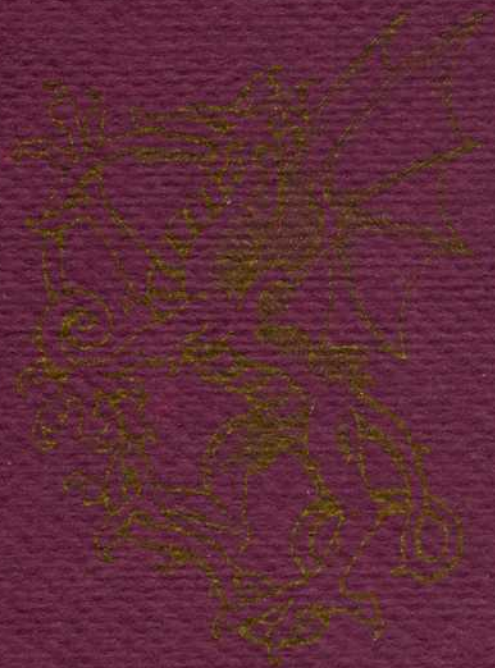


the Fraoile Path

TESTAMENTS
OF THE FIRST
CALIAL



For all you those who went before us
Remember you, their sacrifices, and their humanity
Respect you their follies, and their wisdom
Receive you their testaments
Living histories
Of our journey
And the Diab of Ascension

The Fragile Path: Testaments of the First Calial
An Illustrated Tale for Mage: the Ascension

FRAGILE PATH

THE FIRST CALIAL



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the Fragile Path

TESTAMENTS
OF THE FIRST
CABAL

Compiled by Porthos Fitz-Empress,
Hermes bani Flambeau, Drua'shi Master
and Deacon Primus of Chantry Doissetep

Authors

Heylel Teomim Thoabath, bani Solificati
Eloine, "Chosen and Beloved," bani Verbena
Sister Bernadette de la Champagne, bani Chœur Céleste
Akrites Salonikas ó, bani Seers of Chronos
Walking Hawk, Djiionondo-wanenake, bani Speakers-With-Dreams

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A Brief Introduction: THE POINT OF THIS BOOK

By Porthos Fitz-Empress, Hermes bani Flambeau,
Drua'shi Master and Deacon Primus of Chantry Doissetep

My pupil Mahmet tells me, as does my own experience, that no one listens to an old man ramble on these days, even if that old man can level mountains with a thought. Thus, I will endeavor to be brief. A modern book must have a punch, a hook; readers must be snatched from the waters of apathy and thrust into the point of the work before they can grow bored and pick up a magazine instead. I shall forgo my usual thoughts on this state of affairs and introduce the "hook" without further commentary:

**WE ARE WINNING THE WAR BUT LOSING THE WORLD, GODDAMMIT!!!
MANY PEOPLE DIED TO GIVE US WHAT WE HAVE TODAY! PEOPLE, NOT
NUMBERS IN A HISTORY BOOK! HUMAN BEINGS, LIKE YOU OR I, WHO SACRIFICED
EVERYTHING THEY HAD TO GRANT US A FUTURE!!**

**WE MUST REMEMBER THEM, AND THE THINGS THEY FOUGHT FOR,
OR END UP LOSING EVERYTHING WE HAVE NOW AND EVER DREAM OF
HAVING, SOMEDAY!**

Less than subtle, but I trust I've made my point.

This is a book of the dead, the final Testaments of five mages who helped found our august union, who traveled, with four others, across the world and sacrificed everything they had for a chance to bring wonder back to the world. Wonder through strength, purity of vision, and magick.

They failed. Yet they triumphed.

This group, called the First Cabal of the Nine Mystick Traditions, fell before the swords of early Technomancers, vicious Paradox, and the treachery of their own leader. Their defeat almost destroyed the brittle union of our Council; one Tradition was banished soon after the Great Betrayal and the trial that followed, and the remaining four mages of that Cabal went their separate ways, despondent and disillusioned. Nevertheless, our Council endured; we survived the Betrayal and the tarnishing of our dreams, the fragmentation of the Solificati and the defection of many Dreamspeakers and Akashic Brothers when their homelands fell under western attack. We survived Paradox, the Pogrom, and even the destruction of our Ahl-i-Batin brethren (if, indeed, they are no more) and the induction of the Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts into our midst. Despite Technocratic persecution, our Council has prevailed.

And I have seen it all.

And I have seen it forgotten.

And I have wept, for I knew these five, and the four others who were murdered. I participated in the trial of Heylel, and felt Bernadette's tears on the shoulder of my robe. I cried the day Eloine, whom I had desired, left Horizon forever, her eyes haggard and her spirit, with which she had entranced me, gone as dead as the one who had been her lover. I stood by as Walking Hawk strode into the mists that bore him to his homeland, disgusted with the sight of white men, and I trembled as I unrolled the scroll which bore the revelations of Akrites the Seer, who knew, some two hundred years ago, that I would write this very book.

This story is still living history to me.

And I have seen it pass sterile into textbooks, just more facts to be learned to please a stern tutor, then forgotten when the lesson is over.

But the lessons of the Awakened must never end. By the divine Avatar within each of us, we are bound to history just as we are charged to create it. We, of all mortals, cannot forget what has gone before us. Nor can we shunt it into scraps of paper and shove it onto library shelves, just another book to be checked out when required. *We are history*, the past, present and future incarnate, and we must not forget those who went before us — what they did, what they gave, what they eventually won — lest we become the last chapter in the final history book.

This is the tale of the First Cabal; five Testaments, plus my own observations and commentary. As so few of our kind have the tolerance to sift through archaic wordcraft, I have taken the (laborious) liberty of translating these testimonies into modern English (and Spanish, German, Latin, Hebrew, French, Japanese, Mandarin, Bantu, Cherokee and Arabic, in the appropriate translations), and posted a virtual reality simulation (with help from Tsun-Hsing Kao, Felicia Thomas, and a group of dedicated scholars and actors — see my Acknowledgments) on the Net for those who wish to experience the full weight of the events. Perhaps, by gathering them together for the first time, I will have added a sixth Testament to those within. For although I was not a part of the First Cabal, their fate — and eventual redemption — has haunted me for half a millennia.



BACKGROUND HISTORY:

Tempus Dicit; Sapiencia Audit

By Master Porthos

Please forgive me a momentary conceit; I know how few of our kind read the Roman language these days and how few still care to hold to the lessons of the past. But the grace of Latin is its musical simplicity. Like the very act of magick itself, the tone of the words carry wisdom beyond their simple substance. A more literal translation, "Time speaks, wisdom listens," lacks, I feel, the musicality of this stately tongue.

Then again, this romantic impression of a warlike race (even the word "romantic" reflects this prejudice) belies the truth behind their deeds; the Romans themselves were disciplined thieves by our modern morality, stealing territory, culture, religion, philosophy and living slaves from every land they entered. By the standards of our age, they were barbarians (as were the grand Athenians before them); as architects of an untamed world, they were merely pragmatic. There is a lesson in this for our kind, a lesson I have lived by for over five hundred years.

That lesson is not the glorification of ruthlessness, though many of my rivals would disagree; it is a simple, if inobvious, truth: ideals and morality are as changeable as the Reality we Awakened command. A simple foundation, however, a common morality, has supported every society, from the earliest cave-dwellers to the Victorian stooges of the Technocrats:

Thou Shalt Not Steal from Thine own Kind.

Thou Shalt Not Lie to Thine own Kind.

Thou Shalt Not Murder Thine own Kind.

Thou Shalt Know that Some Greater Purpose guides Thine every step.

Shite Not where Thou Layest.

(Forgive the wordcraft... I digress, as my pupil Mahmet always tells me, into anachronisms to make a point. You must admit, however, that great thoughts lose something in common translations.)

As I said, these are universal concepts, the pillars of any society that hopes to survive for any length of time. And in our modern world, they have crumbled like fireplace logs gone to ash. And like ash they have scattered to the winds.

This is not news, my friends; our Hollow cousins and Nephandic contemporaries celebrate our coming fall in their songs, clothes and favorite films. All of us, from the nomad shaman to the Thanatoic avenger, feel the icy touch of Entropy winding down the clockwork of our world. We have squandered our prize, we *Sapiens*, by throwing away the morality and vision that is our birthright. The world as we know it is dying, and the blame is partially our own.

Now, lest I resemble some mortal street-preacher, allow me to qualify this: *we have seen such days before*. Many times past, the collective hand of the gods has seen fit to rewind the clockspring, granting our kind another chance to fulfill our Destiny. Our World, ephemeral though She may appear, does not die easily. Our kind, humanity, is another matter. Our hold on existence, potent though it may appear, is a tenuous thing, easily snuffed by a careless thought or suicidal gesture. We are, in the grand scheme of things, expendable. It is upon our principles, our morality, which springs both from our Divine Self and the preservation of self, that we depend for our fragile lives.

I can hear you snickering, you know. Even here, at my desk, I sense your dismissal even as I put pen to paper. Morality is a joke, you might say, cheapened by preachers and renegades. And you would be wrong. Morality, some sense of purpose and principle, is all that keeps us from oblivion. We Awakened, of all humanity, should know this much. Such principles are not dead, no matter how poor the circumstances, until we dump them into our own grave. As I said, we have seen — I have seen — darker days before; darkness has been our lot since the beginning of time (if, indeed, Time has such a beginning). We have, as a species, as enlightened and Awakened souls incarnate, faced such times before. We may not have always triumphed, but we have always endured.

Our rivals would say otherwise; one seeks to bind the World in Technocratic chains while the others wish to drag Her down into chaos or destruction. Each group would claim victory; our continued existence as a Mystick Council, however, proves that they are wrong. For five centuries, near a dozen lifetimes, I have seen our Council rise, stumble and rise again. In these Twilight days, we hold a power we have not known since the formation of our Brotherhood (or Fellowship, or whatever else passes for correct in these gender-bollixed times...). Despite the cyber-magickal nightmares that stalk our kind in street and village, I know this to be true. I have been here since our formation, you see, since the Great Convocation of 1466, and I know our ups and downs like few mages alive.

The Grand Convocation

The gathering of Magi known as the Grand Convocation was a riot of color, sensation, wisdom and novelty; I doubt we shall ever see its like again. Over a period of years, we came together from the cities and covenants of Europe to the peaks of Tibet, from the grasslands of Africa to the vision country now called the outback, from lands undiscovered, uncharted and undreamt of by the feeble minds of Medieval man. As the Portals were opened and the grand meeting place called Horizon was formed, we poured in from every known culture, place and practice to create a Fellowship of Awakened Ones, to save our world from ignorant indifference.

We failed, yet we succeeded. We lost our unity, and nearly our souls, but we won the future — the future that is now our modern world. For all the darkness of this world would have increased a thousandfold if our Council had despaired when the First Cabal fell...

But I've gone ahead of myself. There is a point to all of this, which I shall explain momentarily, but suffice to say that our Council, and our world, have seen darkness ascendant before. And we have survived. For it is our vision, and our dedication to it, and the universal morality which I spoke of earlier, that has seen us through other trials. We are the shapers of reality, the Awakened few, and our wisdom can save our world from final death. Our wisdom, guided by the lessons of the past...

An Autobiographical Pause

For those who do not know me (and many, I pray, do not, for my reputation is not as pristine as I would like), I am a Hermetic Master of Doissetep and one of the founders of her present Horizon incarnation. I have survived over five hundred years of wars, intrigues, plagues, persecutions, romances, loves, betrayals, Quiets, backlashes and assassination attempts. Some call me eccentric, deluded, even murderously insane; they may even be right. Surely, my mind is not what it once was. I have, however, survived and prospered, though not without cost. I've known more defeats than all the nations of the Earth combined, and my survival is my greatest victory. My survival, and the lessons those defeats have taught me.

The details of my birth and early life are both tedious and unimportant; suffice to say that I Awakened on my own and was soon taken in and trained by mentors of the Hermetic House Flambeau. In my twenty-eighth year, I helped move Doissetep to the Shard Realm of Forces during the crumbling Mythic Age of Europe. The Houses of Hermes united at that time to send what covenants (Chantryes) we could save into custom-built realities to safeguard them from the Order of Reason (the infant Technocracy) and their mortal and ephemeral allies. The grand

magicks we wove killed over a dozen of my cabal, even in those days when Paradox was more a threat than a certainty; we survivors had to rebuild largely from scratch. For my part, I was barely an apprentice when we moved Doissetep into her current location, and my survival had more to do with luck and incompetence, I fear, than with magickal skill. As the decades passed, our work on Earth grew harder and more hazardous; many of us remained in the Realm full-time. When I was forty-four, we had a visitor — Master Baldric LaSalle, of House Tytalus — who brought us news of an impending Tribunal, a Grand Convocation of Magi from across the world.

