgul. I think he'd consider killing her a nice slap on the wrist.

"Madam Bantu is a little more progressive than most of her Tradition, but she still sees things in their straight black-and-white way. The Chorus doesn't like necromancers or assassins — if the Akashics weren't already our archrivals, the Choristers would have leaped at the chance. But they do go in for forgiveness and redemption, so I think she'd suggest Gilgul but not execution. Bantu would want to be sure Theora never did magick again — and for some reason they think soullessness more merciful than death.

"Marianna of Balador," said Mitzi, sending a tan piece to the bar, "she's hard to predict. The Cult as a whole, I think, would feel Theora had chosen her path. 'Make your bed and lie in it,' is as much their motto as ours. So what she should say, to represent the Ecstatics fairly, is guilty, Gilgul and execution. But the Primus herself might be more sympathetic. She's seen

slavery, abuse, battered women...she might ignore other opinions and vote innocent. Knowing the Cult, they'd respect her more if she did just that."

Julia rolled double fours without obvious trickery, and began taking pieces off the board. Mitzi went on:

"The Dreamspeaker vote should be for Gilgul but not death. I don't pretend to understand them well enough to say for sure. Most of them would consider Theora's spirit irredeemably tainted by exposure to that hellhole — and I'm not sure they wouldn't be right. But Laughing Eagle is a deep one. He's *been* a slave. I don't know whether he'd feel more for her or less because of that; she *did* succumb, while he never did. He could go either way.

"The Rimpoche will abstain."

Julia looked up, shocked.

Mitzi continued, "He has a personal stake in the verdict, Jule. The Chodana and our ethics apply as much to him as to anyone. More, actually.

"Master Cristavao will certainly vote guilty." Mitzi brought her last man home and took off another. "The Order of Hermes has no love for us and never did. Even Porthos, who used to get along well with the Old Man, has stopped his correspondence. I hope Latishia's full story gets back to him and changes *that*. For some reason, they don't approve of our taking in Lord Gilmore and the refugees, either." They played a few turns in silence while Mitzi thought.

"Failure is the worst sin for them," Mitzi said. "I think Hermetics who screw up are expected to crawl off and die immediately afterward. Cristavao has been exposed and humiliated by Gillan, and Theora's failure to escape capture is the current reason. Death sentence, Gilgul. Definitely.

"Dr. Spence has to vote guilty; I'm not sure he could keep his seat otherwise. The **Thunder Child** was one of the proudest ships in the Ether. Even if Theora hadn't killed Scientists, I think the Sons would still come

down against her; they have too many white-bread chauvinists in the ranks. I'm sure he'll recommend execution. He might not demand Gilgul — the Sons can be a little materialistic and short-sighted outside their labs."

She called her apprentice on a sloppy illusion, and continued:

"Lady Charlotte will probably say guilty, but might stop with execution. The Verbena see things in a different black-and-white than the Chorus, and tend to believe in short, sharp solutions to problems. So death is likely, but I think she'll vote against Gilgul. She knows us well enough to realize it's the worse fate by our standards. Still, the Speakers, the Cult, and the Verbena stand with us in most Council affairs. If any two of them vote innocent, the third probably will, too.

"Master Thackery I'm not so sure about. Virtual Adepts are almost as white-bread as the Sons, but less conservative. They don't have that knee-jerk fear of death, sex and raw magick. They're modernist, small, and looked down on by the rest of the Traditions just like us. We seem half-Nephandi, they seem half-Technocrat. We could be strong allies if the Lhakshmits keep up their good work on the Web. I guess Thackery'd want to punish Theora and still stay on our good side, but that he'd get it wrong — Gilgul without execution instead of the other way around."

"At best," she finished, "five votes guilty of the major charges, recommending death or Gilgul or both; three votes innocent, one abstention."

Julia frowned, staring at the board. One last tan marker on the second point faced four of Mitzi's browns on six.

"So you've lost?" Julia asked.

Mitzi picked up her dice cup. She rolled an honest double six, and smiled.

"Too soon to say."

Verdict

The last Primus took his seat, and slowly the Council Chamber fell silent. Smithson rose.

"Theora Hetirck of the Freedom Razorcabal of the House of Helekar..." Smithson said.

The prisoner stared straight ahead, neither frightened, brave nor thoughtful, just empty.

"...you have been judged by this Tribunal. Hear the count: One of us has not spoken. Two of us find you guilty of all charges. Six declare you innocent...." The Primus waited to let the furor die down to finish. "Of all charges punishable by Gilgul or death."

The crowd rumbled again. Smithson waited patiently. Julia watched Tsai and Tanaka scowl at their leader. Raging Eagle watched the center of the room, and Julia realized he and Mitzi were the only two that still seemed to be interested in Theora. The prisoner's expression had barely changed, but she stared now at the defense in disbelief.

"For the lesser charges, we sentence you unanimously to Branding, house arrest, reduction to the rank of Apprentice, and re-education."

The hot air blew around the Council again.

"That's good, isn't it?" asked Julia.

"Depends on where they place her. If it's not a Euthanatos Chantry, we've lost more than the case," Mitzi answered.

Smithson stood patiently. The furor did not pass. A full minute passed. Lady Charlotte Quay, dark-eyed and thunderously offended, shouted sheet lightning inches over the heads of the crowd. The spectators finally shut up, and the verdict continued.

"You will be taken from here directly to the First North Sentencing Hall, where your Avatar will be Branded. The Medicans will turn you over to the custody of Miss Zimmermann, who may at that time release you from your shackles if she chooses. Miss Zimmermann will conduct you to the university Chantry Cerberus, where Master Senex will take charge of you. You are not to leave Cerberus until such time as he has satisfied himself and this Council that you are responsible for your own actions."

He nodded to the Medicans, and they took Theora away.

Goodbyes

Theora Hetirck shuffled her feet nervously and pulled at her sleeves. The stiff black dress was gone. Her new companions had found a tie-dyed, floppy green blouse and bright-blue sailor pants in what Mitzi called "Julia's art clothes." She had thanked her defenders politely. Someday, they imagined, she might even smile.

Julia stood by, keeping an eye out for trouble. Mitzi herself finished setting the portal for Cerberus' Gatehouse. A shaved head, moving through the crowd close by, caught her attention. Impulsively she stepped forward into the path of Raging Eagle. He started, and stared down at her.

"Miss Zimmermann."

"I wanted to speak with you after the verdict," Mitzi replied, "but you left so quickly...." She shook her head and started over. "I wanted to explain about Latishia. I was afraid you thought I'd sacrificed Theora to save her."

"I did," he replied.

An awkward silence descended. Several seconds slipped by.

"I have to go," Raging Eagle finally said. Still, he made no move toward the portal. "I've been away from my temple almost a week," he added, as if that explained everything. For a moment he gazed intently at her face. Master Hyemyōng came up behind him and tugged gently at his sleeve. "Stop fidgeting with that pen when you are nervous," Raging Eagle told his rival. "It gives away your state of mind." Then he left.

Mitzi walked a few subdued paces back to Julia and found herself facing Takstang.

"The Old Man is expecting her," said the Primus. "I had a few words with him before the Council discussed the sentence. She should do well with him; he likes problem cases." He took her hand. "I put a letter in one of your bags; give it to Senex and tell him I pray for his success. There is something there for you, too, and for your little shravaka." **Tell her I shall watch her progress — it should put a little fear behind her efforts.**

Takstang gripped her fingers firmly, warningly. **Don't let yourself be tempted to wield the sword of Holofernes over Dachau. It is not yet Judith's hour of vengeance.** Mitzi nodded, seeing her Avatar and its sheathed sword in her mind's eye. Not an easy restraint, but a necessary one.

To Julia, he said, "Those marked heavily by Destiny live short, unhappy lives, fight against terrible odds, and die horribly before their time. Do good as you find the opportunity, live long and well, and you will surpass the brief, bright flames around you. Glory and haste are uncomfortable gifts."

He went to Theora, and she shrank back bashfully. Takstang shook his head and waited. At last, she met his eye.

"You are as free as you think you are," he said, and sent them on their way.



Beyond the Council

Monsters do not die. They must be killed.

— Dan Simmons, *Carrión Comfort*

Because Euthanatoi take the extreme long view in all things, they have a somewhat “relaxed” attitude toward the Ascension War. To them, the “team” — Tradition, Craft, Orphan, Convention — what you choose in this life isn’t as important as what you do while you’re playing. Allegiances that last lifetimes — as Nephandi-tainted souls often do — frustrate the Chakravanti into violence. No one hates the Fallen more than the death mages who so often bear their stigma...especially since the line between Jhor and true corruption is so easy to cross.

The Apad-Dharma sect operates freely in Southern India, and maintains two Marabouts in Calcutta as well. Outsiders can’t tell the difference between the Fallen Euthanatoi and their more principled brethren, and misunderstandings flare up constantly. One of the few things to be said in Voormas’ favor is that his own Chantryhouse waged a sickening war with the Apad-Dharma; many of the horribly mutilated victims in Helekar’s torture chambers were, in fact, Thanatoic Nephandi.

The jury’s out on the Marauders; some Euthanatoi attack the reality-benders on sight, while others consider them better allies than their fellow Traditionalists. Marauders, at heart, epitomize the tearing down that leads to new possibilities; even so, they’re like cancers, and endanger innocent lives with their dementia.

There are, of course, many states of existence in the Hidden World, such as...

Vampires

Euthanatoi view the Kindred with a blend of fascination and pity. Most Thanatoics know at least one lick. Seemingly suffering Gilgul and Awakening at the same time, vampires intrigue the death mages. Where do their powers come from? Mortal choices? Caine’s soul? An Avatar twisted horribly out of shape? Divine curses? Who knows? Tattered copies of Aristotle deLaurent’s *Book of Nod* translation circulate endlessly among younger Chakravanti, and trigger endless arguments.

The Tradition’s general policy is: Look, but don’t touch. Too many Chakravanti have been seduced, slaugh-

tered or Embraced by their own field research. Necromantic cabals track, steal from and spy on the vampires, taking countermeasures when necessary. Protecting innocent souls is paramount, however; Euthanatoi tend to frown on vampiric appetites, even when they understand the condition. Renegade bloodsuckers (like Sabbat and Anarchs) are undesirable allies at best, and even the Giovanni necromancers (who share a common interest in necromancy with some Euthanatoi) are suspect at best, targets at worst.

• Nagaraja

The tragic *Idran Sutra* tells of one sect’s alliance with vampire spirits. An early Thanatoic group, the Idran brought vampiric allies into the Shadowlands during the Himalayan Wars, a tactic which allowed them to hit the invaders from behind. Their hatred of the Akashics cost them their souls; drunk on poisoned blood, the Idran gave themselves over to vampiric slavery, taking the name *Tal’mahe’Ra* (see **Dirty Secrets of the Black Hand**). Most of the group’s True Mages surrendered their magicks for immortality, but some remained human. The secret Black Hand society accepted the sect (or grew from it, depending on who you ask), and the *Tal’mahe’Ra* still work with these vampiric conspirators.

Over the centuries, the former Idran “adopted” new members from fellow Thanatoic sects, solitary magicians and, far later, from Tradition mages who picked up the gory mantle during the early Ascension conflicts. To this day, the *Tal’mahe’Ra* sect survives in several Indian cities. Some Verbena and other blood magicians still walk with the *Tal’mahe’Ra*, but they walk softly; the Traditions censured the sect and its members long ago. Membership or alliance with it is considered a crime before the Council.