The lessons of the past years had taught us that survival lay in cooperation. Amid much protesting, we sent a delegation to the meeting place, a Node called *Caverna Ominorum*, in the ruins of a Roman pavilion. I was chosen to go with them. From there, we eventually traveled to Horizon, the Realm where that Convocation began. For all the sorrow I witnessed and the tedious years I endured, I have never regretted that journey. It was nearly ten years before I saw my Chantry again, but by that time I had, in the Horizon Meetingplace, witnessed all the wonders of the world.

A thousand Magi assembled! More than a thousand, perhaps; I have never seen accurate numbers offered for that vast herd of Awakened humanity, beasts and custos, I merely know that it was vast. In a Realm carved from Primal Force, siphoned from nine sacred sites chosen by those who would found our Traditions, I saw the many faces of the One incarnate. I had no doubt, when first I arrived, that such a multitude could crush the Technocratic upstarts and free our Reality from their constraints. How wrong I was, how foolishly naive, to believe that force and numbers alone could turn back the changes that bore down upon us all! The Order of Reason may have been small in comparison to our flock, but they had unity and purpose on their side. We had dissension, greed, pride, and an ethnocentric shortsightedness that cost us dearly years later when the Dreamspeakers' lands were conquered. It is not always numbers or force that shape reality, you see. Solidity of purpose is often enough.

The Convocation was wondrous while it lasted, however; certámins, often fought before the standard etiquette was established, raged daily, and the Common Hall buzzed with a Babalous multiplicity of tongues — ideas incarnate, expressed in more ways than the mind could fathom. A Spanish priest could be seen talking to a shaman blacker than the cleric's Cassock, and they might agree as often as not. A Frankish dragon might be seen trading blows with a grizzly bear larger than any ursine alive today. A hundred sacred symbols bedecked corridors which might lead from a desert plain to a Nordic cliffside. It was miraculous — nothing less! — and though it may sound quaint to mages weaned on television, VR, intercontinental travel and the United Nations, it was absolutely unprecedented.

The Convocation ended with the acceptance of the Resolutions and the formation of the First Cabal. Our unity ended when that same Cabal returned in ruins. Since the day the Great Betrayer was scattered, our Council has been likewise. When I returned to Doissetep, it was with a leaden heart and a rage which has not abated to this day. In my youth, I felt we had been mistaken, that we had squandered our time and efforts on grand gestures. I was wrong. I know that now.

Irony's Ring

Despite that wisdom, I am old, now, and dying like our World. For the half-millennia since the fall of the Cabal, I have devoted myself to an endless War and pointless bickering with those who ought to be my allies. The halls of my Chantry home are rife with intrigues and I have participated as much as any man and more than most. I am guilty of wasting lives and lifetimes in backbiting and counter-plotting, and I have been a fool.

Perhaps it was inevitable. It is a cruel irony of our Awakened state that, although we are crafters of possibility, age settles over our souls like a shroud. I fear I am one of the oldest of our kind alive; though I have heard tales and crossed paths with Magi whose years rival the mountains themselves, our static age must have brought them low by now. The borders of possibility are not what they once were, and there is rough cosmic justice in that. Although "science" marches at a maddening pace, it loops its own snare around its feet; sooner or

later, the Technomancers will trip upon the chain they themselves have made, cutting off their own possibilities as brutally as they have savaged our Arts. I have already seen the signs of this, and I laugh. Fate plays such bitter jests.

Mere force is not enlightenment, nor is age alone. We mages are bound by the Entropy within. Dynamic as we may appear, powerful as we may become, we cannot help but settle into patterns; these patterns limit our potential, and new blood must wash the slate clean again. My history of intrigue and the perpetual rivalry which tears at my own Chantry are proof enough of this. Perhaps I have never Ascended to join the Oracles because I limit myself with this belief. Nevertheless, I am convinced that youth is vision; undisciplined, of course, and ignorant and untrained, but vital. That vitality is siphoned from us with age. Even if we slow the advance within our bodies, we cannot keep the weight from our enlightened minds. The more we see, the more we think we know. The more we believe we understand, the more set in our ways we become, and the more we limit our potential. Thus, youth is the flame that ignites the future. Power is merely polish on blunted blades.

Rejoice, my young brethren. The Master has paid you a compliment.

Our Euthantos friends have the right of it; Entropy is inevitable, even to immortals. This is the lesson our nightshade cousins, the vampires, have yet to learn. As one who has survived many of their kind, I can only smile ruefully at the ache in my bones and the crackling of my joints. Time may be sidestepped, but she can never be ignored.

If my words seem bitter, it is because I am tired. I'm weary of the politics which hamstring our Council even as we snap at the Technomancers' heels. As the Twilight Age approaches, we are collectively stronger than we've been since our inception. Nine we stand, united, for the first time since the Ahl-i-Batin fled the dream they helped create, only a few short years after the Sons of Ether filled a seat left vacant for almost four hundred years! In the mortal world, faith and wonder gnaw at the Technomancers' hollow truths. Who knows what the next decades might bring? Yet we drift apart within our own Fellowship, cursed by shortsightedness and a lack of faith in our own miracles. What fools we are, to throw away the future on division! And yet we seem trapped, like I am, here in my sanctum, watching the shadows, waiting for the tingle of the dolor-wards which alert me to yet another threat. I am tired of fighting my own kind; I am weary of our stupidity.

And I am digressing. To the history, then, of the First Cabal, and to Hell with an old man's ramblings!

For ages without number, magick, in one form or another, ruled the minds of humanity and the fabric of reality. During this time, there were no "Traditions" as we know them, though common philosophies and magickal orders existed. As the force of static "reason" closed in about the miracle workers, however, the balance of power shifted. Many people rose up against the mages who had worked so freely for so long and reality itself began to close in, limiting or even destroying millennia of magickal work. The process was gradual but unmistakable.

As the boundaries of reality became firmer and the tolerance of the Sleepers grew shorter, Magi warred against each other. The resulting battles, plagues, persecutions and divisions decimated the Awakened and non-Awakened alike. The fledgling Order of Reason, composed of science-minded mages and philosophers, thrived in the chaos. With their unity and purpose, the Alliances of the Order — the Artificers, Cabal of Pure Thought, Craftmasons, Masters of Reason, Seekers of the Void, High Guild, Philosophers' Union and other smaller groups — arbitrated internal disputes, declared a common goal of common good and worked towards a single unified reality theorem. The scattered mystick orders didn't have a chance.

In the early 1440s, three mages, representing what would later become the Celestial Chorus, Verbena and Order of Hermes, met and discussed the problem. Across the world, magick faltered and wizards battled. Something had to be done; a common purpose, ideal and methodology had to be forged. These three mages and their allies spent years traveling the world convincing others of their kind to come together. The resulting Tribunal, called the Grand Convocation, began in 1457, meeting in a great Realm called Horizon.

With unthinkable magicks, the first Masters pooled their resources and carved Horizon from

Reality itself. As each different group joined the confederacy, it added a place of power to the Realm, feeding it with Primal Essence. The soldiers of Reason laid siege to those Nodes that they could find, but new sources were added and the old ones reinforced. Great battles raged at the Canyon of Qu'Dali, the floating tip of Lyonesse and Stonehenge itself, but we mysticks cloaked the remaining Nodes with other magicks and drove the invaders from our lands.

The Realm we built contained a Grand Hall, filled with nine cloisters and a tenth central Common Hall. Each cloister fed into another sub-Realm, created to match the preferred climate of the representatives. Outside the Grand Hall, the Realm mirrored the seasons of Earth; huge fields provided food for the visitors and gave a place of recreation for those who felt trapped within the Hall. Some lived outside and ventured in only when they had to. Mythic beasts, whose numbers had thinned back on Earth, found sanctuary in the fields of Horizon. And there the Council met.

With hundreds of mages gathered from dozens of magickal paths, conflict was inevitable. Nevertheless, the Council affirmed, in its initial Protocols, a determination to work together for the common good and mutual survival. Many of the most prominent sorcerers of the age met in Horizon, the refuge of the would-be Council and their flocks. For over nine years, these mages debated, maneuvered and battled, sometimes literally, over the guidelines of the newborn "Traditions," the Spheres of magick and the definitions and duties of the Nine. The result, though far from perfect, remains more or less intact to this day.

In 1466, the Council of Nine finally reached a Resolution; we would proceed together towards a common goal, Ascension, with an established code and (hopefully) the blessings of the gods. After the establishment of the Protocols and goals of Ascension, the Council appointed a nine-member cabal of Adepts to venture back out into the mortal world and gather support for the Council among the Sleepers and Awakened of the world. Nine mages, one from each Tradition, went forth. Their mission, though short-lived, changed the world.

These nine Adepts were not amateurs; each was hand-picked by the Council members (amid much politicking) as a sterling example of his or her Tradition. By word and deed, these Magi were to win over wizards, messiahs and other practitioners of True Magick and give aid, comfort and wisdom to the distrustful mortals, who, having had enough of "witches," had fallen under the spell of Scientific Reason. They were to battle the magickal enemies of the Council — the Nephandi and Diabolists, the orphan renegades and demon-ridden hedge-warlocks, Disparates (mages who condemned the Council's plans) and the Order of Reason — whenever necessary, but were counseled to shun violence and avoid the lure of pride. First and foremost, the mages of the First Cabal were to be emissaries of goodwill. Of good intentions are great evils wrought.

Their leader, Heylel Teomim, hermaphroditic chosen of the Solificati, waxed powerfully in hubris and betrayed the others. In 1470, Heylel led them into a trap set by the Cabal of Pure Thought (a witch-hunting forerunner to the New World Order). Only the Traitor and the Ecstatic mage, Akrites Salonikas, escaped. Three mages died in combat; the remaining four were taken and tortured by mortal Inquisitors. One more died there and the others were sentenced to burn. A troupe of Tradition mages, led by the escapee, rescued the survivors and tracked down the Betrayer. Taken alive, Heylel was sentenced by the Council to both Gilgul and death. Before the Council, he gave one last defiant yet repentant speech, telling of his sorrows, pride, despair and scorn for the Council. Heylel's twin Avatars were then ripped from their body and mystically shredded while the body itself was consumed to dust by fire and ice, then scattered by winds across Horizon.

The four survivors of the nine scattered as well. Eloine, the Verbena, was inconsolable; Heylel had been her lover and the parent of her children. She forsook our Council and died in a witch-hunter's gaol some fifty years later. Kind Bernadette, the Celestial sister who never spoke except in song, retreated from Horizon amid rumors of collusion with the Inquisitors; her death-song was given to our archives only recently. Walking Hawk, a Seneca shaman who traveled across the Atlantic to join us, returned to his people, presumably to warn them of our existence. Had his warning been heeded, history might have turned out differently. Akrites, whom some called hero and others called coward, exiled himself after the trial had concluded.

Some said he'd seen the future and done nothing to prevent it, and they cursed him for the mission's failure. His guilt must have been an enormous burden because, as I later discovered, the story was true. The Betrayer's Tradition, the alchemical Solificati, crumbled soon after their chosen did the same. Some joined the Technocratic Artificers while others went Errant or joined that mysterious Craft called the Children of Knowledge. Within less than two-score years, their seat was empty. It remained so until 1905, when the Sons of Ether forsook the Technocracy. By that time, the last of the Cabal were long since gone.

On the surface, their story is a depressing failure; it certainly seemed to be so at the time. Only an appraisal of the survivors' tasks after their defection shows the depth of their commitment. Sister Bernadette ministered to the sick and suffering of Europe for lifetimes afterwards; she appears here and again in Chorus lore, and did not die until 1723. Eloine aided refugees from the witch-hunting madness that swept Europe, her Arts forsworn but her respect for life undimmed. She was only caught when age reduced her to easy prey and she died defiant, her faith restored. Walking Hawk, regrettably, died soon after giving the Oration preserved here. Though many of his own people regarded him as an hysteric in later years, his words still commanded great respect among the tribes and may have laid the foundation of the Iroquois Confederacy. Akrites, even in his exile, amassed a great library, which he bequeathed to Doissetep when he finally passed on. Despite the tragedy that destroyed their fellowship, the survivors of the First Cabal carried on the spirit that had led them to the Council long after they parted ways.

Conclusion: A Point is Made

During a recent class, I saw Apprentices dozing off or gazing into daydreams as they learned about the Nine. It angered me at first, but I realized that history without voices is a dry and sterile thing, devoid of passion and easily dismissed. I knew these Nine as people — some were my friends, two I would have had as lovers if they'd have had me, one was an enigma. All of them were human beings, not names upon a page. Few youngsters have the patience, I'm afraid, to listen to an old man prattle on about his own youth (relatively speaking; I was almost fifty when the Convocation began!). I feel the words of the survivors themselves would speak more vividly than my own flawed recollections. Thus, I have collected these Testaments to tell the story of their trials in their own voices. I offer these accounts as personal portraits — nothing I could say would do justice to their quests.

I spoke earlier of common morality; I can find no better example of such morality than these nine Awakened. Even the Betrayer, whose treachery rent the Cabal asunder, lived and died by his (or her) own moral code. Morality is not about sexual activity, or language, or taste in clothing or entertainment. It is about conduct and honor, about finding one's principles and standing by them, despite the cost. The Romans and Athenians, butchers though they might be by our modern codes, believed in honor and lived and died by it. So, too, did the Nine. We can all learn much from their example.

The mistakes of the Council and the deeds of the First Cabal offer many lessons, but this last point is most important to us in these Twilight Days: those survivors clung to their vision, even as their ideals were shattered and their lives destroyed. It is a fragile Path we Awakened walk, moreso those of us who seek to balance stasis, darkness and insanity. The voices of those who went before us can guide our steps along that Path, if we care to listen. The First Cabal persevered, even unto death, and their courage should inspire us all.

I offer this book as a rallying cry, a call to arms and to the ideals of the Council. Nine we stand, now, mystically linked in Oath and numerology to a grand pattern of Balance, dynamic through our vision, yet shaped by our unity. Nine in One, for the first time since the Betrayal. Such strength is critical in this Twilight time.

Change uncontrolled is madness. The Marauders prove this regularly, but it took the follies of the First and Second World Wars to show me the perils of unchecked pride and the scars we leave upon our Earth. We must honor the Nines' example; otherwise, our power carves the Tapestry a grave.

Thus endeth the sermon. Let the tales begin.

Timeline for the COUNCIL OF NINE

1210-1457 — Early Beginnings

- Destruction of Mistridge Covenant by the Craftsmasons — early Technomancers who, by most accounts, united the Order of Reason (Winter, 1210).
- Convention of the White Tower (March 25, 1325).
- Ascension War begins; across the world, reality begins to tighten. Many Magi fall to persecutions, revolts, assassinations, plagues and outright battles with the Order of Reason (1330-present).
- By some accounts, the Seers of Chronos (now Cultists of Ecstasy) and Ahl-i-Batin encourage the Houses of Hermes to call a worldwide Tribunal for the good of all Magi. Response is mixed (early 1420s).

1440 — Mistridge Tribunal

- Hermetic Master Baldric begins a quest for great Magi. After many adventures, he meets with Lady Nightshade (founder of the Verbena) and Master Valorian (founder of the Chorus) during the turning of the year. They confer in the ruins of Mistridge, and it is said that faeries visited them there. Reasons for this meeting vary, but all three come to an agreement to found a magickal order of their own. They depart to find other like-minded Masters. (1439-1440)

1440-1457 — The Quests

- Nightshade follows the Paths of the Wyck from Britain into North America; she meets Star-of-Eagles, who spreads the word among the Indian tribes, and Ali-beh-shaar of the Ahl-i-Batin. Later, she battles the English Inquisitor General Wyndgarde in Ireland and freezes his army in a sudden blizzard.
- Master Balric and Valorian journey into the Middle East and Africa with Sh'zar the Seer (founder of the modern Cult of Ecstasy) and Ali-beh-shaar. The latter sparks conflict with Valorian by introducing him to “Lustee Sprites” during the trek. Valorian goes East; the others meet with wise woman Naioba, of the Mo-Mo Keu dreamlands, and convince her of the rightness of their cause. The death-mystic Chalech greets the group in Rome.
- Valorian meets with the master alchemist Diplomate Luis, who introduces him in turn to the Akashic Brother Wu Jin. They ascend to the fabled Mt. Ki'wee and gain the blessings of their gods, then return to Mistridge.
- The Second Mistridge Tribunal (1449); Star-of-Eagles and Naioba, both somewhat befuddled by the trip, agree to share “leadership” of Those-Who-Speak-With-Dreams. Craftsmasons attack Mistridge again, solidifying the mages' resolve.

- After the Craftsmasons' defeat, the Primi — founders — of the Council agree to construct a great Realm in which to meet. Each returns to his or her native land and raises great power with which to fuel this “Horizon” Realm. After a series of fits and starts, the Nodes are connected and the Realm is formed. This takes five years.
- Star-of-Eagles and Naioba marry (1456), the first such union among the Traditions. She bears him three children.
- Magi and custos from across the world trickle into Horizon. The Council begins to grow.

1457-1466 — The Grand Convocation

- Nine years of debate ensues. Some factions drop out or declare themselves “Disparate;” others consolidate under the Nine Traditions — the Ahl-i-Batin, Akashic Brotherhood, Celestial Chorus, Dreamspeakers, Euthanatos, Orders of Hermes, Seers of Chronos, Solificati, and Verbena. The nine Spheres of magick are adopted as universal, and each Tradition picks a specialty.
- Naioba assassinated by Dreamspeaker *barabbi*. (1464). Star-of-Eagles is inconsolable. Her people rally to his side against the European Traditions when the Chorus seeks to convert the Africans “for their own good.”
- Resolutions and Protocols passed, (Summer Solstice, 1466). The Council later appoints the First Cabal from among the finest mages in Horizon.

1466-1470 — The First Cabal

- After leaving Horizon, the Cabal crosses Europe and the Middle East, easing plagues, ministering to Sleepers in distress, and battling the Order of Reason. While liberating accused witches in the French town of Garoche, the Cabal burns the town to its foundations. A hunt is declared, and the Cabal passes across the Paths of the Wyck into central Africa to liberate Naioba's people from a conquering tribe. Their travels take them from France to Tibet, to lost Dis in the heart of Africa and the frozen wastes of Greenland. They never reach the Americas, however.
- Twins born to Eloine and Heylel (1469). Their names are lost to history.
- The Great Betrayal; in the province of Narbonne, an army of Inquisitors, led by Heylel and twelve Templars of the Cabal of Pure Thought. Four among the Cabal are killed; the others are imprisoned until Akrites leads a secret mission to free them (summer 1470).
- The trial and destruction of Heylel Thoabath and the final scattering of the Nine (November 1470).

RESOLUTIONS OF INTENT OF THE COUNCIL OF NINE MYSTICK TRADITIONS

We Declare, on this day commonly known and held sacred as the Longest Day of Summer, the formation of our Brotherhood, forged in Magick and Dedicated to restoring and retaining Truth, Art and Wonder throughout our World. Let it be commonly Known as the Council of the Nine Mystick Traditions, gathered in the Common Horizon Realm, which contains the Essence of all places in One, as do we All.

In the Names of all the Gods and Goddesses we Revere, *we Unite* under this one Council for the Resolution of Disputes, the Defeat of our Enemies, and the Pursuit, Salvation and Teaching of our Art.

We Declare, under all the Oaths of our Magicks, the following Resolutions:

— *That* we Gather all willing Magi under the titles of Traditions, as befits their Preference and Art, and School them to the Good of Each and All.

— *That* all Enemies of one Tradition become the Enemies of All.

— *That* the Enmities betwixt our Traditions be Dissolved for the Good of All, and that all Disputes be Resolved by Common Trial and Tribunal.

— *That* we Adopt, under as many Names as we see fit, the Nine Universal Spheres of Magick to Teach and Define our Art.

— *That* we Pursue the Protocols of Good Conduct to the best of our abilities, for the Good of All, and punish Infractions by Common Trial and Tribunal.

— *That* we Pursue, and help Others to Pursue, the Higher Path we call Ascension, for the Good of Each and All.

— *That* we Protect those Lands, Peoples and Beasts threatened by the Depredations of the Orders of Reason, our Common Foes.

— *That* we Seek a return to the Old Ways and the Broadening of our World and its Wonders, and Strive toward a better Understanding of our Art.

— *That* we Meet each Nine Turns of the Year, with our Assigned Officers, to Pledge our Unity in the face of all Obstruction, Trial and Dissent.

This we Pledge, in all Respect and Unity. May our Path Prevail against the Hazards of our Age.

DECLARATION OF THE IVORY TOWER

We of this Convention, gathered in the White Tower of Yoasmy Fallen in the Province of Ramainge, Normandy, this Twenty-Fifth day of March, in the Year of Our Lord Thirteen-Hundred and Twenty-Five, do hereby resolve that Humanity will not be menaced by madmen and beasts, that the World must be a place of Order and Reason, that the governor of Mankind should be Mankind itself, that the chief Enterprise of Mankind shall be the preservation of his own safety, and that the Triumph of Mankind shall be the eradication of the supernatural world and the realization of the Collective Will.

To this End, we the Undersigned do hereby swear to make War upon Sorcerers, Nightgaunts, Faeries, Boggies, Witches, Devils, Changelings, Werebeasts, and all diverse Creatures of the Night. By our Blood and Power of Our Will, Reason and Craft, the reign of Madness shall be purged from this Earth, our Home. We pledge Our Collective Might and Will also to the Defeat of all Conspirators who would aid the targets of Our Great Wrath. May this Most Sane Union guide Our Hands and Our Wills to the good of Mankind!

This do We attest and declare: that Man shall be his own Master. None other but God may stand in Our way in this Great Mission.

Our Will be Done.



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The details of the March of the Nine have been committed to record many times, though not, I feel, with much empathy for the mages themselves. The accounts below, however, may help the diligent student trace the steps of this ill-fated voyage.

The following volumes come highly recommended for modern readers. More advanced students know how to procure more arcane texts. None of these, of course, are available at mundane libraries, though I do not doubt that some accounts have reached the vaults of uncomprehending mortals. The larger Chantries will have copies of many of the texts listed below, and most are available from the reading room in the Spy's Demise. Good luck!

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Those Within the CABAL

Many among us have never learned even the basic history of the Nine. These brief introductions will hopefully "fill in the blanks," as they say, and give a human face to these five voices. As any wise one knows, you must understand a person to comprehend their words and actions. I've gleaned these portraits from recollection, scholarship, and the crystal record which preserves the Council sessions within Horizon's Great Hall. Doubtless, the ghosts of the Nine would add more if they could.

I have tried to be as objective as possible; total remove, I must admit, would be impossible, and perhaps undesirable as well. As I have said, I knew these Nine; I can still hear their voices, feel their embrace, recall the sensations of wonder and, yes, desire, that I experienced in their presence. This, perhaps, is the curse of longevity — to remember those who have long since died as if they were just next door. Mortal senility, I believe, is a protective veil against such memories and the pain they carry with them. A mage, however, can neither tolerate nor sustain such a veil for long. He must remain ever-cognizant, or else pass into a long Wizard's Twilight, lest he wound Reality with his years-born madness.

These are the faces of the Nine; the words of the survivors follow with little interruption from me. Perhaps, by gathering this book together and passing on the Cabal's legacy, I add my own Testament to this collection. Only Time will decide the worth of these collected fragments: Time, and you, the reader.

THOSE WHO DIED IN BATTLE

The Akashic Brother — Fall Breeze

Although young and inexperienced, Fall Breeze was chosen by the Akashic emissaries to the Council for her unflagging enthusiasm, generous nature, martial prowess and fluent command of English, French, Mandarin, Japanese, Arabic, Greek, Latin, Gaelic and several African and Iroquois dialects, in addition to her native Cantonese. Before her tragic death at the age of 30, Fall Breeze had also mastered reading and writing in Hebrew, Sanskrit and high and low Germanic runes. Her capacity for languages alone made her an impressive figure among the Council mages.

As a mage, Fall Breeze had a formidable array of Do maneuvers and a natural grasp of empathy and telepathy. As a woman, she was open-hearted, curious and talkative, with a likable but a ready tongue. She did not mince words often, but could be charming when she needed to be. Some mages were appalled by her unseemly conduct, but others admired her quick mind, attractive appearance, and blinding reflexes.

Fall Breeze's bad habits were almost as notable as her accomplishments. Her temper was legendary; she frequently broke furniture during her sudden outbursts and offended many with her curt remarks. From a group of Ecstasy Cultists, she acquired a liking for hallucinogenics and stimulating magicks — habits that grew from brief experiments to a near-addiction by the end of her life. Though not as easily sensual as the Verbena, Fall Breeze had a penchant for quick crushes — and these were not always directed at men. Although she rarely consummated her desires, Fall Breeze's passions would often spark either jealous fits or cool avoidance. One might expect that the Akashic mage would have been drawn to the Verbena, but she detested most of the Celtic witches she met. This did not stop her from learning their language; indeed, she could lay down insults with the best of them! It may be said that Fall Breeze was both fascinated and repelled by those things she was supposed to suppress for her Art. In light of this, she frequently spoke of the many incarnations she would endure before perfection.

The details of her early years are sketchy; she did not often speak of her life before the Brotherhood. She was born Jiu Ling, near the Pacific coast, and sometimes reminisced about her childhood aboard her uncle's fishing boat. A Brotherhood Master approached Jiu Ling in her early teens. Her parents, assuming that she was to join a Buddhist monastery, bid her to follow the man, and she did. Fall Breeze, as she was named, quickly earned herself respect from the elders for her intellect and reprimands from her Mentor for her restless passions. She accompanied a delegation to the Council and made many friends (and a few enemies) among the budding Traditions. When the ballots were passed for the First Cabal, Fall Breeze was at the head of the list.