An odd Kindred bloodline, the *Nagaraja*, grew from the Idrans’ fall. Fearsome blends of sorcerer and vampire, the *Nagaraja* predated the Tremere wizards by nearly 1000 years. Death arts, reeking of Jhor, grew from the Idrans’ lost magick and their affinity with the Un-

derworld spirits. While a far cry from True Magick, these arts granted the Nagaraja power over the dead and some commerce with the Underworld. Although their numbers have never been large — less than a dozen exist — their odd powers inspired tales that haunt the Indian night (and the Euthanatoi) 2500 years later.

According to those unlucky enough to have met them, the Nagaraja of the Tal'mahe'Ra sect follow a corrupted form of the Chodona. They believe that, having survived death not once but twice, they're the purest beings on Earth. As agents of *Kala*, Nagaraja feel it is their divine duty to safeguard decay and entropy, to kill that which stagnates and return it to the Cycle again. Naturally, outsiders confuse these vampires with the Chakravanti. What the Nagaraja lack, however, are the tenets of *Sadhana*, *Daya* and *Tyaga*; they torture and kill for pleasure, steal life energies — *ojas* — from their victims and channel the *ojas* back into themselves as a reward for assisting the Cycle. To true Euthanatoi, this is life-theft, the worst kind of corruption. Nagaraja are *Naraki* — unclean abominations, and their state is an affront to everything the Tradition values.

Changing Breeds

The Jhor (see Appendix) causes conflicts between death mages and most shapechangers. Garou warriors speak of a "Wyrn taint" that some Euthanatoi carry with them, and tend to become...impatient...with the Chakravanti. Though some werecats (often members of the Bubasti or Bagheera tribes) or Corax (wereravens) socialize with Euthanatoi, the Changing Breeds as a whole keep a healthy distance from Kali's children.

Wraiths

Most outsiders assume the Shadowlands are some sort of playground for Euthanatoi. This is hardly the case. Responsible necromancers tread lightly in the Dark Umbra — the Tempests and Nihils can take a living mage out of the Cycle for good. The ancient "Sybils' maps," once used to navigate the Underworld, mislead any death mage foolish enough to carry one. And Entropy magicks, so useful everywhere else, backfire horribly beyond the Shroud.

To the Chakravanti, ghosts are lost souls stuck to the Wheel by their own stubborn will. Some mages pity the spirits, and use their Arts to comfort them — or to help

them into Oblivion's Great Unmaking. Others exploit the Restless, seeing them as resources that don't know enough to use themselves up. Helpful necromancers become mediums, opening up passages between the worlds, offering themselves for brief possessions (see the rote *Living Bridge*, in *Mage*) or smashing their Fetters; less-sympathetic mages use the ghosts for their own ends, manipulate dead bodies or channel Oblivion itself into living hosts (see "Euthanatos Necromancy" in the Appendix).

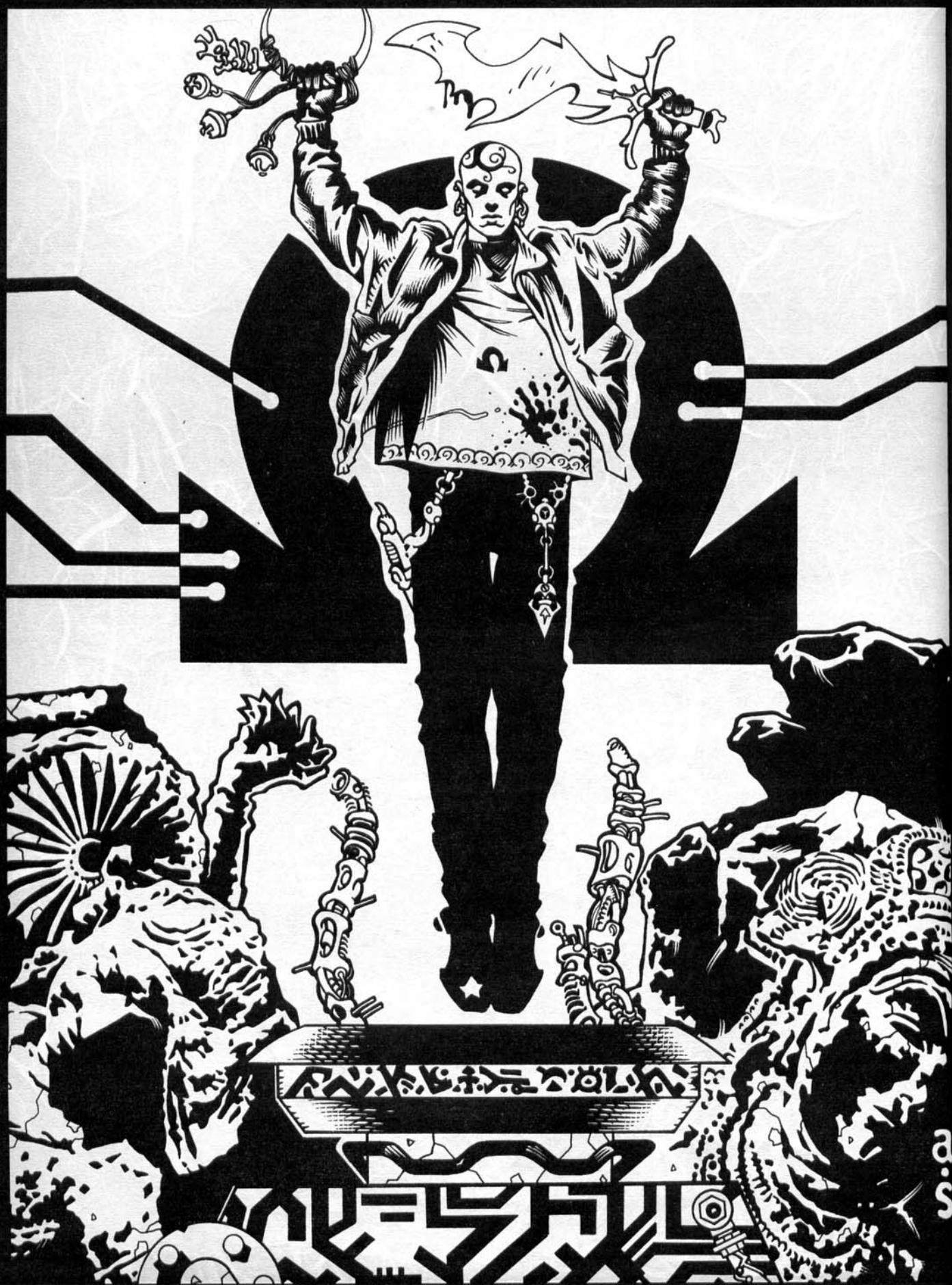
Wraiths *desperately* hate and fear living folks who meddle with death; hence, the Restless often take a dim view of Euthanatoi unless the latter offer them something in return (protection for a Fetter, revenge, a chance to see their loved ones or a brief return to the living world). Ghosts often keep their friends nearby; many a careless necromancer has learned about Restless politics the hard way....

Changelings

Despite a long familiarity between the Aided and the British fae, changelings remain a mystery to most Euthanatoi. Though they age and die like other mortals, dreamweavers seem to slip past the usual working of the Wheel, as if their souls reincarnate immediately or just disappear. Though no formal "alliances" exist between the Tradition and the noble Houses, some slough find comfort in the death mages' trappings of mortality. For the most part, however, the Chakravanti and the changelings keep a respectful gulf between them.

Mummies

Few as they are, the Reborn are worth mentioning when one speaks of the Chakravanti. Are mummies stuck on the Wheel, or do they ride it like experts? The Euthanatoi aren't sure. The various sutras, chronicles and texts they maintain mention souls with guided destinies, people who recall millennia of lifetimes, who recognize people they've never met and understand the Underworld with uncanny insight. Some of these immortals challenge Kali's children, but others aid them in their studies of mortality and rebirth. The Scholars of the Wheel document three mummies — Neferukhayt, Hetch-Abehu and Maaa-ant-f — who've proven helpful through the ages, and two — Am-besek and Amam the Devourer — who create...trouble.



Walking on Bones (Characters)

अस्थि गतं

Jesus cured the blind man so that he could see the evils of the world.

— Me'Shell NdegéOcello, "The Womb"



Euthanatoi are not obsessed with death, not all of them, anyway.

Oh, sure they seem to be. I mean, look at their name — "Good Death." Look at their traditional image — pale complexion, black clothes, weapon in hand, ready to off some poor bastard who literally isn't good enough to live. Scary dudes, these Euthanatoi. Of course they're obsessed with death. Take a look at one. Can't you tell?

The image is a mirage, an illusion of something in the distance, not without cause, but ultimately without substance.

The Euthanatoi's true interest isn't death. It's rebirth. It's the Cycle of creation. Entropy is not the end of everything — it's the death of the old in favor of the new. The lotus, symbol of creation rising from the waters, is important to the Chakravanti. After all, without rebirth, death is just oblivion. And jeez, oblivion is dull.

If Euthanatoi were as morbid as people seem to think, most of them would have committed suicide by now. Instead, they're among the most vibrant mysticks on the Council. They're a little weird, admittedly, but hey, who isn't? Don't let the black clothes fool you — in their own way, the Chakravanti are free and alive. It takes a strong will to live to stare death in the face, and walk away.

Everyone knows the death mage stereotypes: assassins, necromancers, grave robbers and mad cult priests. Few outsiders see the healers, the teachers, the philanthropists and prophets that form the bulk of the Tradition. Maybe those outsiders don't *want* to see the real Euthanatoi. Too many folks believe that death is contagious, that in shaking hands with death you begin to die. The Chakravanti know we've *all* shaken hands with death. Few of us choose to wear it on our sleeves, that's all. True, some death mages *do* fit the stereotypes — fear grants status, after all. The majority, the invisible ones, stand in plain sight. They're safer that way. And contrary to belief, the Euthanatoi want to survive. Acceptance of death is not a rejection of life.

Shade Among Shadows

*I remember there was a time
When dead and buried meant just that
Underneath the cold dark ground
Things stay put!*

— Oingo Boingo, "Dead or Alive"

Quote: *There's no such things as vampires? You just go ahead believing that, buddy. Me, I know better.*

Prelude: They are out there, you know. One almost killed you a few years ago. Routine homicide (if there is such a thing), my ass — it was feeding time downtown and you came in before dessert. The pretty thing was playing with its food when you shined the light in its face, and it hissed at you with bloodstained fury. So much for warning shots! Not that it mattered, anyway — you blasted three holes in the thing before it sent you slamming to the pavement and enjoyed another course....

The grimy walls crumbled and the fog rushed in. The thing at your neck seemed to glow as the World's Greatest Orgasm shook you like a dog toy. Giggling, the monster let you drop. The sticky shit in your hair was blood — your own. No question, you'd be buried now if it hadn't been for the woman in black lace. She touched your neck as the mists blocked out the light, and she whispered in your ear until your heart began to pump again. Her cool lips warmed your own. By the time the ambulance arrived, she was gone. She came back to visit, though, while you recovered. When you could stand again, the woman in lace escorted you off into the night and began your education. The lessons get weirder every night.

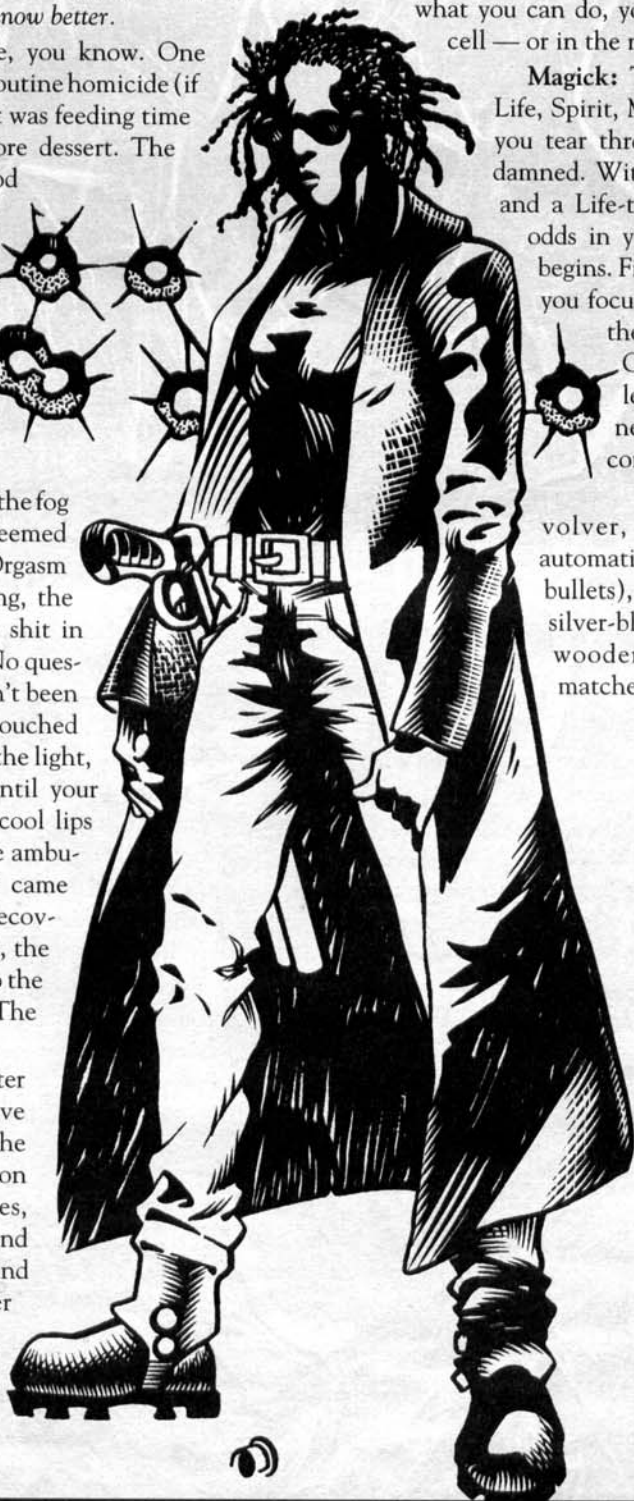
Concept: You're a monster hunter with an edge, a magickal edge. You've seen through death, and you know the bastards that're hanging around on the fringe. Vampires, werewolves, ghosts — they're real, they kill and they're everywhere. Even junkies and welfare queens deserve a cleaner death than that! You are the last

line of defense for a sleeping world. For the sake of the innocents, give no mercy.

Roleplaying Tips: Nightmares wander the neon-lit winter streets. Most of them are stronger than you, so be careful, damnit! Sleep by day, hunt by night, and for God's sake, keep your mouth shut! If your partners knew what you can do, you'd be the next one in a cell — or in the morgue.

Magick: The Arts you practice — Life, Spirit, Mind and Entropy — help you tear through the disguises of the damned. With an Entropy-nudge here and a Life-twist there, you stack the odds in your favor when the fight begins. Firelight and cigarettes help you focus your concentration, and the tools of the hunt carry God's blessings. Before you leave each night, pray. You never know when it might come in handy.

Equipment: Service revolver, shotgun and hidden automatic (all loaded with silver bullets), box of incendiary rounds, silver-bladed knife, radio, badge, wooden stakes, lighter and matches, lockpicks, cigarettes.



EUTHIANATOS™

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: FANATIC
Essence: PRIMORDIAL
Demeanor: BRAVO

Concept: SHADE AMONG
Mentor: SHADOWS
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength _____ ●●●●●●
Dexterity REFLEXES ●●●●●●
Stamina _____ ●●●●●●

Social

Charisma _____ ●●●●●●
Manipulation _____ ●●●●●●
Appearance _____ ●●●●●●

Mental

Perception PARANOID ●●●●●●
Intelligence _____ ●●●●●●
Wits _____ ●●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Alertness _____ ●●●●●●
Athletics _____ ●●●●●●
Awareness _____ ●●●●●●
Brawl _____ ●●●●●●
Dodge _____ ●●●●●●
Expression _____ ○○○○○○
Instruction _____ ○○○○○○
Intuition _____ ○○○○○○
Intimidation _____ ●●●●●●
Streetwise _____ ●●●●●●
Subterfuge _____ ●●●●●●

Skills

Do _____ ○○○○○○
Drive _____ ●●●●●●
Etiquette _____ ○○○○○○
Firearms _____ ●●●●●●
Leadership _____ ○○○○○○
Meditation _____ ○○○○○○
Melee _____ ●●●●●●
Research _____ ○○○○○○
Stealth _____ ●●●●●●
Survival _____ ○○○○○○
Technology _____ ●●●●●●

Knowledges

Computer _____ ○○○○○○
Cosmology _____ ○○○○○○
Culture _____ ○○○○○○
Enigmas _____ ○○○○○○
Investigation _____ ○○○○○○
Law _____ ●●●●●●
Linguistics _____ ○○○○○○
Lore _____ ●●●●●●
Medicine _____ ●●●●●●
Occult _____ ●●●●●●
Science _____ ○○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence _____ ○○○○○○
Entropy _____ ●●●●●●
Forces _____ ○○○○○○

Life _____ ●●●●●●
Mind _____ ●●●●●●
Matter _____ ○○○○○○

Prime _____ ○○○○○○
Spirit _____ ●●●●●●
Time _____ ○○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

ALLIES _____ ●●●●●●
ARCANE _____ ●●●●●●
AVATAR _____ ●●●●●●
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○

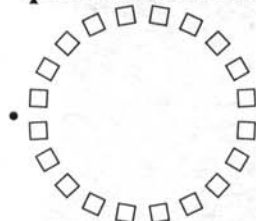
Arete

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Other Traits

_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○

Experience

Agent of Fortune

Chance is perhaps the pseudonym of God when he does not wish to sign his work.

— Anatole France

Quote: *You bet your life? I wouldn't if I were you.*

Prelude: Daddy was a Reno cabdriver. Mom dealt cards in the pit, drawing customers with her looks alone. You favored Mom's Indian heritage and learned about life from Lady Luck. Her endless dramas never disappointed you.

Growing up, you wandered, drawn by the laughter of Madame Fortune to Vegas, Atlantic City, Monaco and other places. Along the way, you honed the charm — and the skills — that made the game easier. In the beginning, it was tough. You lost your shirt and worse. The risk, however, the thrill that sent thousands to the tables and the wheels, that mesmerized them with Luck's sleight of hand, drew you on. Desperately, you bet it all on one last turn of the cards — and broke the bank. Hard faces eyed your fortune, but you went on a winning streak. By the time you left, the casino was filled with poor losers.

The beating was a wake-up call. The hands that guided you up from half-death belonged to a Locksmith who'd

been drawn by your streak of luck. In time, she taught you how to spin the wheel with a purpose. Now you waltz with Lady Luck in style, an agent of fortune with an eye to the greater good. The cards are a metaphor for life, and there's always another hand to be had.

Concept: Not all Euthanatoi are killers; you prefer Aces (or Jokers) over Kings. Luck — good or bad — is the hand you deal, and it's much less permanent than death. It's amazing how much sudden poverty can teach a person. On the other hand, your way with fortune helps the needy. Slot machines are child's play, and you get a warm feeling from the shouts of joy you inspire. Lady Luck can flash a dazzling smile.

Roleplaying Tips: You're a class act. Sharp, attractive, well-versed in social graces and magickal Arts. Slide past people with an appraising eye and a quick quip. Charm and money forgive a multitude of sins. You're subtle, too. Why use marked cards or force when your natural talents tip the scales your way?

Magick: Entropy stacks your deck, Mind helps you deal it, and Time helps you spot a lucky break. Gambling toys and luck charms focus your intentions, but there're no loaded dice here — just you, your will and Lady Fortune. Who could ask for anything more?

Equipment: Deck of cards, cash, lucky charm, sexy clothes, makeup kit, expensive jewelry, can of mace.



EUTHIANATOS™

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: ARCHITECT
Essence: QUESTING
Demeanor: BON VIVANT

Concept: AGENT OF
Mentor: FORTUNE
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity FAST HANDS ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●

Social

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance EXOTIC ●●●●●

Mental

Perception ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●
Instruction ●●●●●
Intuition ●●●●●
Intimidation ●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●

Skills

Do ●●●●●
Drive ●●●●●
Etiquette FUN-LOVING ●●●●●
Firearms ●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●
Meditation ●●●●●
Melee ●●●●●
Research ●●●●●
Stealth ●●●●●
Survival ●●●●●
Technology ●●●●●

Knowledges

Computer ●●●●●
Cosmology ●●●●●
Culture ●●●●●
Enigmas ●●●●●
Investigation ●●●●●
Law ●●●●●
Linguistics ●●●●●
Lore ●●●●●
Medicine ●●●●●
Occult ●●●●●
Science ●●●●●

Spheres

Correspondence ●●●●●
Entropy ●●●●●
Forces ●●●●●

Life ●●●●●
Mind ●●●●●
Matter ●●●●●

Prime ●●●●●
Spirit ●●●●●
Time ●●●●●

Advantages

Backgrounds

ALLIES ●●●●●
AVATAR ●●●●●
RESOURCES ●●●●●
INFLUENCE ●●●●●
●●●●●

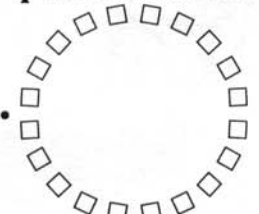
Arete

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Other Traits

STYLE ●●●●●
GAMBLING ●●●●●
●●●●●
●●●●●
●●●●●

Experience

One cannot weep for the entire world. It is beyond human strength. One must choose.

— Jean Anouilh

Quote: *How much do you want to live?*

Prelude: Grandma fell down the stairs when you were eight. It took a long time for her to die, and there was nothing you could do. The ambulance came too late to save her. Grandma's death left a void that went beyond words, but she granted you a destiny: to help, to save, to avert the pain when the dead leave the living.

People said your invisible friend "Brett" was a re-

action to Grandma's death. Until med school, you thought so, too. Too many long hours and too little sleep broke you. When they kicked you out, the depression kicked in. Brett sat bedside as you drifted between sleep and wakefulness for what seemed like weeks. Finally, he dragged you out of bed and forced you to the mirror. The sight was pretty sobering — the sight and the power tingling through your fingers — the power to heal, or to kill.

The local rescue squad was happy to have you, and they had a use for those new talents. Brett was pleased. Somehow, you knew Grandma was, too. By the time your mentor appeared, intuition had shaped skills that took others years to master. Now you work the street beat, where second chances are hard to come by. Some might call this a thankless job, but Grandma, Brett and your mentor would disagree. So would you.

Concept: A caretaker to the bone. Some people claim you're working off childhood guilt, but that's not really true. You have a rare talent, a power that comes from God, and it would be a sin to waste it. Sure, pain's a part of life, but it shouldn't be the last thing a person feels. It's not your style to play judge and jury, but if a patient's too far gone, you simply let nature take its course and ease his passage onward.