Anyone who met the girl (she was only 17 when she attended the Convocation) was impressed one way or another. It was said that she was graceful as a willow and strong as a clap of thunder. Fall Breeze was short — about 5'2" — and lithe, with unusually sharp features for a Chinese woman. Her dark brown eyes were restless and curious. The length of her black hair varied greatly; she shaved bald several times a year (usually after committing some act which she considered unworthy of her Brotherhood), but occasionally grew her hair magickally long, to the small of her back and sometimes longer, when proud of herself. She tended to wear loose robes cut and wrapped to allow freedom of movement, but occasionally picked up some fashion from one of the many lands the Cabal visited. Though inquisitive, she rarely spoke just for the sake of speech; her conversations were usually aimed at learning or discovering some new thing.

The Brother (she never referred to herself as "Sister") avoided Cygnus Moro; it was said that she had clashed with him years earlier, during a dispute between the Akashics and Death Mages. Daud-Allah fascinated her with his endless knowledge and command of languages. He taught her many of the tongues she knew over the course of the Convocation, and the two were fast friends throughout. Though some among the Cabal speculated that their relationship went beyond friendship, they were very discreet if it ever had. She engaged in constant debate with Master Louis, but respected him as a learned and honorable man. His apparent death by Paradox spurred her into a killing rage, and she felled over a dozen mortal men and two mages before wounds and magicks brought her down.

It is said that a modern incarnation of this great mage lives in some Akashic Realm. I know not the truth behind this rumor, but wonder how much of her personality has passed on to her descendant, should she exist.

The Euthanatos — Cygnus Moro

A half-Greek, half-Libyan, Cygnus was born to an Indian merchant's slave in 1399, during the chaos caused by Timur the Lame's conquest of that region. Though raised a Muslim, Cygnus (then simply called Haroun) fell in with a forbidden sect of Kali-serving partisans who opposed the Turkish invasion. His dramatic Awakening, which involved a vision of copulating with the Black Mother herself, came after a successful battle with Turkish gaulers to free a group of Hindus. Cygnus, who later took the name of the Greek bringer of balance, often said that it was the actions of his mother's masters and his homeland's invaders that taught him how deeply some men deserved death.

Cygnus was always partial to women; he claimed never to have passed the Good Death on to a woman, as they were the chosen of the Black Mother and the Great Goddess. Although his upbringing was quite Eastern, he harbored a fondness for Classical Greek philosophy and literature and often compared Kali with Artemus, an odd insight for the time. Though he never took a wife, he had many children by an array of lovers. Despite his seemingly cavalier ways, Cygnus was said to treat each woman he knew as a goddess incarnate, which may have accounted for his popularity with the fair sex.

By the standards of both Muslim and Christian doctrine, this unusual mage was a servant of evil; his personal habits, which included some rather modern promiscuity, did not endear him to his counterparts. He was, however, a deeply learned man, fiercely loyal to his friends and rich with the lore of a dozen cultures. Like Fall Breeze, Cygnus had a gift for quick learning and linguistics. His grasp of logic, mathematics and various religious doctrines was likewise impressive. Before making a kill, Cygnus researched his subjects, often following them for days or even weeks before determining that their time to die had come. This habit honed his skills with stealth, observation and intrigue. When the end came, the Death Mage made sure that it was as fast and painless as possible.



Strange as it may seem to those who fear the Euthanatos, Moro was renowned for his generosity and kindness; he frequently gave food and valuables to beggars and peasants and acted as confidant to several members of the Cabal. It may be that his lowly beginnings and harsh youth taught him sympathy for the downtrodden. His "candidates" for the Good Death tended to be the fatally suffering, the greedy thieves and the deliberately cruel. If someone offended him, he often tried to convince them of their error; anyone who saw reason was spared. Those who rejected Cygnus' entreaties usually ended up dead.

This Euthanatos may have been the one to convince his fellows to accept a Greek name for a largely Eastern Tradition. His magick was neither flashy nor powerful; instead he influenced probabilities and accelerated decay of structures or the Mind. He was likely chosen for his subtlety and eloquence, characteristics some of his Cabal fellows lacked. Although he and Fall Breeze did not get along well, they offended each other less than most members of their Traditions did. He could be stunningly personable when he chose, which some mages conceded may have had something to do with his command of the Mind. Tall and powerfully built, with curly black hair and dark, lustrous skin, Cygnus Moro cut an imposing figure that lent strength to his arguments and flair to his seductions. His black eyes seemed to simmer with cold fire when his passions were roused, and his voice had the timbre of a strong wind flowing through a cavern. Magickal or not, his charisma was undeniable.

His skill with weapons was also without peer; only Fall Breeze and Daud-Allah could best him in non-magickal combat. He was an excellent strategist as well, though Master DuMonte could beat him soundly in chess and certámin. Cygnus exercised frequently, almost as a form of meditation; his stamina was put to the test when the hated torturers questioned him. They may

have feared his strength or his ability to destroy wood, stone and steel (which he once used in an unsuccessful bid to free Eloine), or they may have wished to break him first, as an example to the others. In either case, he died in agony. Witnesses claimed that his screams shook the dungeon walls and that his curses killed a score of Inquisitors.

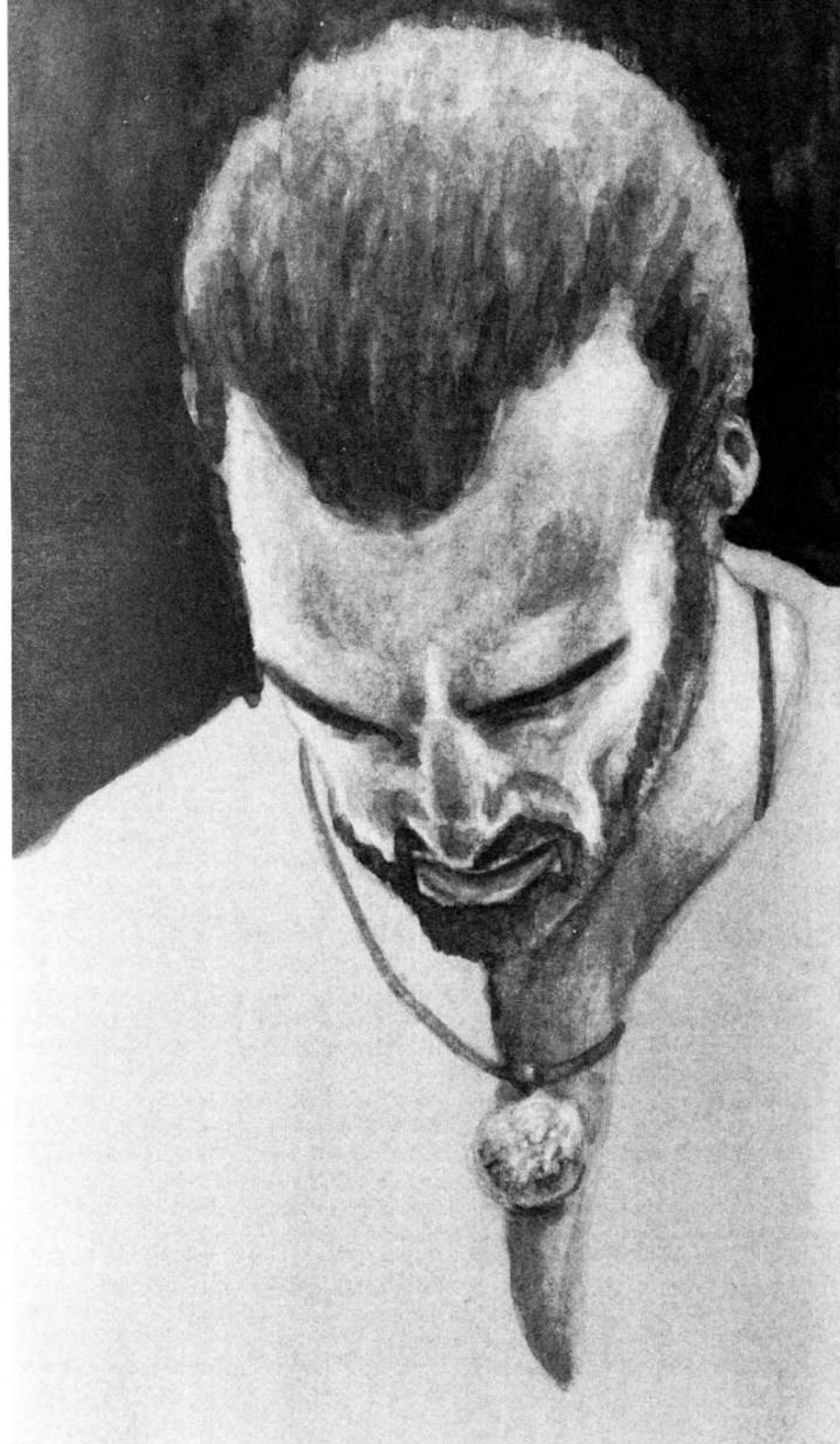
Within the Cabal, the Balance Bringer was regarded with apprehensive respect. Daud-Allah disliked him initially, but soon adopted him as a sort of foster son, taking him under his wing in the way of a godfather. Had it not been for the objections of the Akashic Brotherhood, Cygnus might have led the Cabal. As it was, Heylel seemed to view him with good humor and respect. Master DuMonte wrote that Cygnus was "...a Man whose generous Compassion is matched only by his skill at dispatching the Unwanted from his Sight. His is the Power of the Man who needs no proof of his Virility." Indeed, he was mourned by a huge contingent of children and lovers when his mangled body was retrieved from the gaol. Ten women immolated themselves at his funeral, much to the horror of his Council brethren. In death, as in life, Cygnus Moro left an unforgettable impression.

The Hermetic Mage — Master Louis DuMonte, Maître de Forces, Hermes bani House Quaesitor

Even as the raging tide falls silent and recedes, so, too, do all powers have their tempering force. For the Cabal of Nine, this was Louis DuMonte, a man of solid judgment with a keen eye for justice. The Council knew the Cabal to be a chaotic mixture of disparate powers bound together to achieve a common goal, and saw the wisdom in including one who exemplified stability and balance. The Hermetic mage assumed the role of settling disputes, for though he was forever firm in his beliefs, his mind remained open to the viewpoints and philosophies that were the hallmarks of his peers' Traditions. Few would doubt his reputation as a fair and impartial judge, and fewer still would claim that he had failed to uphold the noble goal and purpose of the Nine.

I feel that I owe a debt of apology to this Hermetic Magus, for in the beginning, I did not trust him or believe him to be the best candidate to accompany the Cabal. He was a dark man, aloof and troubled, plagued by the phantoms of a turbulent youth — for he had been a victim of the untoward violence of the Order of Reason. Though he was a trusted friend and ally of Master Baldric LaSalle, who first enjoined us to take part in the impending Tribunal, I felt from the beginning that Louis resented the divisions between the Traditions. In so doing, the disparate Houses of the Order of Hermes were consolidated, unified into a single Tradition. Louis was born to House Guernicus, or House Quaesitor, as it was called (literally "House of Judges") and was fostered in its care. He was fiercely loyal to his House, understanding better than I that each House was a Tradition all its own, with its own history, its own beauty. He did not want to see his, or any other, House forced to conform to standards delineated by the Convocation. At that time, I was so infatuated by the notion of a magickal order that I was blinded to the potential dangers to my own. I was angered by his arguments, and thought him disloyal to our cause. But I have come to realize that this was actually a sign of strength, for Louis always saw all sides of every issue, and never allowed his passions to sway him. In some respects, this lack of emotionality was a crippling flaw — but it made him the force of balance within the Cabal, the eye of the storm, so to speak.

I attribute this objectivity to the early tragedies Louis suffered; when he was hardly more than a youth, the Order of Reason discovered his Covenant, and marshaled the forces of the Inquisition into an assault against the mages of his House. Louis lost his parents, and many of his friends and family, in that fateful battle. This tragedy drove him to withdraw and bury himself in study of the Hermetic Arts. He surrounded himself with a psychological cocoon, keeping himself distant from the outside world.



This tragedy also spurred him on to what would become his true life's work: the drawing of a force comprised of all magickal traditions, that would resist the encroaching powers of the Church and Reason. Before his appointment to the Cabal, Louis served as courier and go-between for Baldric of House Tytalus, working to establish the necessary ties upon which the Grand Convocation would be forged. These activities won him the notice of the Council.

As I said, I did not at first support DuMonte's appointment to the Cabal, but he demonstrated such mastery of his craft, as well as an admirable knowledge of magick and religion — no doubt amassed over the course of his early years of intensive self-confinement — that there were few other logical choices.