You heal more than just bodies; you heal souls. The people touched by your talents experience a rebirth, a whisper of your own reawakening. This "spiritual CPR" jump-starts their appreciation for life. Those folks too hardened to salvage still receive a gift: a farewell "kiss" that sends their souls onward with the promise of better things next time around.

Roleplaying Tips: First, make people comfortable. Alleviate their pain. Speak in a calm voice, even when your own temper rises. Take care of those around you, even when off duty. Pain doesn't punch a time clock. Neither do you.

Magick: Life, obviously, is your specialty. It's amazing what medicine can accomplish these days. Mind helps you judge who is and isn't worth the effort; moreover, it passes your healing gift to your patients and their loved ones. Prayer, medical procedures and a calm, soothing voice focus your intentions and your Arts.

Equipment: Medical equipment, ambulance, uniform, St. Christopher medallion.



EUTHIANATOS™

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: CAREGIVER
Essence: PATTERN
Demeanor: CAREGIVER

Concept: EMT
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●

Social

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

Mental

Perception HEALTH ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Expression ○○○○○
Instruction ○○○○○
Intuition ○○○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Streetwise ●●●●●
Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Do ○○○○○
Drive ●●●●●
Etiquette ●●●●●
Firearms ●●●●●
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ●●●●●
Melee ●●●●●
Research ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○
Technology ●●●●●

Knowledges

Computer ●●●●●
Cosmology ●●●●●
Culture ○○○○○
Enigmas ●●●●●
Investigation ●●●●●
Law ●●●●●
Linguistics ○○○○○
Lore ○○○○○
Medicine EMERGENCY ●●●●●
Occult ○○○○○
Science ●●●●●

Spheres

Correspondence ○○○○○
Entropy ●●●●●
Forces ○○○○○

Life ●●●●●
Mind ●●●●●
Matter ○○○○○

Prime ○○○○○
Spirit ○○○○○
Time ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

AVATAR ●●●●●
DREAM ●●●●●
ARCANE ●●●●●
○○○○○
○○○○○

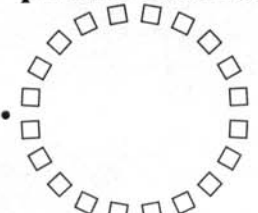
Arete

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Willpower

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Other Traits

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Health

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Planters and Harvesters

I distrust the underground world, but I want to understand it...because if the Masters of the World exist, they can only be underground: this is a truth that all sense but few dare utter.

— Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*

A fearsome lot, these death mages. Each one's brimming with an aversion to life and a thirst for blood. That's what their rivals say, and the tales of dread Helekar have made such talk grow all the louder. Surely the greatest of their numbers must have bloodstained souls and hands whitened with bone dust.

Mustn't they? Fair question. You be the judge.

Pheodora

A leading member of the Pomegranate Deme, Pheodora was a companion and friend (and possibly lover) of Haroun, known to history as Cygnus Moro (see **The Fragile Path**). As one of the few female members of the soon-to-be Tradition present at the Grand Convocation, she also lent a different perspective to the proceedings. She apparently brought Moro into the Convocation hoping that his soft voice and keen insight might help bring the disparate groups together under a single banner. She also spoke eloquently about the twin concepts of Fate and Karma; through her influence, the two were merged into the common concept of *Tamas* — Entropy — that has guided the Tradition's teachings ever since.

The fascination with Greek culture and scholarship that ran through the Italian Renaissance was a godsend to people like Pheodora. The daughter of a scholar and a midwife, she hired her considerable talents with Greek and Latin out to her father's friends — a group that included several wizards. It is said she Awakened after a near-fatal case of plague; during her weeks of sickness and recovery, Pheodora claimed she descended to the Underworld, spoke with Persephone herself, and ascended with a new stalk of grain. When planted, this grain yielded a rich wheat harvest in less than a year. Like the wheat, Pheodora soon grew, from a talented girl to a skilled magician. Her studies served her well when the Convocation summons swept across the land. When things came together, Pheodora was at the forefront.

Pheodora's skill with medicine, languages and earthly magick made her many friends during the long years of the Convocation. Many Euthanatoi healers follow her example to this day. Her Arts focused equally on the forces of life and death, and she taught that without an understanding of both, each was meaningless. She met death herself when she was only 26, a victim of a local skirmish with the Turks. Accounts claim Pheodora was administering to wounded soldiers when a band of raiders overran her campground — a fate she had foreseen a week before. Even so, she'd gone off to help, knowing she was doomed. Her last journal entry, dated several days before the raid, says simply:

I fear the caverns to dark Hades waiting past the cut threads of my youth. The cold wind beckons from across the farmer's field. Does a Field of my own, an Elysium Field, await, or a Christian fire-field for pagans such as I, or a shade-field wrapped in spirits of the dancing dead?

The fields are hungry for souls. Threads wind upon the spool. Yet I cannot refuse the call. The scales have come up even. Why should I have cause to weep? I will return anew. No Field can hold my heart.

Voormas, Grand Harvester of Souls

The sudden exposure and disappearance of the House of Helekar catapulted its longtime master Voormas from respected obscurity to hunted infamy. Though he once distinguished himself among Euthanatoi with his loyalty and efficiency, somewhere along the way he crossed the line between dutiful assassin and sadistic murderer. In his eyes, Kali dances her last steps upon the dying Earth. The Age of Iron is at hand, and Voormas considers himself a disciple of that age.

Voormas' downward spiral took many centuries, but began in the streets of old Calcutta. As a young priest of the Dark Mother, he preached the coming of the Age of Kali. As he descended into the Underworld again and again, he attained a fixation on death that rivaled the most depraved vampires'. Knowing that such a fascination would bring him under suspicion, Voormas gravitated to the hidden sect founded by Grand Harvester Helekar: The Consanguinity of Eternal Joy.

After years of faithful service, Voormas slew Helekar in a duel for the leadership of the Realm, then assumed the master's mantle. Under his command, the societies of the house moved from their original purpose — protecting the sect from outsiders — to a covert agenda of murder. At the behest of powerful spirits who claim to be avatars of Kali and Shiva, Voormas had gathered the powers of death and misery and used them to fuel the dark essence of his Realm. Over time, the House of Helekar has become a bone-dusted shrine to depravity and pain. Voormas has sheltered the Realm's true nature and purpose for nearly 200 years. That masquerade, however, has ended at last.

When agents of the Council descended on the Realm after reports of its true nature, they discovered an empty plain of dust, marked by massive footprints and copious amounts of blood and corpses. Voormas has vanished, taking the House of Helekar with him. Where he is now is anyone's guess, but the Council expects to find out soon enough.

The monumental powers at this master's command should be obvious enough; any man capable of moving a castle and sheltering it from the collected Council is more a force of nature than a mage. Despite his obvious corruption, those who know Voormas claim he's sincere. Some mysticks speculate that he went to the Nephandic Cauls long ago, but many Euthanatoi doubt that assumption. Voormas honestly believes he's serving the gods of destruction with his work, and feels that the time has come for the end of the Earth we know. Voormas' warrior-form, a huge six-armed demon with features of both Shiva and Kali, suggests either divine favor or religious insanity. Some Chakravanti secretly wonder if Voormas is right — perhaps the end *has* come.



Even so, Voormas is not immortal. Several aspirants have tried to assassinate this Grand Harvester of Souls. The lucky ones died before they reached the torture pits of Helekar. With the Council's bounty on his head, this ancient killer makes a tempting target. It is whispered, however, that whoever slays the Master of Helekar will be cursed with the same bloodlust that turned this ancient mage into the king of killers. Kali has no answer. She only dances, laughs and dances some more.

Senex

"The Old Man," they call him. Even when he was young, many knew him by that name. Wise beyond his years, Senex once befriended the Seer Akrites Salonikas (see **Cult of Ecstasy** and **The Fragile Path**). Noting the young mystick's serious demeanor, Akrites christened him Senex, or "Old Man." The name stuck for nearly 500 years.

Senex's real name and origins are lost to time. His confidantes, who are few and far between, know he studied magick in Great Zimbabwe early in the 16th century. By the time the city fell, he was an accomplished sorcerer with an aptitude for Fate-based Arts and divination. In contrast to his flamboyant fellow mysticks, Senex advocated subtlety. His preference probably kept him alive during the long witch-hunts of the age. Though he has been credited with hundreds of impressive feats, he rarely "signs" his work. It's the Old Man's way to simply appear, act and fade away.

Although he's a known foe of the Technocracy, Senex prefers to teach than to kill. Unlike many of his contemporaries, the Old Man maintains close ties with young mages, and stays fluent in their ways. Although he supposedly retreated from the earthly realm several centuries ago, he often reappears for short visits. During two such journeys, Senex took apprentices. The first was a Spanish peasant named Mercedes; the second was an American assassin named Amanda. Word has begun to spread in certain circles that Mercedes (or Mercy) has been reborn in Amanda, but no one knows whether the corruption that caused Senex to kill the first apprentice has carried through in the second. Only time will tell.

As one might expect, Senex's name carries a great deal of weight among Euthanatoi. Although he declined a position on the Council in favor of remaining in his isolated Chantry on Cerberus, Senex has many allies throughout the Traditions. Some Chakravanti prophets claim the Old Man plays an important part in destiny's game. With the House of Helekar's disappearance and Senex's role in the hunt, some mages speculate that a showdown between the Old Man and the archmage Voormas might be in store....

Despite his age, Senex resembles a middle-aged black man in good health. His voice, unaccented by his many dialects, glides smoothly across parables, jests and soft formalities. No one doubts the power such a mage must have at his command, but Senex just smiles and extends his hand. He has no need for shows of force. The Old Man is a shadow, a murmur, a soft campfire. He has no need to be anything more than that.



Appendix: The Jewels of Kali काल्या मण्यः

*In art and dreams, may you proceed with abandon
In life, may you proceed with balance and stealth*
— Patti Smith

Coumatha: The Crossroads of Styles



*Go forth, under the open sky, and list
To Nature's teachings, while from all
around—*

*Earth and her waters, and the depths of
air—*

Comes a still voice...

—William Cullen Bryant, "Thanatopsis"

Connected at a crossroad, the Euthanatoi gather from four different points on the magickal map. From the oldest corner come the Hindu mysticks whose language and perspective have left the deepest mark on the Tradition. From the cold north, the Celtic followers of Annwn and the Morrigan bring their affinity for the hidden world. The Greek pagans of Persephone and Hades add a ritualistic flavor filled with dark caves, secret languages and immutable Fate. Finally, the practitioners of voodoo (an eclectic path in itself) take up the fallen standard of the old

Mayan wizards, mixing the primal spirit Arts, modern refinements, and their own close affinity with death.

The meeting place is death itself, and the life that springs from death. In that circle, all four roads come together. Newer styles have risen like weeds from the fertile dirt in the center of the Tradition — techno-Euthanatoi and Romantics who meld the old ways with science and occultism. Death mages are nothing if not resourceful.

Drawing from these diverse magickal styles (see **Mage**, pages 72-73, 179-182), this Tradition has forged an eclectic practice based on the nine Arts, its native beliefs and the certainties of death, decay and resurrection. Like their close cousins, the Ecstasy Cultists and the Verbena, the Chakravanti observe the eternal flux of creation. Some personify it as gods. Some treat it as principles or natural forces, but all agree on one point: All things die, but death is not an ending.



Hindus

These Euthanatoi focus themselves on the ascending order of things. By becoming one with that order, meditating on it and transcending mortal views, a mage can stir the dust into patterns of his own design. He does not change *dharma* (the principle of cosmic duty); he changes *karma* (the principle of action and result). By making things come to pass, he causes other things to follow. Such mages prefer to be called Chakravanti; the name indicatess their place in the Great Cycle. Outside most mortals' *dharma*, they follow sacred steps in the dance of death and rebirth.

Indian mysticks often favor Tantrik arts (which focus internal energies and discipline the body and mind), religious symbols, offerings, prayers and sacrifices of the self and of others. While Kali and Shiva are the obvious symbols of Hindu Chakravanti, the power of the lotus (which they often wear in some form) is more important than the sword.

Celtic Pagans and Romantics

An oppressed and hidden minority since before the Council's days, these mysticks share a strong tie to the Verbena. While the latter focus on the "life" side of the Cycle, though, Thanatoics favor death and decay. To them, the autumn wind that sweeps the dead leaves from the trees and scatters them to the ground where they fertilize the spring grasses is a powerful symbol for the Thanatoics' own role in creation. Many Romantics seized on the same concepts during the 1800s, and their neo-Gothic descendants follow them today.

Celtic Euthanatoi favor prayers to their gods, samples of the elements, group rituals, blood sacrifices, ashes and body parts. Like Verbena, they often give their own blood as part of a greater working. Some modern Romantics add Tarot cards or dice to their workings, but most traditional pagans leave such elements alone.

Greeks

The most formal Thanatoics follow the Greek and Arabic refinements. Combining pagan worship with the concept of Fate, divination and near-Hermetic rituals, these intellectuals lay low out of habit. During the Convocation, these Greeks hid from the Turks who occupied their homeland. Close study during those shadowy years brought them into contact with the survivors of forbidden Arab sects. Their secret codes and hidden meeting places melded with older legacies: the Eleusean mysteries, rural pagan observances and the complex chants and diagrams of Arabic and Egyptian magick. Greek Euthanatoi insist on the proper use of the plural and get indignant when someone calls them "The Euthanatos."

Subtle and ritualistic, these Thanatoics prefer to divine a course before taking any action. Their style includes complex chants, prayers to Greek gods (often Persephone,

Kore, Hecate and Hades), and fruits, wheat, water and dust. Purification is extraordinarily important to followers of the Greek style; to them, killing leaves a blood-taint that can only be purged with ritual baths and prayers.

Voodooists

The Tradition's newest members are used to war. In the Caribbean Gulf, this tiny contingent (which prefers the name *Ta Kiti*) contends with vampires, angry spirits, the hostile Bata'a (see **The Book of Crafts**), and an endless cycle of disease and poverty. These Voodooists have more strength in the cities of North America, where there's more room to move — and to hide. These dreaded mysticks, more militant than many of their kind, personify the Spheres as loa spirits. To invoke their magicks, they make pleas and sacrifices to the appropriate loa (Legba, Damballah, Erzulie, Baron Samedi and sometimes even Chango) and open themselves to possession.

These mysticks favor a bloody style that ties Catholic symbolism, African and Native American spirit arts, and modern technology together. They often use prayers, the elements, sacrificial offerings, music, dance, salt, sugar and body parts to move the Wheel through the blessings of the spirits.

Techno-Euthanatos

The smallest yet fastest-growing segment of the Tradition melds all of the other styles together, combining them in a metaphysical soup of chaos theory, advanced mathematics, computer hacking and biomanipulation. Many of the more "traditional" Euthanatoi consider these bastard mysticks to be little better than Technocrats, and few outsiders can tell the difference between a techno-Euthanatos and a Virtual Adept or a mad Progenitor.

To a techno-Euthanatos, science and philosophy prove the inherent mortality of concepts. Objects, beings, ideas — all disintegrate under stress and reform as new and different things. This breakdown fascinates the technos, who would rather purge a database than kill a person. These mad mages channel their Arts through computer terminals, viruses (both data and biological), complex mathematical equations, high-powered weapons and mind-altering drugs. Many Euthanatoi keep their distance when these guys go to work. Who's to say what'll happen when the chaos theory comes true?





The Nine Arts

Where there is magic, there is no death.

— Joseph Campbell



Like many Traditions, the Thanatoics agree on nine key elements of reality but disagree about what to call them. While the formal terms discussed below constitute the “orthodox” titles for the Spheres, many Euthanatoi ignore them. The principles behind the names, however, are generally agreed upon within the Tradition’s ranks. Some traditional occultists prefer to use titles from their own cultures rather than the ones below, and many modern-day Thanatoics simply use the most common names for the Spheres — Correspondence, Entropy and so on — or teach the principles without degrading them with names.

Correspondence — *Avayavin*, “The Whole”

To the Euthanatoi, all things are connected by a primal thread. Euthanatoi who prefer the Greek elements of their cult refer to Correspondence as “Ariadne’s Thread”; those who use voodoo magicks simply call on Legba, the Opener of the Ways. Either way, this Sphere calls upon the whole to share one thing with another.

Entropy — *Tamas*, “Dark Inertia”

Tamas is the truth of inertia and decay, the principle that all things break apart. Although some death mages view this Sphere as Fate, Karma, Probability or Baron Samedi, most simply call it Tamas. A Euthanatos can plan the course of Fate by observing and channeling this dark inevitability,

One of the Euthanatoi’s great achievements was the melding of Fate — the immutable will of the gods — with karma and dharma and the eternal Cycle. By finding the common ground and staking a claim to it, the original founders brought the four roads together in the soil of death. Thus, the Art has become their symbol and their specialty.

Forces — *Tejas*, “The Shining Power”

Energy is the Shining Power, the inner fire of all things. To touch it is to caress creation’s heartbeat. By shifting this attention to the elements, a Euthanatos moves the world. It’s a handy skill to have when the Wheel needs to be put in balance.

Life — *Prana*, “Life Breath”

Life is the dance of the spark in the flesh, the essence that bonds matter, mind and spirit into one. It quivers between the living world and the Shadowlands, waiting to be shifted into some new miracle. Like Persephone, life rises out of the Underworld. Most Euthanatoi learn Prana as a second Art. To understand death, you must appreciate life.

Matter — *Pakriti*, “Form”

Without Prana, matter is form only, separate from spirit and consciousness. Even so, the principle of Pakriti teaches that all objects pulse with the drive to manifest. To shape a thing, you must direct this drive. Do so with respect, and the forms will recall your name.

Mind — *Manas*, “Mind”

The mind is part of the living whole, the sentience that lingers after Life has failed and Spirit has fled. The ghosts who shimmer in the Twilight Lands anchor their souls through force of will. The living shape matter with the mind’s creative power. Manas binds Life, Matter and Spirit, wraps them together and gives them a purpose. To see into the mind is to understand what makes someone whole.

Prime — *Vac*, “Speech”

Vac is the primal Word, the Om from which the world was made. This vibration echoes in the veins of the world, resounding in the shapes that we perceive. Vac is far more than the sounds we hear — it is the echoing song of the cosmos.

Spirit — *Cit*, “Consciousness”

The Inner Ghost is potential in motion, shaped by the world it feeds. Without it, no living or unliving thing can exist. Spirit is consciousness itself, not the reflection of the mind, but the soul behind it.

Time — *Sat*, “Being”

Time is a Wheel, an endless cycle within endless cycles. Kali, Chronos, Legba — all of them stand outside of Time and open the door. Time forms the limits of our world and guides the Tamas on its path. Only the unmanifest and the truly enlightened can rise above the Wheel and watch it from outside its cycle.

The Tenth Sphere: *Akasha* — “The Void and Well”

Outside creation is the Void, the well of all things that are when creation is not. To harness it, as the Brotherhood seeks to do, is to step outside the world of forms and dip your fingers in unformed chaos. Akasha is potential outside creation, the cosmos in pure form. Disagreements over this view of infinity continue to this day in the halls of Horizon and the Chantries of the Euthanatoi and the Brotherhood. How can one define what drifts beyond description?





Siddi: The Chakravanti Arts



He knew what he knew: that the real world was full of magic, so magical worlds could easily be real.

— Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

Loosely translated, *Siddi* means “Mystick Power Gained from Meditation” or “Inner Energy Set Free to do Great Works.” Chalech supposedly chose this word because it summed up the Tradition’s ideal: By focusing yourself through discipline and meditation, you unlock the power swirling inside, the power of creation’s Cycle — the power of life and death.

Like their Ecstatic cousins, Chakravanti recognize the miraculous nature of creation. Some savor each fleeting sensation while others glide through life silently, brushing their fingers across each surface but never holding on. If most Euthanatoi seem somber, it’s because they recognize the passing nature of the world. By dying and returning to life, they see the precious yet fragile nature of the living world, and they defend it with a fanatic’s zeal. A life is fleeting, a world is not. Reincarnation’s not worth much if there’s nothing left to come back to.

Death is, of course, the Euthanatoi calling card. It follows them in a hundred forms, drifting through their

magickal Arts and coloring the world as they pass. Everyone expects it of them, and they do seem to be the masters of it. The mastery gained from agamas, study and hard-won experience gives Chakravanti an edge when dealing with death magick. This edge offers shadow magicks to those who can stand the cost.

Jhor: The Death-Taint

Death? What do you know about death?

— Liers in Wait, “Blood and Family”

Death makes a fascinating companion. He’s such an interesting acquaintance that some people, including many Euthanatoi, don’t know when to ask him to leave. Once you make peace with death, he tends to make himself at home.

Those who deal too closely with death begin to share its taint. At first, people simply shy away from the mage in question; over time, comfort with death turns to fascination and sometimes to obsession. The touch of mortality follows the mystick, sometimes killing insects and flowers in her presence. Sometimes, this effect becomes severe enough to kill small animals and chase healthier ones away. The aura of death becomes so strong that it erodes the mage’s sanity and her soul. Most Thanatoics who turn *barabbi* reach this point just before the Fall. Death becomes such a fixture in their lives that life itself flees their presence.



In game terms, death-taint begins to take over when a Euthanatos:

- Relies too heavily on magicks involving death or decay;
- Kills too frequently (especially with magick);
- Suffers some extremely traumatic event (torture, a friend's damnation);
- Spends unhealthy amounts of time around dead bodies and ghosts, or;
- Continually botches Entropy or death-related spells, or suffers Paradox backlashes of 5 points or more with such Effects.

Jhor points are noted on a character's sheet (see page 72). The Storyteller might have a Euthanatos player roll his Jhor level if something really traumatic happens (torture, a friend's death, etc.). If a critical event occurs, the player may make a Willpower roll to avoid deepening the death-taint. The roll's difficulty begins at 4 and goes up by +1 for each level of the character's existing taint. A Chakravat with two dots in Jhor makes his rolls at difficulty 6. Success means the Jhor actually falls one level (stopping at a base of zero, or difficulty 4). Failure keeps the taint at its current level. A botch gives the character an additional point of Jhor. This rating is permanent until some story event (see below) works the taint away.

All Chakravanti know the importance of keeping a balanced approach to death. Lose that balance, and you become the next Voormas, a symbol of what everyone fears from your Tradition. Death carries a powerful Resonance (Mage, page 71); if you can't control such energies, they will control you — and consume you.

Jhor begins as a morbid curiosity and progresses through the following stages:

1: The mage feels drawn to death. Her conversations grow morbid; her wardrobe assumes mourning colors; her dreams feature death and burial motifs. People smile tightly while she speaks.