In the beginning, Louis proved difficult for the other members of the Cabal to understand. An unassuming man of few words and guarded manner, the mage's soft gray eyes reflected little emotion, but scrutinized everything impassively. He often kept himself aloof, plodding along ahead of the others, setting his tent apart and, perhaps unconsciously, upwind of the camp. The rest of the company, more inclined to develop quick friendships — and friendly rivalries — interpreted his behavior as hostile rejection, and for the most part left him to his own devices.

His quiet manner soon came to work in his favor. Because he spoke so infrequently, his words held greater weight; thus, when he did speak, his opinions were given serious consideration, held above all others except, perhaps, Heylel's. The Solificato himself often solicited Louis' advice, especially when, as frequently occurred, the group was fractured by a difference of opinion. As a result, an implicit friendship, based more upon trust and mutual respect than an actual exchange of words, soon developed between the two. Following Heylel's lead, the Cabal often turned to Louis to settle disputes, to find solutions that would please all parties, even allowing for the gulfs that separated the representatives of the various magickal Traditions.

Striving always for simplicity and practicality, Louis dressed in plain brown robes of coarse and sturdy fibers, well-suited to the conditions of strenuous travel. The Hermetic mage had little use for material things. He carried a silver amulet engraved with what seemed an endless array of runes, a ring with perfectly balanced scales embossed on its gold face, and an abacus, for use in the rituals of his magick: these comprised the entirety of his valued possessions. He scorned Daud-Allah's love for the trappings of his warrior's life — the multifarious weapons which he shined and sharpened daily — and his insistence upon dressing in the traditional manner of his people. Perhaps he admired Eloine the most, for she needed no accouterments, and her Tradition allowed her to be free of even the minimal material of clothing. He would often watch her when she sang and danced, noticing with envy the ease and eloquence with which she expressed her emotions with her voice and body. Yet he found her alien and puzzling, and kept himself distant. His rejection of her was so complete, in fact, that they rarely even spoke. Few would guess the passion that burned beneath his cold and stern facade.

The journey with the Cabal hardened Louis; though portly when the trip began, he soon grew lean and muscular, though even at his leanest, he was a stocky figure. At five feet three inches, he was one of the shortest of the company. Though only in his mid-forties, the beard and mustache that framed his small nose and thin lips were spattered with gray and his hair had begun to thin. The early tragedies that scarred his life left him dour, more inclined to frown than to smile. Still, there was a look of youth about him that seemed inconsistent with his role as judge and arbitrator.

I have long wondered what occurred over the course of the journey that led Louis to a change of heart. Though always open-minded, Louis' adamant distrust of the other Traditions became increasingly apparent as the Cabal journeyed across Europe, as did his dogmatic insistence upon the veracity of his own beliefs. His hatred of the Church bred conflicts with Sister Bernadette; his xenophobic sentiments roused the ire of Walking Hawk, Daud-Allah and Fall Breeze, though none could sufficiently explain the bond that grew between he and Cygnus Moro: he took greater pleasure in the Euthanatos' company than he did that of any other member of the Cabal. Perhaps the man's generous nature and natural charm somehow unlocked the key to the mage's closely guarded inner thoughts. Still, he was not able to fully overcome the bitterness he

carried, both for the loss of his loved ones, and for what he saw to be the ill-treatment of the Hermetic Tradition to which he had devoted his life.

Gradually, Louis began to soften his convictions against the Order of Reason. He never eased his arguments against the Church, but maintained rather that the two would one day separate. Time would prove him right in his assertion.

Who can say what subtle forces drew the Cabal forward to its final doom? Perhaps it was the convictions of the Hermetic magus, his growing distrust of the other members of the Cabal, that contributed to Heylel's fateful choice. Perhaps, then, we blame one member, when in truth it was the Nine together who worked to shape the Cabal's self-destruction.

In the end, Louis fought bravely, until he was at last consumed by the fire of his magick, spent to defend the lives of his fellows and the mission for which they had banded together. I remain confident to this day that the very core of that conviction burned most brightly in the consuming flames of this Magus of the Hermetic Order. None can doubt that even through that final battle, DuMonte's loyalty to the Cabal was fierce.

The Batini — Daud-Allah Abu-Hisham, Ibn-Muqla al-Baghdadi

Daud-Allah's role in history began long before the meeting of the Grand Convocation and the founding of the Cabal of Nine. Though he never told his true age, the Batini professed to having lived for more than four centuries before his involvement with the Cabal began, which made him by far the oldest member. He claimed to have killed hundreds of Crusaders in his intrepid history — an honor which did not endear him to many of his European counterparts — and to have fought alongside Saladin in the Second Crusade. The scimitar he bore — a weapon which, he pointed out, was not traditional to his people — he claimed to have captured from a captain in the army of Genghis Khan. In addition to this, Daud-Allah carried with him a short sword, a Japanese Tachi, a long bow, several javelins, and spears of different lengths. He practiced nightly with his weapons when the company was camped, perfecting his mastery of each as well as the mental discipline that made him all but invincible in battle.

His nature belied his fierce warrior background, however, for Daud-Allah, a name which means "Beloved of Allah," was a man of gentle manners and even temper. Unlike many among the Ahl-i-Batin, he never impressed his own opinions upon others, and angered only when pushed to the extreme. His companions often marveled at the irony that a man with so little hate and anger in his soul would prove to be among the fiercest of warriors, for Daud-Allah's prowess in battle was unsurpassed. He struck down foes with the pure unbridled strength and speed of lightning, his many weapons weaving a musical dance which served to transform a single man into a company of soldiers.

This knowledge extended also to the realm of magick, for he was well-trained in Correspondence Arts, and admirably knowledgeable about the Arts of Forces and Spirit. He would use these skills to act as scout, often disappearing for several days at a time in order to gauge the possible dangers and obstacles that might await the rest of the Cabal. On one occasion, he summoned a djinn to carry a crucial bit of information back to the Council of Nine. Otherwise, he seldom displayed his magickal skills, preferring to rely upon his skill with weapons.

Daud-Allah was well-learned in many subjects; over his long lifetime he studied many of the varied languages and cultures of Europe. This proved to be a sore point for some of the other members of the company, for his knowledge often exceeded that of the Tradition's chosen representative. In addition to his native Persian, the Batini spoke fluent French, was well-versed in English and Italian, Egyptian, the Cantonese dialect of Chinese, Arabic, Mongolian, Greek and

Japanese, and had some limited mastery of Latin. A student of alchemy, Kabbalistic formulae, and Greek philosophy, Daud-Allah was also a great scholar of Christian Scripture. Though he devoted centuries to the effort to defend against the ill-fated Crusaders, Daud-Allah held a profound appreciation for the Christians' doctrines, and it saddened him to see these teachings so shamelessly discarded in the throes of the Holy War. Bernadette shared this passion for the teachings of Christianity, and found that she could learn many things from him. The two spoke often, and a tenuous bond soon grew between them.

Others, such as DuMonte and Walking Hawk, were guarded in their conversations with him, fearing to appear unlearned within the radius of his vast experience. Only Heylel, perhaps because of his own remarkable accomplishments, did not seem at all intimidated by the scope of Daud-Allah's intelligence, and these two shared many hours of conversation, offering to each other the treasures of their own unique experiences.

Akrites shared a unique relationship with the ancient warrior-mage, for the Batini represented the epitome of what the Seer of Chronos deemed Ascension, the true freedom of inner perfection. Time, according to Akrites, was the key to Ascension. In Daud-Allah's noble heart and quiet wisdom, Akrites saw perfection, and he regarded the Batini with reverence and awe. Daud-Allah, too, held great respect for the Ecstatic, and shared a kinship with him based upon their common Middle-Eastern origins.

Because his great age set him apart from his companions, Daud-Allah was less inclined to speak than to listen. Even so, the Batini remained on friendly terms with the members of the Cabal, in spite of the obvious cultural and philosophical differences. The companions recognized, as did he himself, that he was more enlightened than others of his Tradition. It was rumored that he maintained a secret tryst with Fall Breeze, for they spent much time alone together. In truth, they probably only shared their expertise with one another, she in hand to hand combat, and he in the art of weaponry. The sole member of the Nine with whom Daud-Allah had reason to argue was Eloine; he could not reconcile himself to her late-night celebrations, carried on in plain sight while fully unclothed. Often, he described to her the consequences of such behavior among the women in Persia. Eloine interpreted these expressions of astonished curiosity as personal insults to her beliefs and her Tradition. Soon enough, Daud-Allah learned to keep his comments to himself.

As their time together lengthened, however, tensions within the Cabal increased. Daud-Allah's insistence upon wearing traditional Persian garb when weather permitted caused conflict between the Batini and the Cabal; this especially offended the practical Louis, who could never understand the warrior's appreciation for finery. Some also questioned the necessity for his frequent pauses every day to pray to Mecca, which the others deemed as merely another hindrance to the speed of their urgent journey.

Daud-Allah was a commanding figure, with wide eyes dark and deep as a midnight sky. The only true reflection of his age, they bespoke the tides of the centuries in the emotions they conveyed, and the bitterness of many years in their jaded edges. His black hair, a shade darker than his deep brown skin, fell to his shoulders. Ancient though he was, that smooth and supple skin belied his age, creased only by gentle crow's feet around eyes which had too long squinted at the sun. A thick goatee and mustache further sharpened the angles of his strong-boned face, and the traditional turban of his people added to the warrior's already imposing stature. This he never removed, save upon two occasions in which it became unraveled in the course of combat. A fierce man of strength and power, Daud-Allah was the strong arm of the Cabal until the final battle, and he felled more than any other on that morning of Heylel's Betrayal. Alas, sheer numbers alone were all that could overcome this rare and gifted warrior. His heroic feats shall ring forth throughout history, and he shall forever be honored as one of the greatest of his Tradition.



THOSE WHO SURVIVED TO LEAVE THESE TESTAMENTS

The Solificato — Heylel Teomim Thoabath

This, the leader of the Cabal of Nine, whose name translates, “The Twin Lights of the Morning Star,” was perhaps the most extraordinary of all who comprised the ill-fated Cabal — and the most unfathomable. Heylel Teomim, creator of the legendary Philosopher’s Stone, was the product of an alchemical amalgamation of two entities, an attempt to create a perfect union between the masculine and feminine elements of the human psyche. While Heylel stands as a wondrous hallmark of the far frontiers of alchemy, this strange and beautiful creature was by all accounts a tragic failure; the individuals whose souls became one in the Teomim could not wholly surrender their separate beings to effect a total fusion. Heylel’s existence was forever marred by internal conflict, a crisis of identity born of an inability to embrace the unity of his spirit. This was reflected in his tendency to shift between “I” and “we” when referring to himself, sometimes even within a single sentence. In the interest of simplicity, I shall use the masculine form when referring to Heylel, though the mage was neither male nor female, but both contained within a single body.

Of Heylel’s history, we know little. Before his transformation, Heylel was Julius de Medici and Mia de Napoli. The former was the youngest son born to a prominent wealthy Italian family; although rumor suggests that he may have been a bastard child, this allegation has never been substantiated. Shortly after his Awakening and the discovery of his “sorcerous” talent, Julius was disowned, cut off from the family business and barred from his inheritance. Had he not been so brutally abandoned, he might never have embarked upon the Path which led him to the Solificati and his miraculous alchemical discoveries.

Mia de Napoli was abandoned in infancy; I have been unable to trace her true parentage. She was quite literally raised on the streets, and quickly learned to survive in the worst neighborhoods of Naples. All we know for certain is that she was a prostitute and a thief. It is rumored that she worked for an assassin as well, but this seems a bit far-fetched for the times. How these two ever met remains a matter for speculation, but their role in the history of the Solificati Tradition is unquestionable.

Some say that it was the process of merging these two beings that led to the creation of the Philosopher’s Stone, rumored to alter matter and grant immortality, for which the Teomim won his high standing among the Nine. I myself do not hold with this particular theory, however, for I feel that such an accomplishment could not have been accidental. Persistent rumors of the Golden Pear of Botger — allegedly the vessel which contains the secrets of the Philosopher’s Stone — make further case for my dispute.

This fusion was imperfect; Heylel’s physical appearance changed from day to day, alternating between predominantly male and female characteristics, though some features were consistent to both. Subtle changes in height and eye color, as well as the growth of breasts or the stubble of a beard, marked the direction of the shifts. Overall, Heylel had dark brown hair with auburn highlights, which hung loose in wisps that graced his shoulders. His face was narrow and oval in shape, with a strong brow, long, pointed nose and full lips. His close-set eyes shifted intermittently from brown to green to blue, lending a supernatural quality to Heylel’s mien. Oftentimes, the members of the Cabal would find themselves staring at Heylel in rapt fascination, as if this changeable being had journeyed from some mythic land to dwell for a time among more ordinary humans. He was, in truth, unnaturally beautiful. Whether in male or female form, Heylel’s hands were long and elegant, the skin smooth and soft. When he spoke, they worked eloquently to punctuate his words. Often before he delivered an argument or initiated a discussion, he frowned in deep thought or concentration, as if listening to the whispers of some inner voice; whether or not this was the two souls in him pooling their thoughts, their ideas, and their wisdoms, the words that followed had the quality of otherworldly inspiration.