2: The mage feels compelled to seek death out. She may haunt graveyards, read Romantic poetry, rent all six parts of the *Faces of Death* series, and so on. If there's a body (or an undead creature) around, she'll spend lots of time in its presence. People and animals become distinctly uncomfortable around the mage, and avoid her company.

3: The mage grows exceedingly morbid. She never goes out in sunlight, and seems incapable of talking about anything without bringing up death. Her dreams become horror movies that fascinate and repulse her at the same time. Most "normal" folks keep their distance, and animals slink away.

4: Death becomes the mystick's companion. She begins to show signs of corruption to those who can see them. Her aura blackens, and misty clouds surround her in the spirit world. To shapeshifters, she "stinks of the Wyrn." Mortal people and animals grow physically uncomfortable

if the mage is around, and her dreams and conversations stay completely in shadow.

5: Things begin to die when the mystick is around. Flowers wither, flies drop and grass turns brown as she passes. Children run screaming from the mage's presence, and her own thoughts make Edgar Allen Poe look cheerful. Living creatures instinctively avoid the mage whenever possible, and she becomes a psychic vampire, feeding off any vitality in her presence. If things don't die on their own, the mage might kill them herself. Mere death is no longer enough to satisfy her — now she wants to watch things suffer.

It's often hard to tell when you're on the way down the slope. Most Euthanatoi hover somewhere between the first and second stages just as a matter of course. When the mage notices her deterioration, she can sometimes fight the effects by making a serious effort to steer her thoughts away from death (through Willpower rolls) until her sense of balance returns. Long meditations on life and rebirth can also be helpful.

At stage three and onward, Flaws (see **The Book of Shadows**) begin to manifest — Flaws like Dark Fate, Haunted, Psychic Vampire, Spirit Magnet (Banes) and Throwback. The final stages of Jhor are difficult to escape. Only an agama, a Seeking or a prolonged purification ritual can bring a mystick back from the fourth or fifth stages. An Euthanatos at the fifth stage doesn't *want* to come back; death has become the only thing she values. She must be brought back — or destroyed — by her companions.

The Endless Breath: Euthanatos Necromancy

In the future — and I never thought I'd hear myself saying this — no more dead people in the living room!

— Blossom

To the uninitiated, all Euthanatoi are necromancers. It's not true, but it's a common misconception. While they do *study* death and the dead, most Chakravanti avoid actually *using* death magicks. Such Arts carry Jhor, and can be more trouble than they're worth.

Even so, necromancy — the Art of raising or channeling the dead, or of rousing their remains — is a specialty of certain Tradition sects. The Ta Kiti, in particular, are especially drawn to spells that call the dead forth. Most necromantic rituals involve summoning ghosts to some appointed place, but some draw on the *essence* of death rather than on Restless souls. The most disgusting forms of the Art of Corpses do just that — they reanimate dead bodies, or pieces of them. Even Euthanatoi look darkly on sorcerers who would move the bodies of the dead. There's something obscene about commanding that which used to be alive as if it still were.

• Calling Ghosts

The most common form of death magick involves calling up ghosts. In story terms, the necromancer lays out artifacts from the departed, goes into a trance and demands the wraith's attention. Depending on the mystick and the ghost, their "discussion" can range from an affectionate request to a threat. Once the "conversation" is over, the mystick dismisses the wraith, who returns to the Underworld.

In game terms, the mage should have a Fetter or two (see **Wraith: The Oblivion**, pages 41-42) in addition to his usual foci. The Fetter won't compel the ghost to attend, but it helps. Most wraiths will do anything to protect their Fetters — destroying such ties sends the ghost into torments called *Harrowings*. Calling the wraith simply requires Spirit 2. Ordering it around against its will demands Spirit 4 and a lot of luck. The mage's success depends on the spirit's temperament, location and current state. It's much easier to call a ghost who recently died in the room where the Euthanatos stands than it is to summon the wraith of Hitler from the banks of the Ganges River.

As many Euthanatos have discovered the hard way, Entropy has a nasty effect on ghosts. It works easily (-2 difficulty), but literally brings out the worst in a wraith — his Shadow. Each success grants the wraith a point of Angst and forces him to make an immediate Willpower roll (difficulty = the mage's successes + 5). Failure unlocks the Spectre waiting inside every ghost. Gods help everyone around then....

Necromantic Animation

Successes	Amount of Animated Material
One	A few bones or small part (a finger)
Two	A complex part (a hand)
Three	A limb or head
Four	Several limbs and a torso
Five	A whole body

Any sensible necromancer knows how to ward an area to protect it from ghosts (**Wraith**, page 288). Since the consequences of botched death magick can be pretty severe, a Chakravat often wards himself inside a protective circle away from the Fetter. Such circles often include blood, salt, water, herbs or all of the above. More sophisticated necromancers inscribe their wards with Hermetic glyphs and call friendly spirits for additional protection. Such summonings can get very crowded if everything goes according to plan!

Not every soul can be summoned by necromancy. Many of the dead simply pass into Oblivion; others may lack Fetters and are barred from the lands of the living. If a Euthanatos tries to summon someone whose soul has passed beyond (into either Oblivion or Transcendence), he will fail. Instead, he might conjure either a floating memory of the lost individual, summoned forth from the Tempest, or a Spectre, which may have acquired knowledge of the lost soul by devouring its memory.

Wraiths (including Spectres) without Fetters *cannot* be summoned unless they wish to be. Such wraiths, with the exception of those rare few who have Resolved their Fetters, are physically damaged by merely visiting the Shadowlands, and few have any wish to do so at the bidding of a mere mortal mage.

• Reanimation

A gruesome form of necromancy reanimates dead bodies (or parts of bodies) at the sorcerer's command. An infamous "trademark" of the Ta Kiti, this Art evokes nightmares even from a Euthanatos' allies! In story terms, the body parts require extensive preparation to make them receptive to Thanatoic magick. Charms are spoken, herbs sprinkled and spirits invoked. The ghost of the departed may or may not be joined with the corpse, depending on the mage's wishes and sadism, through a spirit-binding ritual. A final command manipulates the dead flesh into a puppet-like state.

In game terms, animating dead tissue simply demands Life 2/ Prime 2; bare bones require Matter 2/ Prime 2. The number of successes determines how much dead material the necromancer can raise or animate. Locking the spirit into the body requires an additional Spirit 4 Effect.

• Necrosynthesis

The darkest necromantic Arts unleash the essence of death itself. Channeled through living beings, this "liquid mortality" withers flesh, crumbles bones, rots organs and destroys senses and reflexes. An especially foul form of necrosynthesis breeds parasites or viruses by transforming the victim's life energies into new patterns that feed on his body as it dies. Needless to say, these evil secrets are considered, shall we say, bad form by the Tradition as a



whole; they're sure ways to stack your karmic deck with all the wrong cards!

In game terms, the Euthanatos character calls up the essence of decay through Entropy 4/ Life 3; the result resembles the fourth level of Nephandic Qlippothic Entropy (**The Book of Madness**, pages 22-24): The victim's body bursts into a hideous, agonizing spasm of mutations, suffering aggravated damage as per the usual chart but crumbling into a corrupt mass in the process. A character killed this way is dead for *good* unless some Master of Life can restore the body through potent vulgar magicks (10 successes or more).

Most cultures — certainly all modern ones — persecute known necromancers. Practitioners of these Arts tend to hide themselves well, indeed, even from their fellow mages. The Chakravanti know the risks and stigma necromancy bears; a careless death wizard may find out more than he really wants to know about mortality...and its aftermath.

Fingers of Light: Foci

As the "Crossroads of Styles" section asserts, Euthanatoi employ any number of ritual tools, and use them in many ways. Regardless of the practice itself, most Thanatoics take ritual precautions before and after a working, and direct their will with care. When you're playing with the powers of life, death and fate, an extra safeguard is worth the effort.

The most common Chakravanti foci include:

- **Asceticism:** Various ascetic practices, from fasting to lying on spikes, can focus any number of spells. It should be noted that ascetic practices are anything but fun or pleasant. Self-mutilation — a common feature in voodoo and Tantrik magick — falls under this gruesome heading. Such sacrifices involve driving nails through body parts, slitting open veins, tattooing and even skinning oneself alive. The ultimate sacrifice — death — is considered the ultimate offering and is said to do great things.

- **Bells and Drums:** Percussion instruments, which mimic the heartbeat, find their way into many styles, especially Hindu and voodoo practices.

- **Bones:** Vital links between life, death and the mage, bones may be carved into tools (dice, weapons, etc.), waved as wands, burned into ash or broken to release a Chakravat's intentions.

- **Canes, Sticks or Wands:** Often carved of bone or blessed wood, these "legs" symbolize the power of divine law, directing the mage's will at some transgressor. Many Euthanatos, especially voodooists and Romantics, carry some form of cane or staff.

- **Computers:** The Lakshmists' favorite toys, computers and other number-crunching devices allow a mage to shift probability on a grand scale. Most techno-Euthanatos link their systems to other lines, scattering the desired

results like poisoned grain, sabotaging security controls or disseminating chaos propaganda across the internet.

- **Dance:** This classic focus conducts energy through the body and focuses the mind outward. As exhaustion sets in, consciousness takes wing.

- **Dice, Cards and Lots:** Games of chance are traditional pastimes in India; cards, especially Tarot decks, found their way into occultism long ago. The connections between fate, mortality and random "chance" make cards and dice natural foci for Thanatoic workings, and all styles use them.

- **Drugs and Poisons:** The essence of distilled mortality, poisons find their way into all sorts of rites, from Awakenings to assassinations. Most Euthanatos drink drams of poison, giving themselves a "small taste of death" just before entering a trance or a fight. Vision drugs, like absinthe, opium, hashish and LSD, channel the mage's thoughts to a higher plane, while certain spirits (especially voodoo loa) demand offerings of tobacco, rum or wine before they'll assist a mage.

Rather than compiling an exhaustive list of poisons and their game effects (which is beyond the scope of this book), a Storyteller can simply assign a story effect to a toxin, give the target a chance to discover or survive the attack, and declare the outcome in story terms. A Perception + Alertness, Subterfuge or Poisons roll could give the target a chance to discover the poison. A Stamina, soak or Willpower roll might offer the victim a chance to shrug off the worst effects, while a Stamina + Meditation, Herbalism or Occult roll could reflect a mind-over-body purging.

The **Destiny's Price** sourcebook offers a number of common drugs and poisons and their effects on pages 116 and 119, in addition to details about the black market and a host of vicious weapons.

- **Eye Contact:** The eyes are the windows to the soul. By making eye contact, a mage can bind his shadow across another's spirit. The Chakravanti claim it's an easy jump between the glance in the eye and the beat of the heart.

- **Fetters:** Essential parts of necromancy, Fetters link the Restless Dead with the living world. Anything can be a Fetter, so long as it has some deep connection to the ghost in question. A mage with a wraith's Fetter can negotiate bargains, command service or shatter the ghost's connections to the living world. While Fetters hold no real power in and of themselves, they're vital to those who deal with the Restless Dead.

- **Fire:** The sacrificial fire is the gateway to heaven. Bodies, bones and herbs are often burned, and brands are heated to purify cold steel into living fire. Flame is warmth, destruction and divinity, and finds its way into all Euthanatos practices.

- **Fruits, Seeds, Juices and Flowers:** The old gives way to the new through juices and seeds. Most Euthanatos eat



fruits, grind them into pulp or drink their juices, then scatter the seeds and rinds to foster new growth. Figs, grapes and pomegranates are important symbols within the Tradition, while flowers like the lotus and the jasmine adorn the mages or their sacred sites.