Though few among the Council ever fully understood Heylel, they willingly elected him leader of the Nine. His noble air, born of the knowledge that he was the closest anyone had come to true perfection, won him the others’ confidence. He was firm, but not condescending, in pointing out the flaws and faults of his companions’ words and actions, and his direction of the group was skillfully subtle. The Hermetic mage was Heylel’s closest ally among the Cabal, for the Teomim trusted Louis’ objectivity, and often found refuge in his company from a barrage of conflicting passions.

Heylel’s vivid eloquence, too, worked in his favor. His criticisms were transformed into praise by the tone and music of his voice; arguments in which he was involved became fruitful discussions from which both participants reaped equal rewards. Among his flu-



ent tongues, the Teomim numbered his native Italian, German, French, Greek, English, and Latin, as well as some broken Chinese and Pictish. Heylel spoke not just with words, but with his entire body, pacing and gesturing while in the fires of a passionate speech. Heylel fostered endless discussions among his companions on subjects of political, religious, and philosophical importance, and was always open to their views, listening with genuine interest before presenting his countering arguments. He rarely allowed his emotions to influence his words, though he took no pains to suppress his sense of humor, and laughed heartily at the jokes the company would toss about to lighten their weary travels.

Each member of the Cabal, in their own way, developed a bond with Heylel. Because he was so near perfection, the others saw in him an answer to a need, an element to fill the hollows of their souls. He was, perhaps, the closest friend of the aloof DuMonte; certainly he was the only member of the Cabal who truly understood the Hermetic mage's sorrow, and was the first to realize the benefits of his vast and practical wisdom. To Akrites, Heylel was the strong father figure; he achieved the delicate balance of friendship and discipline that earned the Seer's high regard and loyalty. The ancient Daud-Allah found in Heylel an intellectual equal, the first in many years, who opened him to unique thoughts and experiences, for Heylel was a creature unlike any the world traveler had encountered in his centuries-long lifetime. Heylel's perspective stretched the boundaries of Daud-Allah's understanding of the world.

As time wore on, however, the respect and confidence the others granted the Teomim began to fray, worn thin by doubts and jealousies. Walking Hawk, a man of simple beliefs and few words, never fully trusted the Solificato. Beautiful in both male and female aspect, Heylel at times inflamed the passions of his companions, including the chaste and holy Sister Bernadette. Only Eloine, I believe, ever consummated her desire for the Teomim. Perhaps this tragic affair was Heylel's fatal mistake, for the attention he paid to the beautiful Verbena further alienated the slowly crumbling alliance. Their unholy and inexplicable emotions toward Heylel led the Magi of the Cabal to pull away from him, just as their petty squabbles caused them to turn away from one another. Perhaps, in the end, this is what impelled the Teomim to commit their ultimate Betrayal.

The true motivations for his actions remain a mystery, and I will not pass judgment here, though I will admit that over my long life I have begun to question the justice of my own once-vehement persecution. It is my intention to allow him to tell his story as he told it to the Convocation years ago, and leave my readers to formulate their own opinions.

The Verbena — Eloine “Chosen and Beloved”

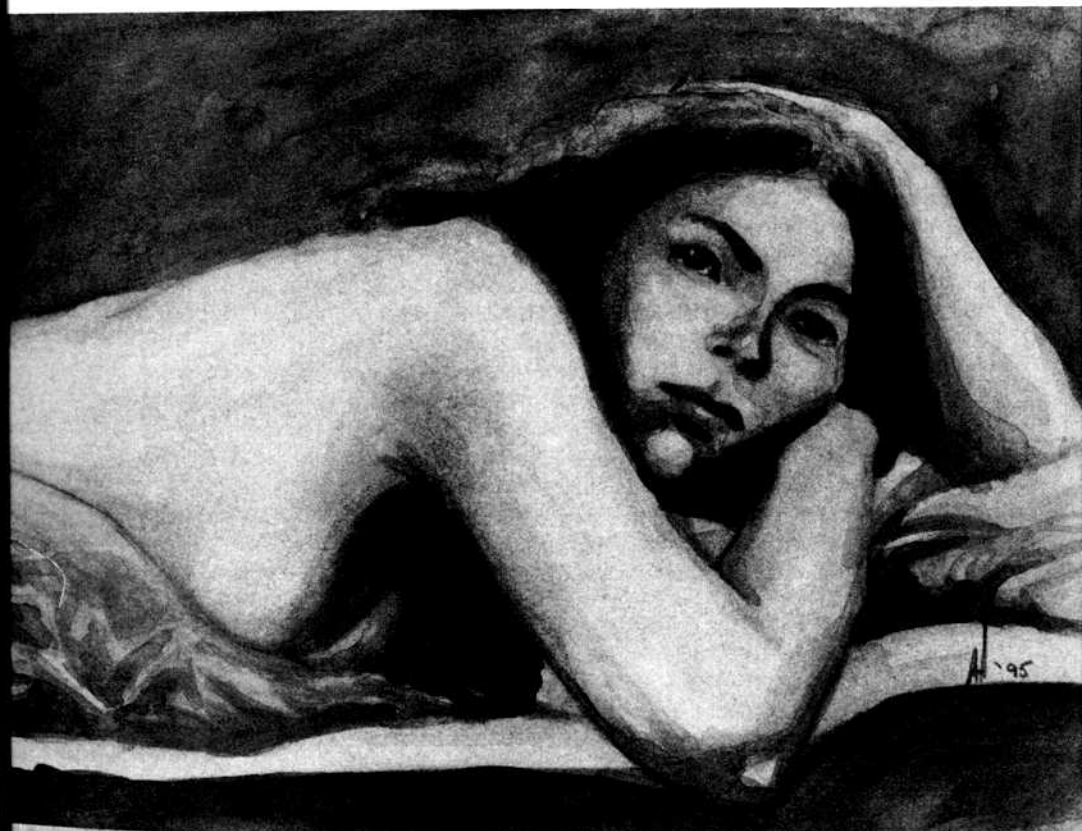
I find it hard, when writing of Eloine, to maintain my scholarly resolve. As a youth, I knew her family; as a man, I desired her; as a mage, I revered her, just as I did each of the Nine. Her spirit seemed to blossom after her initiation into the Chosen; where once she seemed a dancing flame, she burned brightly afterward, like an inferno. The heartbreak I knew when she returned to Horizon, anguished, her spirit and body broken, has reverberated for five hundred years. Only the death of my first wife, Catharina, and the despair that grows with each intrigue within these walls, compares with the pain I knew when I beheld what our ideals, and hers, had done to the woman I loved.

Past affections aside, Eloine, named “Protector” and “Beloved,” played a special role in the history of our Council; she bore twins from a union with the Great Betrayer, twins which disappeared into legend when parent fought parent. The mystery of these illustrious twins has attracted many speculations, but no confirmed answers. They must have played some monumental role in the following century, if, indeed, they survived; I cannot believe that Destiny would ignore the fruits of such a magnificent, if tragic, union.

Whatever the fate of her children might have been, the Verbena Chosen was a memorable figure; though not as learned as Fall Breeze or Daud-Allah, nor as formidable as Master DuMonte or Cygnus Moro, Eloine was a potent Adept in her own right, with an intuitive gift for elemental Arts and a sincere respect for the Mother's begotten. Of all the Nine, her ideals were the purest — and the most fragile.

Like Fall Breeze, Eloine was young when she joined the Convocation. Her mother and father, both Awakened Magi with the blood of the primordial Wyck in their veins, shared a friendship with the Primi Nightshade. They had been some of the first to heed her call to unity, though they remained in their mortal home on the Irish coast until Eloine was nearly fifteen. Before they passed into Horizon, the family ministered to the local villagers while hunting the stragglers who had survived General Wyndgarde's ill-fated “meeting” with Nightshade. Surprisingly, Eloine had no siblings; raised as an only child, she swam in her parents' love and absorbed their teaching and their Art. By the time she journeyed with them to Horizon, she was a powerful sorceress, with a strong Avatar and boundless enthusiasm.

I confess to being enchanted by the girl's metamorphosis; where last I had known a child, a sensual woman now danced, lively, strong and flirtatious. Though I could not, in good conscience, court her even before her initiation, I watched her from afar. It was said that she came from Boadicea's royal line, and she carried that stamp of wild nobility in her every gesture. Her thick red hair cascaded down her back, and her eyes, like green marble, carried hints of older times in their depths. She bared her voluptuous body freely, much to the scandal of the more ascetic magi, and went barefooted in all but the harshest weather. Her sensuality was a natural thing, not affected or calculated, but drawn from her affinity to the sacred Earth. Despite this, she was in many ways an innocent; unlike the Baccan Seers, who paraded their lusts in open indulgence, Eloine kept to herself. The few lovers she chose came, in most cases, from within her Tradition — until Heylel.



I will not speak further of the relationship between them; the Remembrances she herself has left us turn speculation into shallow gossip. I cannot claim I was not jealous of the union (when later I had heard of it), but Eloine's life was always hers to pursue. The zeal with which she embraced Destiny left her broken when that tide turned back upon her.

Her magick flowed largely from dance and song-ecstasy; with these, she tapped into the very pulse of the Earth and drew upon the Spirit World. As I said, her parents had taught her everything from healing chants to woodcraft; though she had no real gift for languages, she communicated well enough with most of her Cabal to share in their debates. She knew weapons, too, though she hesitated to draw them unless threatened. It was neither skill nor politesse nor savvy nor power that led Nightshade to choose such a youngster for the mission the Primi herself had championed; it was spirit and honest zeal. Eloine embodied the virtues Nightshade hoped would guide the First Cabal. She had reason to regret that decision later, but I believe time has proven Nightshade right.

Unlike her soul-sister Bernadette, Eloine was not naive; she had spilled blood and hunted men, spent her nights in passion and her days in debate. The bond between the two women, however, has been cause for much speculation over the years. Some Akashics claim that the two shared an Avatar-bond, a reincarnation cycle of affinity. Others claim that the two had some past business to resolve, and that even now they follow each other through some endless loop of ambivalent sisterhood. The primal opposition of their two Traditions has been said, by the cosmically-inclined, to mark the yin-yang focus of the Cabal at its zenith. The Cult even claims the two were lovers. I think it's all foolishness, myself. Eloine and Bernadette had a chance meeting at Destiny's crossroads. Neither emerged unscathed.

All who knew Eloine were shocked by her transformation when Akrites brought the survivors home to Horizon Chantry. Her dancing spirit had been whipped into a scarred mass that even Nightshade could not heal. She left a young woman and returned an old widow scarcely four years later. The cries of her babies haunted the mother into furious midnight searches; more than once, she could be found rooting around in some corner of the Realm, her eyes pleading, her face haggard. For all her frenzy, she never muttered the babes' names aloud or committed them to paper. Perhaps she sensed some dire magick that would follow a Name to either its source or its owner. If the Verbena know the twins' identities, they have kept them silent. To the rest of us, those names are lost.

Perhaps it was the fate of her firstborn that kept Eloine from bearing other children; although she probably took other partners, those unions must have been joyless things. No accounts speak of later loves, and the bitterness and guilt that seeps from her Remembrances would have poisoned future unions. It's ironic that the Chosen of the carnal healers would herself have become so quickly barren; in a few short years, Eloine passed from Maiden and Mother to Crone. Though she survived for decades afterward, she forswore her Art and became a vagabond.

Several accounts claim Eloine joined a women's underground that ferried accused witches away from Inquisitors or avenged the atrocities that epitomized the European witch-craze. Potent as their efforts may have been, this fellowship, if it existed, made little impact on the madness that consumed mage and innocent alike. The Cabal of Pure Thought and their mortal minions had been too effective for anyone's good; within two centuries, millions had died in ways that must have cheered the Fallen Ones. Eloine perished in the flames of that early holocaust, her body aged but her faith, we are told, renewed near the moment of her death. Whenever the Avatar of Eloine now rests, I hope it has found its peace. Her Testament becomes my prayer, and my farewell.

The Chorus Sister — Bernadette

In my mind, Bernadette was less a woman than a fine and delicate bird, gracefully beautiful, and yet not wholly of this world. She was a true healer, whose wondrous gift was turned to vile purposes by those who sought to use her. Though she lived for some three hundred years, and her time with the Cabal was only a small part of the span of her experiences, Bernadette seemed forever pure and innocent in her thinking. Perhaps there were certain truths about herself which she resisted; perhaps she was frightened of the dangerous world she saw, and deliberately closed her eyes. Certainly, the long road of her travels left her jaded, scarred, and bitter. But like the spring that follows a long winter, she continued to weave her poetry throughout her later years; whatever hidden fears and sorrows she carried with her were forever locked away inside.

The time and place of her birth played a major role in shaping Sister Bernadette's life; her early years were shadowed by the rise of the iron hand of religious fanaticism, an economic crisis that crippled France, and the appearance of the Black Plague. Joan of Arc was born five years earlier in Sister Bernadette's hometown of Domremy, Champagne, a significant fact in light of Bernadette's own remarkable experience: like the famed religious leader, she claimed to have been visited by angels when, as a child she fell deathly ill. Wracked by dangerously high fever, she passed in and out of consciousness. During this time, as she later described, angelic beings came to her and revealed many wondrous things, imparting vast and holy knowledge. This was the Awakening of her Avatar. Perhaps it was this brush with death that kindled in Bernadette the miraculous healing powers for which she is still renowned.

Following this experience, her parents sent her away from Domremy, consigning her to the Second Order of Dominicans — the theologians known as the Black Friars, who led the Inquisition — and a lifetime vow of poverty. This life of religious devotion fostered in Bernadette a purity of thought which she was never to outgrow, for she saw the world only in terms of black and white, good and evil — or Christian and Heretic. The fine shades of gray that lie between were beyond her comprehension. When things were not perfect according to her careful constructs, she strove to make them so. This was reflected in her healing ability: she would lay her hands upon the damaged spirit and refine it to what she saw to be its purest form. To Bernadette, the theologians of her Order, the Christians, were good; the mages who committed heresy against the Christian doctrines were, in her eyes, evil.

Of all among the Nine, only one ever guessed the role Bernadette played in the Inquisition before she joined the Celestial Chorus and began her travels. This was the Batini Daud-Allah, the ancient warrior whose knowledge of the Christian scriptures far surpassed her own. Though many Christians had been his enemies, Daud-Allah had great reverence for the teachings of Christ, so much so that he spent his life opposing misguided believers. He saw the shameful irony behind the bloody Crusades, and for that, he vowed to destroy the Crusaders. Daud-Allah cared very much for the beautiful young (by his standards) singer, for she, too, coveted the purity of the Christian way. Though she was never to realize this, he treasured the songs she sung to him in the course of their discussions, for he saw these as beautiful expressions of her feelings for her religion, unhampered by the complexities of doctrine. His mistake lay in attempting to increase the depth of her knowledge of Scripture; Bernadette came to resent his greater learning, and her early admiration for the Batini quickly turned bitter. Daud-Allah, whose ancient eyes had long ago developed the ability to see beyond surfaces, saw in her reaction a response to her own guilt. Bernadette herself was a Crusader; she, in the name of Christianity, had used her powers to destroy the enemies of the Inquisition. Certain truths, the singer of the Celestial Chorus did not wish to hear.



Though she recognized the purity and goodness of Daud-Allah's soul, the gulf between the singer and the ancient scholar grew ever wider, further strained by the fact that Bernadette herself had never learned to read. To her, this seemed a frivolous skill. For this failing, many of the Order of Dominicans regarded her with scorn. This remained a closely-guarded secret throughout the many years of the Sister's life, and may explain Bernadette's dislike for the scholarly Hermetic mage DuMonte, whom she judged snobbish by his behavior.

Though the written word never held any attraction for Bernadette, she is today revered as one of the greatest singers of the Celestial Chorus — indeed many of her songs are still found within the Tradition's archives. She communicated solely through song, an unusual, but not unheard of talent among the musically-based Order. Among her magickal skills, she possessed an uncanny ability to manifest projections of herself, each of which would carry its own voice within the weaving of Bernadette's melody; it was through this means that the singer carried on discussions with herself, often through the night, for she rarely slept. While most of the Cabal respected this, a few, such as Fall Breeze and Walking Hawk, found it queerly disturbing. As time went on, her companions grew weary of her ever-winding threads of song.

Though a grown woman of forty-five years, Bernadette's childlike appearance led the others to treat her as they would a fragile youth, always protecting and defending her from danger. Nearly as tall as Louis, Bernadette dwindled next to the burly mage, for her figure was as fine and light as a bird's. Indeed, her companions remained amazed at the depth and power of the voices resonating from the Sister's delicate frame. Her raven-black hair was cut short in page-boy style, furthering her waifish charm, and bright blue eyes peeked out from beneath her bangs like a reflection of the heavens. She dressed in plain black robes that seemed to weigh heavily upon her thin shoulders, and served to further emphasize her blue eyes and rich burgundy lips. Even her face was pointed like a bird's, with high, sharp cheekbones and a long thin nose.

Bernadette's predisposition to see things only in terms of black and white became a source of tension in her relations with the others; she was unable to reconcile certain elements of the natures of her companions, and within herself as well. The Ecstatic, Akrites, proved to be a challenge to the singer's vow of chastity, for although she knew him to be sinful, she still felt herself drawn to his enigmatic charm. The Ecstatics claim Akrites seduced every member of the Cabal, but I find it difficult to believe that Bernadette ever truly fell to the power of his blatant sensuality. More likely, the knowledge of her attraction only caused her to withdraw further from the mage.

An uneasy friendship grew between Bernadette and Eloine, for these two are said to be spiritual kin, bound to encounter one another through the course of many lifetimes, whether as friends, lovers, or bitter enemies. From the beginning, they understood each other well, and the bond between them was plain to all the company. Alas, on the journey of this lifetime, the tenuous trust the women shared was doomed to fail. The sword that severed them was Heylel, the inexplicable leader of the group, whose power was such that he drew each member of the Cabal into his embrace, physically or metaphorically. Bernadette's embrace was metaphoric only, but Eloine consummated her love for Heylel. After she had begun to share his tent, the friendship that had blossomed between the women quickly withered. Bernadette regarded Eloine with mistrust and suspicion, emotions which may have sprung from jealousy, for Bernadette would never act upon the secret desires she, too, harbored for Heylel.

Did Bernadette survive the tortures she suffered at the hands of the Pure Thought mages during her imprisonment? Physically, of course, she lived to sing the song of her ordeal. Yet her religion maintained such a hold on her that she never learned to see beyond the world the Bible painted. To her mind, mages were angels — and even angels can fall from the grace of God. Who among us can fault this pure but weary spirit in her quest to Heal the dark wounds of the world? To my mind, no greater music has touched this world than the final voice, the Celestial Chorus, that at the last recounted in lyrical prose the life of Sister Bernadette.

The Seer — Akrites Salonikas 6

Akrites Salonikas, named for the legendary Byzantine border-lord Akrites Digenes, was by nature a rebel, a fiery spirit who stirred flames of passion in the hearts of friends and followers alike. Prior to his years with the Cabal, the Seer traveled throughout his native land of Persia, introducing the ecstatic arts of music, dance, incense, drugs, and sexual pleasures to the Sleepers, exploring the sacred Passions through these mind-altering practices. A prophet in the eyes of the people, he used his influence to incite them to revolt against their cycle of slavery. True to his name (Greek for "borderer"), Akrites walked the narrow line that marked the border between order and chaos. He believed that the established order must periodically be disrupted, shattered and cast aside in favor of a new order, or else society would become forever locked in stasis — a condition, he maintained, which perpetuated mental and spiritual decay. Rebellion, according to Akrites, was the road that led to Freedom.

More than any of the others, Akrites understood the true nature of the threat posed by the Order of Reason. He had glimpsed a world shaped by the hands of the Technomancers. In the process of his Awakening, under the guidance of Prateeti, his teacher and mentor for many years, Akrites tapped into his precognitive abilities and traveled forward through time. So powerful was his talent that he crossed the Time Gauntlet constructed by the Technomancers of the twentieth century and viewed a world ruled by machines and starved of the wonder of magick. This dangerous crossing rebounded upon him in the form of a peculiar Paradox Flaw: when the Seer became excited or aroused, hashish smoke materialized about him in an acrid cloud. It was this vision that won Akrites the ear of the Council, though his dynamic passions stirred a wealth of controversy among the Convocation, and once left him banned from the proceedings for several days. Still, his insights into the nature of the enemy swayed the Council to elect him into the Nine.

Akrites was a time-traveler: since his youth, he experienced visions of the past and the future (a fact his mother kept a closely-guarded secret), though it was only after his Awakening that he learned to understand and control them. He believed that time was the key to Ascension — that as one traveled through time and amassed experience, one's Passions became purified, the Self expanded beyond the boundaries of "I" and achieved a greater depth of being — one that spanned the whole scope of the universe. He was fascinated by Daud-Allah, the Ancient One, whom he revered as a pure and wise spirit, and with whom he shared the inimitable experience of having traveled far along the vast inroads of time. He likewise developed a deep friendship with the Dreamspeaker, Walking Hawk. The Seneca came from a people who loved storytelling, and Akrites was a great storyteller, though many of his tales were gross exaggerations of his earlier adventures. The two often shared a pipe together and exchanged amusing anecdotes or told the legends of their people.

From the beginning, Fall Breeze was quite taken with Akrites, drawn by his sensual charm and his free and easy manners. Had Walking Hawk been a younger man, this may have proved to be a sore point between them — for he cared deeply for the Akashic Brother — but his love was that of a father for a daughter, and so the two remained close companions.

Akrites believed it was his role to expose the others of the Cabal to new realms of experience — realms that would serve to shatter the order of their lives and free them of the prison created by their natures. Thus, he habitually argued for the most unorthodox course of action, attempting to seduce the Cabal with his sensuality and charm to act against accepted rules and standards. He was sexually free and of loose and controversial morals. Indeed, the Ecstasies claim that he seduced every member of the Cabal at one time or another. More often than not, he

would play the role of devil's advocate just to provoke the others, and regaled his companions with exaggerated tales and good-natured jests. Like a wayward child, Akrites would, at times, strike out on his own to forge a new path: sometimes the others followed, but the more conservative of the company — Bernadette, Moro, DuMonte — soon grew leery of his schemes. The Cabal quickly learned to take his words with a helping of salt. Strangely, Akrites developed a close bond with Heylel, who proved to be a stabilizing influence, a balance for his dynamic spirit; with a few soft words, the Cabal's leader could steer him back to the ultimate purpose of the Cabal and the necessity for unity of action.

Akrites was of Persian ancestry, the illegitimate son of a slave woman and a soldier in the court of a Macedonian lord. Rebellious even in his early years, he was a constant source of disappointment to his father, a stern, though not unloving, man. He failed to conform to the life set out for him, refusing a classical education and eventually earning expulsion from the University at Constantinople. His father, at last hopelessly wearied of his untoward behavior, disowned him in favor of a legitimate son by his Christian wife. It is clear that Akrites' devotion to Heylel stemmed from this lingering need for a father figure who understood him well enough to channel the fire of his spirit without attempting to extinguish its flame.

The Seer's almost classic good looks were an even match for his bold and rugged confidence, for he was blessed with nearly golden skin (from his mother's Persian ancestry), and a body of perfect proportions, with straight broad shoulders, narrower hips and torso, and well-defined, strong-muscled limbs. He kept his short beard trimmed close about his square jaw. His eyes, perhaps, said the most about him, for, in equal measure, they smoldered with fierce temper and softened with emotion. Sometimes, however, those large, dark eyes would glitter mysteriously, and none could even hope to guess his thoughts. In the manner of a Byzantine charioteer, his hair was cropped close in front and worn in a long ponytail down the back. He had the look of eternal youth, which he achieved through the Arts of Time, Mind and Life.



Like Daud-Allah, Akrites paid careful attention to his dress, and was most often caparisoned in a manner befitting a noble or a king — which some members of the company saw as a mark of vanity. He favored robes of wool or silk, dyed shades of maroon or blue and elaborately trimmed with gold and silver threads. He was never without a headdress, either a turban or, in winter, a fur-lined hat. Akrites was the only members of the Cabal to wear jewelry of any kind; his right ear was studded with various precious gems, which appeared to change in shape and color from day to day. Across the fingers of his right hand were tattooed the mark of the Prophets, black circles, while on his left he wore the marks of the Faithful — flaming vessels.

Salonikas was by far the most controversial of all the Nine. Though deeply committed to the purpose of the mission, some would say that his actions were motivated more by self-interest than by a sense of duty or obligation. In truth, the Seer viewed things from a different, and perhaps wider, perspective. With the benefit of hindsight, I see now the purpose that lay behind his actions. Perhaps he did, indeed, act for the good of all. Would things have happened differently if he had acted earlier upon his terrible vision? Or would we, as I suspect, have faced troubles far worse than the threat posed by the modern Technomancers?