- **Mantras:** Sound is one of the most important symbolic tools in India; mantras — symbols of the First Sound — form the key to the cosmos itself. It's important to know the proper mantra and *exactly* how to pronounce it. A mage using a mantra incorrectly may find it ineffective if not downright dangerous. Mantras can only be passed on orally; written mantras are "dead" and supposedly have no power. Some Euthanatoi (especially orthodox Chakravanti) recite entire texts during important rituals. Time-consuming as this may be, it's considered a potent exercise of willpower, devotion and spiritual purity.

- **Meditation:** A meditative trance focuses the mind and allows one to examine one's thoughts. Such reflections (standard training in all Euthanatos styles) don't have to be elaborate; a trained meditator can clear her mind in moments.

- **Purification:** "Don't track mud on Death's doormat" is a common Thanatoic jest. Simply put, the Euthanatoi believe in cleaning up — physically, emotionally and spiritually — before going to work. Methods include bath-

ing, branding, firewalking, incense-breathing, meditation and rigorous ordeals.

- **Sacrifice:** Offerings, whether of ghee, herbs or human lives, form the backbone of Vedic ritual. Voodoo practices always involve some sort of sacrifice, as do many Greek rites. Although they prefer to avoid innocent blood sacrifice these days, the "death mages" still labor under a murderous stigma brought about, to a degree, by their belief in sacrifice. The Good Death is another thing entirely; in the eyes of most Euthanatoi, a bad life put to a good end serves the common cause better than a lost soul continuing to spread its poison does.

- **Sex:** The obvious link between an orgasm's "little death" and the Real Thing creates a powerful sympathetic bridge across sex magick. Despite preconceptions, Euthanatos sex rites (like those of many Cultist cousins) are precise and sensual, rising from contact to climax along a series of postures and refinements that take them light-years beyond simple rutting. Many Tantriks abstain from orgasm to reach immortality, redirecting their mystic energies — *ojas* — into powerful longevity spells, while less ambitious mages focus those *ojas* into their willcraft.

- **Water:** Like death itself, water is a transitional force, deep and unknowable. Like death, it purifies by sweeping away. To Hindu Euthanatoi, the water of the sacred Ganges river is most effective; voodooists prefer holy or salted

water; Celtic mages prefer samples from the rivers of their homelands. Some Greek Euthanatoi supposedly use water from the River Styx itself, but that claim is suspect. Some mages even use spit.

In game terms, the different types of water make little or no difference; a Storyteller *might* offer an additional -1 reduction to a Euthanatos' difficulty if she uses a "special" type of water as a unique focus (**Mage**, page 182). If she prefers to make the water itself special, the Storyteller might consider such sacred fluid to be Tass. Otherwise, water is simply water, a ritual tool to be sprinkled, washed or poured over the subject of the mystick's Arts.

- **Weapons:** See below.

- **Yantras:** A yantra is a visual mantra, a geometric design that symbolizes a deity's power or some essential force. Yantras are drawn, then either sat in or stared at during meditation. Sometimes the drawing itself forms a focus as the mage weaves the pattern of the yantra together in a visual design.

Fingers of Iron: Weapons

Euthanatoi from traditional backgrounds employ a variety of exotic weapons, especially in situations in which style is important. After all, it's a lot more impressive to slash through a crack gang with a hunga-munga than it is to simply shoot them. Many of the weapons below provide magickal foci, badges of office, physical discipline and a sense of style. The Chakravanti are a graceful lot, and their tools betray a certain flair.

Just as many Euthanatoi avoid killing, many others prefer modern firepower to the shaft, dart and blade, yet most Thanatoic killers carry some sort of blade in addition to, or in place of, a firearm. Whether or not a given character clings to so-called "archaic" arms or moves with the times depends entirely on the mystick in question, her history, and the player's wishes. A host of additional weapons can be found among the following books: **The Vampire**

Weapons				
Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Conceal	Notes
Blowgun	7	2	J	Often poisoned; worthless in wind (Range: 10 yards)
Cat Claws, small	4	Strength +1	P	Adds +2 dice to climbing (in palm)
Cat Claws, large	5	Strength +2	J	(extends over fingers from back of hand)
Garrote, cloth	6	Strength	P	See note, p.66
Garrote, wire	6	Strength +1	P	See above
Hunga-Munga	5	Strength +5	T	Can be thrown (Range: Strength x 3 yards)
Katar, small	5	Strength +1	P	
Katar, large	6	Strength +2	J	
Kris	5	Strength +3	J	
Kukri, small	5	Strength +3	J	
Kukri, large	6	Strength +5	N	
Ninja-to	4	Strength +2	J	
Stiletto	4	Strength +1	P	

Players Guide, Destiny's Price, Akashic Brotherhood and World of Darkness: Combat.

- **Blowguns** are common weapons in grasslands, rain forests and darkened alleys. Some commando and espionage agencies use lightweight break-down versions of these simple weapons. Although the dart itself is almost useless for anything other than annoying the target, most blowgun users poison the dart-tip (see "Drugs and Poisons," above). Obviously, high winds, rain, and low visibility render a blowgun all but useless. When a character uses a blowgun, the player rolls her Dexterity + Archery unless the Storyteller chooses to allow a separate Blowgun Skill.

- **Cat's Claws** can be found in several variations, from the African *chui kisu* to Japanese *shuko* and Indian *bagh nakh*. These strap-on blades or spikes run in a bar under or over the knuckles. Depending on the length of the blades, they can rake and grapple, or simply slash a target to ribbons. The shorter varieties allow the wearer to get a grip on walls, and include a set of counterparts to be worn on the feet. The long blades, which stretch across the back of the hand, don't confer any bonus to climbing attempts. Both variations make it difficult to use your hands.

- A **Garrote** loops around a target's throat and strangles him quickly and quietly. It's a difficult weapon to use; an assassin must be strong enough to hold the victim and brutal enough to choke him to death from behind. The traditional tools of the Thuggee include garrotes made of silk kerchiefs with a coin inside; these strangling cords function like the thinner garrotes of hemp, leather or piano wire (see chart).

A Euthanatos must use both hands to strangle someone with a garrote. After the character sneaks up on the victim, the player needs at least three successes on a Dexterity + Brawl roll (see chart for difficulty) for the victim to be unaware. The victim doesn't take any damage during the first turn of the attack, but suffers the weapon's damage each turn thereafter. Unless he breaks free (which generally requires a resisted Strength roll between the assassin and her victim, with the latter suffering +2 to his difficulty), the target cannot speak, shout or soak damage from the attack. The Euthanatos inflicts her weapon's damage against the target until she relents or he dies.

It's worth mentioning that a garrote is useless against opponents who don't need to breathe (like vampires or HIT Marks), and difficult to use against animals or certain Bygones. Neck protection (or especially large throats) render strangling weapons useless. Choking a person to death is a long, ugly process; would-be stranglers should be aware that this kind of assassination is neither easy nor humane.

- A **Hunga-Munga** is one of the most intimidating hand weapons ever devised. Thick cutting blades project out from the handle in almost every direction, balancing

out the weapon's heft and providing every side with a cutting edge. A strong combatant can throw a hunga-munga some distance, and pity whoever's on the other end! An African weapon favored during the late colonial period, this vicious piece of work was valued as currency by some tribes of the time.

- The **Katar** (a.k.a. *punch dagger* or *bundi*) consists of a thick blade attached to a crosspiece gripped in the killer's hand. As the assassin punches, the blade thrusts deep inside his target, piercing armor and breaking bones. Katars range from small pocket-punchers to huge spiked blades, and look pretty intimidating, even from a distance.

- The **Kris**, best known for its wavy blade, has a long history with cultures from India to the Philippines. Some varieties, which inflict an extra die of damage, are longer, thicker and harder to conceal.

- The infamous Indian **Kukri** comes in several different sizes, from a brutal curved knife to a 4-1/2-pound monstrosity used to decapitate cape buffalo.

- A perfect assassin's sword, the **Ninja-To** consists of a thick handle, a sharp single-edged blade, and a scabbard which often contains blinding powder, garrotes, blowgun darts or other surprises. This functional blade is strong enough to be used as a pick and straight enough to provide a stepladder to an agile (and light!) killer.

- **Stiletos** fit in small, hidden places. Long, round, often poisoned, these needle-knives are popular with secret agents, female assassins and rough gamblers. Though risky to use in open combat, a stiletto offers the element of surprise. Before you see it, it's in your heart.

Ripples of the Living World (Rotes)

Although they're noted for violent magicks (**Rip the Man-Body**, **Little Good Death** and **Slay Machine** from **Mage**, or **Talons**, **Bone Twisting Palm** and **The Poison Maiden** from **The Book of Shadows**), the Euthanatoi call upon a variety of spells — healings, emotional bonds, spirit summonings and acts of fortune. More often than not, their reputation comes from extreme circumstances; most Euthanatoi are so subtle that you never see them working. Where'd that bowl of rice come from? How'd she know about that file? Isn't it lucky that the dealer picked that card when all the chips were down? The Chakravanti simply smiles and lets Lakshmi dance.

The "Euthanatos Necromancy" section, above, details several of the Tradition's darker secrets. Some other common "trademarks" include:

See the **Soul's Burn** (•• **Entropy**, • **Mind**, • **Spirit**)

One of the first and most important secrets an initiate learns is the soul-sight — the gaze that reveals a man's guilt or innocence. Most Hindus and Greeks stare into a person's eyes; Ta Kiti do the same, often adding some kind of veiled

threat or incantation; some Euthanatoi prefer to shuffle cards and base their opinions on a draw, while others study the subject's aura for telltale black ripples or smudges. Either way, the truth becomes plain.

[This coincidental Effect offers a hunch about the subject's state of soul. It is not telepathy, and will not reveal a person's deeds, just the state of his spirit (digging into his mind requires Mind 3). Everyone has some minor sins on her soul; real targets — including Nephandi, Infernalists, mass murderers, rapists, etc. — bear corrupt ripples which spread as their guilt compounds — the Jhor (see above). The greater the taint, the easier it is to detect.

[The subject's own feelings influence the "visibility" of the taint. A guilt-ridden killer would stand out plainly (one success), while a poker-faced manipulator would be harder to spot (three successes). Supernatural concealments — Arcane, mental **Shield** spells, etc. — deduct successes from the Euthanatos' total, making the taint more difficult to see. A person who's aware of the mage's scrutiny might oppose the Effect with a Willpower roll (see **Mage**, page 167). Note that a Euthanatos who realizes that her magick is being consciously *blocked* will follow her target until she finds out why.]

Balance the Scales (•• Entropy, or ••• Entropy and •• Life, Matter or even Forces)

A Chakravat's most underrated weapon is her command of fate and fortune. A simple shrug of probability makes doors stick, guns jam, tires blow, chairs break and roulette wheels stop on command. Luck — good and bad — follows these mysticks around like a puppy, and all of them turn it to their advantage, balancing the cosmic scales for the common good.

Coming, as so many do, from the underclass, Euthanatoi use their talents to reward the honest poor and to punish the rich with a bit of humility. One flamboyant Euthanatos, Oliver Wiseman, is renowned for walking through casinos and making the slot machines pay out to people who deserve a break. The scales tilt the other way, too, pauperizing folks with more money than heart. The Locksmiths hold contests to unseat tycoons through sudden "market shifts." Some Chakravanti "attach" good or ill fortune to a person, an object or even a breeze, sending their blessings or curses to linger long after a mage herself is gone. They pass the luck through a kiss, handshake, blessing or curse and allow fate to take over from there.

[A smart Euthanatos uses this Effect in coincidental ways. Small "accidents" are best; the bigger the "surprise," the more obvious the tampering becomes. One success is enough to effect small changes (a lucky card, a stuck door); more extensive "fortunes" (lottery payoffs, lost pursuers) should be harder to control (two or three successes), and outrageous turns of fate demand some great success (five or more). The Rank 2 version of this Effect lasts for a single incident; to cause more "coincidences," the Chakravat must cast the spell again.

[By "keying" a lucky Effect to a person (Life), object (Matter) or element (Forces), the mage can lay a blessing or curse on that subject (**Mage**, page 193). This demands more

skill with Entropy, but lasts longer than the single incident controlled by Entropy 2. The greater the success, the longer the "touch" lasts and the greater its effects.

[Remember that Entropy alone cannot create something that did not exist before; it only moves what is already in motion. Storytellers should invoke the "domino effect" (**Mage**, page 165) if a death-mage juggles too many coincidences in too short a time.]

Iron Avatar (••• Life, ••• Matter, •• Mind, •• Prime)

By attuning herself to the essence of Kali, a Chakravat assumes the guise of her goddess. (Male Euthanatoi channel Shiva the Destroyer, instead.) As sharp blades grow from her nimble hands, she spins into a dance of blood and madness that ends when her enemies have been reduced to severed limbs.

[This infamous battle-guise, now identified with the archmage Voormas, resembles the Akashic Brotherhood rote **Avatar Form**. The spectacle of six-armed Akashics battling eight-armed Chakravanti found its way into Vedic folklore, which in turn influenced others to adopt the **Iron Avatar** technique.

[Vulgar Life magick shifts the mage into a 10-foot, eight-armed monstrosity; Matter creates the swords in the mystick's hands and Prime keeps the whole thing going while Mind allows the mage to concentrate. The player gains six extra dice for her Dexterity + Melee pool, and adds one Health Level per success to her Health total. Clothing and/or gear does not grow with the mage, and may burst or tear away. Damage suffered in this form does not disappear when the Effect wears off; unless she heals her injuries, the mage may die when Kali's favor departs.

[The essence of destruction incarnate drives the mage into a killing frenzy; until the Effect ends, she rages across the area, killing everyone in her path. The massive amount of energy the **Avatar** consumes limits the spell's duration to two turns per success. After it ends, the Euthanatos collapses into a deep sleep for at least a day.]

Agama Sojourn Te/Agama Sojourn Re (•••• Entropy, •• Life, ••• Spirit, or •••• Entropy, •• Life, •••• Spirit)

Every Chakravat journeys into the Underworld at least once in his life; advanced Euthanatoi travel there more often, walking beyond the Shroud of death and exploring the Shadowlands that lie just outside of mortal sight. Although some truly powerful necromancers venture across the River of Death, the wise ones know that some secrets are best left for the dead.

The average Euthanatoi Awakens through a "normal" NDE (see Inner Workings); once he attains some expertise, the mage can travel into the Underworld under his own power, leaving a spark of life burning as he descends into death. The "simple" sojourn, the *agama te*, parts the curtain for a single mystick; the more complex sojourn, the *agama re*, brings companions along — a wise move if one intends to explore the Shadowlands.

The Underworld is a depressing, dangerous place; only the most warped Euthanatos would consider an *agama* a

vacation, and most of them are steeped in Jhor already. To the death-mages, the Shadowlands are the sticky floor that impedes a soul's return to the Great Unmaking. Although many westerners fear the so-called *Oblivion* that whirls through the Underworld, the Euthanatoi understand its real purpose: To be reborn, a thing must be broken down first. Contemplating that end is, to the death-mysticks, an enlightening thing. Oblivion, however, is the ultimate terror. Many people would rather endure eternity in Hell than disappear forever. The Chakravanti like to think that they're beyond such fears, but even they are mortal. The Great Unmaking sounds better when you're on the living part of the Shroud; those who pass over appreciate the magnitude of death.

[Through vulgar Entropy and Spirit, the mage crosses the barrier between life and death, entering the Dark Penumbra of the Shadowlands (see the **Stepping Sideways** Effect). Life magick keeps his body "alive," but does not protect him from harm in any way. Smart Euthanatoi also understand that Entropy magick is a BAD IDEA once you pass over the Shroud. Using it draws total Oblivion to you, which is never wise in Oblivion's backyard. (See **Wraith: The Oblivion**, pages 32-40, or **The Book of Worlds**, pages 72-77, for details on the Underworld.)]

The Burning Lotus (••••• Prime, •••• Entropy, ••• Forces, sometimes with ••• Spirit, •• Mind, or both)

Sometimes self-sacrifice is the only way to win. This catastrophic spell, perfected during the later Himalayan Wars, pulls life energy from within the Chakravat and his surroundings, then channels it into a huge elemental storm which withers, burns and utterly consumes everything nearby. Advanced variants blast through the Gauntlet as well, or project a final, passionate message across the land, proclaiming the death of a noble mystick and the annihilation of his enemies.

[This exceedingly vulgar Effect funnels Quintessence from within the mage himself, sets up a vortex, and wraps the resulting "package" in a Forces-spawned explosion of fire, water or ice. The vortex disintegrates everything in the "blast area" by drawing its Quintessence out, then scours the vicinity with the storm. This maelstrom consumes the mage himself and inflicts Forces-based aggravated damage on everything within 20 feet per success. Spirits suffer this damage in Power rather than Health Levels. Each point of Quintessence in the Euthanatoi's personal reserve adds an additional Health Level to the damage total. Anything killed or destroyed by the **Burning Lotus** is scattered forever; its spirit might linger, but its form is dust.]

Authors' Notes

Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment.

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

We live in the real world, not the World of Darkness. The Euthanatoi have Entropy magick to see people rotting with, Mind to test their consciences with, and Correspondence to spy with. You don't. They can bring back victims if they decide they've made a mistake. You can't. They are absolutely certain that the people they kill will be reincarnated, because they've got proof. You haven't. And even the Euthanatoi might be wrong. In the real world, there are only two reasons for killing anybody that the law and most gods will accept: defending yourself and defending other people. So, *don't* go out and kill anybody because you've read this book. Don't go out and kill anybody and then say it's because you've read this book. Don't go out and kill anybody. Period.

Thank you.

— Kathleen Ryan and Phil Brucato

Books

- *A History of Secret Societies*, by Arkon Daraul
- *Encyclopedia of Death*, by Beatrice and Robert Kastenbaum
 - *Historic India*, by Time/Life Books
 - *The Song of Kali*, by Dan Simmons
- *The Sword and the Flute*, by David R. Kinsley
- *The Tantric Way: Art, Science and Ritual*, by Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna
- The writings and poetry of Ambrose Bierce, Percy Shelley, Lord George Byron, Sylvia Plath and other morbid humanists and Romantics

Music

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| • Sheila Chandra | • Patti Smith |
| • The Changelings | • Ram Narayan |
| • Dead Can Dance (of course) | • The Sisters of Mercy |
| • Diamonda Galas | • This Mortal Coil |
| • Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan | • Trio Nocturna |

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature:
Essence:
Demeanor:

Concept:
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength_____●○○○○○
Dexterity_____●○○○○○
Stamina_____●○○○○○

Social

Charisma_____●○○○○○
Manipulation_____●○○○○○
Appearance_____●○○○○○

Mental

Perception_____●○○○○○
Intelligence_____●○○○○○
Wits_____●○○○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness_____	00000
Athletics_____	00000
Awareness_____	00000
Brawl_____	00000
Dodge_____	00000
Expression_____	00000
Instruction_____	00000
Intuition_____	00000
Intimidation_____	00000
Streetwise_____	00000
Subterfuge_____	00000

Skills

Do_____	00000
Drive_____	00000
Etiquette_____	00000
Firearms_____	00000
Leadership_____	00000
Meditation_____	00000
Melee_____	00000
Research_____	00000
Stealth_____	00000
Survival_____	00000
Technology_____	00000

Knowledges

Computer_____	00000
Cosmology_____	00000
Culture_____	00000
Enigmas_____	00000
Investigation_____	00000
Law_____	00000
Linguistics_____	00000
Lore_____	00000
Medicine_____	00000
Occult_____	00000
Science_____	00000

Spheres

Correspondence	_____	00000
Entropy	_____	●0000
Forces	_____	00000

Life_____00000
Mind_____00000
Matter_____00000

Prime_____	00000
Spirit_____	00000
Time_____	00000

Advantages

Backgrounds

_____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000

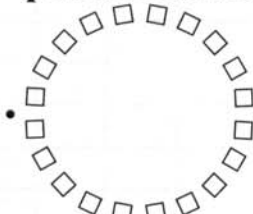
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0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Willpower

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised	-0	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated		<input type="checkbox"/>

Other Traits

_____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000

Experience

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Journal of Internal Medicine 247: 399–406

MAGE: The Ascension™

Merits & Flaws.

[illegible]

Siddi

Preferred Effects

[illegible]

Talismans

Name	Level	Arete	Quintessence	Appearance

Combat

[illegible]

Brawling Table

Maneuver	Difficulty	Damage
Punch	6	Strength
Grapple	6	Strength
Kick	7	Strength+1
Body Slam	7	Special

Armor:

EUTHIANATOS™

MAGE: The Ascension™

Expanded Background

Contacts, Sleeper

Contacts, Awakened

Influence, Sleeper

Allies, Awakened

Resources

Mentor

Familiar

Notable Kills

Acolytes

Chantry/Node

Possessions

Gear (Carried)

Equipment (Owned)

Ritual Tools

Ritual Style

EUTHIANATOS™

MAGE: The Ascension™

History

Diksha

Goals/Destiny

Courmatha

Quiets

Description

Age

Apparent Age

Date of Birth

Age of Awakening

Hair

Eyes

Race

Nationality

Height

Weight

Sex

Shadow Name

Appearance/Nature of Avatar

Jhor Taint

00000

Visuals

Cabal Chart

Character Sketch



Tradition on Trial

Some of our country's best authors were in the West, and a number of them have been in the country a long time. This book gives the country a look that is both new and old, and it is a book that is worth reading.

Walking the Line Between Life and Death

The book is a collection of stories that are both new and old, and it is a book that is worth reading. The stories are both new and old, and they are all about the line between life and death. The book is a collection of stories that are both new and old, and it is a book that is worth reading.

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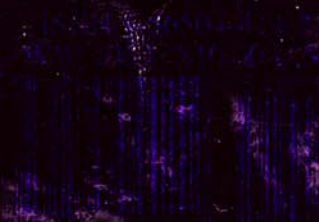
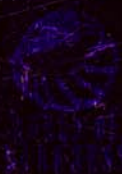
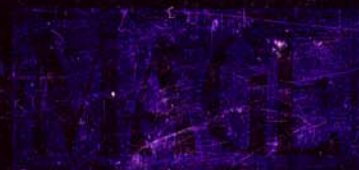
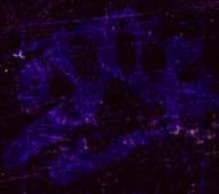
Where Do They Fall?

The book is a collection of stories that are both new and old, and it is a book that is worth reading. The stories are both new and old, and they are all about the line between life and death. The book is a collection of stories that are both new and old, and it is a book that is worth reading.

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