Some say Akrites was a coward for escaping when the Order of Reason fell upon the rest of the Cabal. But in that capacity he was a hero, too, for he returned to rescue his surviving companions from torture and almost certain death. My purpose here is not to judge, but only to illuminate the facts, to present them in the clearest possible light. The role he chose weighed heavily upon the Seer; after he effected the rescue of Sister Bernadette, Walking Hawk and Eloine, Akrites retreated to pass the remainder of his days in self-imposed exile in the Arctic wildlands. His Testament here speaks of what he knew and why he acted as he did; I petition you to read the words that follow with an open heart and mind, and to forestall your judgments until all has been revealed.

The Dreamspeaker — Walking Hawk

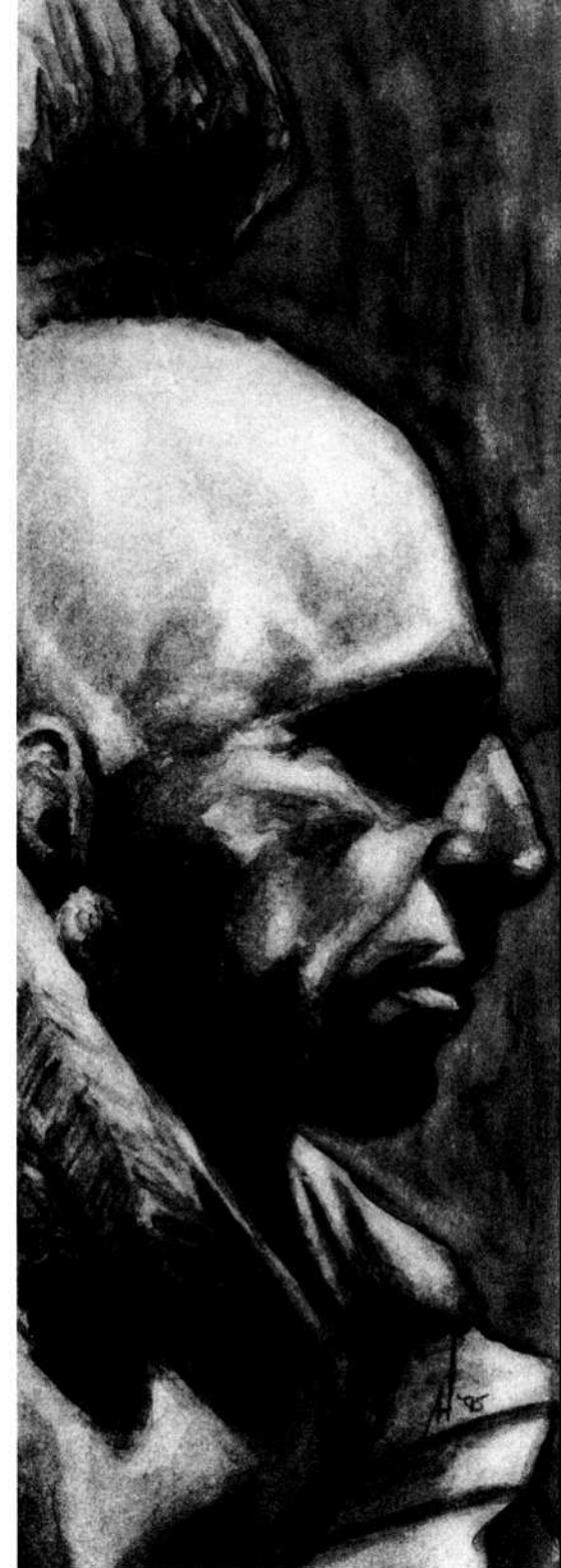
A man of few words, plain speech and savage mien, Walking Hawk seemed to many to be an unenlightened primitive. In truth, the Seneca medicine man proved himself a skilled healer and a wise visionary, a man who shared a strong bond with the Earth-mother and the spirit realm. Admittedly, the talents of the Dreamspeaker puzzled me, accustomed as I was to the rigid, scholarly discipline of Hermetic magick. The Seneca's relationship with the world was, and still remains, wholly beyond my own realm of experience. Walking Hawk's wisdom came from the Earth. He recognized that all things of nature — birds and animals, trees, plants, rocks and water — have a vital energy that links them to the Great Spirit, the giver of life and the creator of the universe. He knew the language of the spirits and called upon them through prayer and ceremony. Answers came in the form of sunsets and snowfalls, favorable winds and spring rains — far different from the fierce displays of power of the Hermetic Magi, the magical chorus of Bernadette's voices, or the mutable nature of the Solificati — but just as potent.

With his height, proud bearing and colorful dress, Walking Hawk was in all aspects a classic warrior chief; for this, his companions were initially wary of him. DuMonte, the scholar, harbored some doubts concerning the true breadth of his learning, believing him to be little more than a savage. Only Akrites and Eloine appreciated the Seneca's image of exotic nobility: his manner of dress at the very least rivaled the Ecstatic's own in its foreign flavor. Walking Hawk wore a tuft of his hair tied in a topknot, and this he often dyed red or decorated with colored feathers; the rest of his hair, he plucked with sharpened clam-shell tweezers. The eyes below were black and scathing, reflecting little but absorbing much of what they saw. His dark skin was leathery, worn by long exposure to the elements. The Dreamspeaker dressed in soft tanned hides,

wearing only a loincloth in warmer weather, but adding leggings and a hunting shirt of brain-tanned buckskin on cooler days. He was never seen without the colorful sash of woven vegetable fibers that cinched his waist; from this hung the pouches which contained his precious medicines. These were dyed and decorated with porcupine quills, as were the soft moccasins he wore on any type of terrain. Colorful shell earrings dangled from his lobes, armbands of stamped copper crossed his powerfully-muscled arms, and he occasionally adorned himself with a bear-claw necklace.

Raised to the warrior's life, Walking Hawk became a war chief at the age of sixteen, after his mother and father were murdered in an attack upon his village. For many years, he led his people on the warpath, thirsty for revenge, and his tomahawk ran red with the blood of his enemies. He was destined, however, for a greater purpose than a vengeful, if heroic death. Grievously wounded in an ambush during one of his raids, Walking Hawk lay helpless and bleeding when a great wolf spirit appeared to him. The wolf promised to spare his life if he would bury his tomahawk and follow the path of a healer. Walking Hawk agreed, and turned his back forever upon his days of warfare. After this Awakening, he learned, with the help of the spirits, to use herbs and plants to heal the sick and injured. Soon he became known throughout the land for his miraculous healing ability.

Walking Hawk was a visionary as well; prophecies often came to him in the form of dreams or during his ceremonial dances. It was such a vision that led him to embark upon a dangerous journey across the vast waters to a new land, eventually to join with the Grand Convocation. His visions, attuned to the spirit forces of the natural world around him, often guided the Cabal, reading the signs of impending danger. He spent much time in prayer and meditation, which occasionally proved a source of irritation to the others. Coupled with the meditations of the others, these rests often meant further delays.



The years of travel in a foreign land were difficult for the Dreamspeaker, for he found himself in a world eerily devoid of life, crossed with many barren fields and places where the trees and vegetation grew warped and twisted. The cities they passed through were, to his mind, filled with a terrible sickness, no better than a blight upon the natural land, which stifled the living plants and animals that had once flourished. He missed the wide, far-stretching forests where a man could retreat to hunt, fish and meditate. The warrior's anger that simmered within him grew more heated as the journey wore on, as did his longing to return to his native lands.

In spite of the fact that his fellow mages could not comprehend his simple beliefs and deep ties with the spirit of the Earth, Walking Hawk forged close friendships with several members of the Cabal. Perhaps he enjoyed the company of Akrites Salonikas the most, for the Seer could tell a better story than the most renowned storytellers of Walking Hawk's tribe, and had a keen interest in herbal lore. The two would often share a smoke while they exchanged tales of their experiences. Like Akrites, Walking Hawk believed Daud-Allah to be wise and noble, but had cause to argue with him on points of religion: he could not understand why Daud-Allah's God was not the same as every person's, or why he had to read from sheets of leaves to hear the word of the Great Spirit.

Fall Breeze held a special place in Walking Hawk's heart. The Akashic Brother was fierce in battle — a trait the healer admired, though he himself had turned away from this path — and had a noble spirit, a willingness to learn, and a penchant for laughter that sometimes lightened his own solemnity. He was much too old to take her as his wife, so he merely enjoyed her company. At times, he would teach her fighting techniques, stealth and swiftness in battle — knowledge gleaned from his own warrior days — and found her to be a quick and captivated student. He could not teach her, however, how to listen to the wind, or speak with the spirits of the small animals who often followed him. Walking Hawk was to Fall Breeze a wise father figure and gentle mentor, but his deep silences perplexed her. She alone saw the sadness that sometimes lingered in his eyes when he watched her and the Batini practice their combat skills.

Walking Hawk did not trust the Solificato — no animal in nature bore a resemblance to the hermaphrodite, and Heylel's mutable existence was wholly beyond his ken. He believed that spirits had taken control of the Teomim's body and warred for domination. The passionate discussions into which Heylel drew his companions were lost on the Dreamspeaker, for the Seneca people conducted arguments differently: each participant spoke only once and at great length, and then, in silence, listened to his fellows. The long debates Heylel incited only confused Walking Hawk, for he could not see the sense in so many words that led to no agreeable conclusion. His feelings toward the Solificato grew even darker after his affair with Eloine, whom he thought a beautiful earth-child, but one poisoned by a darker voice.

Having survived the battle with the minions of Reason and the tortures at the hands of the Cabal of Pure Thought, Walking Hawk at last returned to his native land and people, warning them of the imminent danger he had witnessed in his travels. Though for years afterward he served as a powerful and respected leader of the Seneca tribe, the Cabal's erstwhile defeat — and the loss of his beloved Fall Breeze — scarred him deeply; some of his own people questioned whether he had not grown mad as a result of his adventures. Fiercely loyal to the Cabal's purpose, Walking Hawk perhaps made the greatest sacrifice, for the long years spent wandering through foreign lands gradually withered his soul. There is much that we today can stand to learn from this enigmatic figure, for he spoke a language deeper and more profound than words alone: the language of the trees; the poetry of dreams.

The Confessions of HEYLEL TEOMIM THOABATH bani Solificato, pronounced Barabbi

In my dealings with the members of the First Cabal, few memories stand out as strongly as my first meeting with Heylel. Confidence seemed to radiate from his body, and his face was of uncommon beauty. The two in combination were an almost overwhelming force. Perhaps too overwhelming for even the mage himself to bear. Heylel's predilection for switching between singular and plural ("I" and "we") when referring to "himself," which increased as the years went on, is especially evident in his final Confession.

This crisis of honorific address is understandable; few knew how best to refer to Heylel if not by name, especially when he shifted between genders. Although the Solificato was actually a hermaphrodite (theoretically a perfect being by many alchemical standards), I use the term "he" in my descriptions, if only because that seems more appropriate than "it."

To this day I can still recall the fascination I felt around him, a primal need to stare almost constantly when in his presence. He was beyond magnetic in his demeanor, and beyond merely human in the attraction others felt toward him. Like most of my colleagues, I was both drawn and repulsed: standing near Heylel Teomim made one feel like a moth near a candle in darkness — the light attracted you ever closer while the heat drove you back.

Heylel's reputation alone gave him his place among the Nine. That "he" had actually merged two people into one when forging his new body was amazing enough; this alone would have earned him the right to be on so prestigious a body. His creation of the fabled Philosopher's Stone, however, practically guaranteed him his position as the leader of the Cabal. Many theories have come and gone as to why he betrayed the Traditions; an entire Tradition was dissolved arguing about them. Once, I felt as many of my colleagues did, that Heylel consorted with demons (hence the later appellation "Thoabath" — "Abomination"), but I have grown to actually believe his own explanations in my later years. Perhaps the whispers I have heard from time to time are true; perhaps I truly have grown mad in my Twilight years, and the fact that I believe what Heylel stated is only a symptom of my madness. That is for others to decide.

The single aspect of his confession I cannot overlook is the sheer passion of his words. He spoke of the Betrayal in a voice that broke and cracked with emotion, while his comments to the witnesses of his execution held a contempt cradled in strict politesse. Heylel Teomim Thoabath was the only person I ever knew who could make the term "esteemed colleagues" sound more vulgar than the words of an angry sailor.

I stood and watched as the Gilgul was performed. The nine Primi called down the elements upon him, ripped his twin spirits from his body, and annihilated the lot. It was not one voice that cried out, then, but two souls. I do not feel comfortable deciding, centuries later, if what was done to Heylel was fair and just. As I said earlier, what was once pragmatic has become barbaric, while old abominations have become commonplace. Who can say what would have occurred had Heylel not Betrayed us? Perhaps our world would be a brighter place, perhaps a darker one. Either way, the deed is done. Heylel Teomim is dead, with no chance ever to return. Was he right in his decision? Were we? I do not know. Did he truly believe that his Betrayal would bring about the unity of the Nine Traditions? I believe he did.



Our
name
is
Heylel
Teomim,
renunciate
of the
Solificati
and,
as some
have
called
me,
Barabbi.

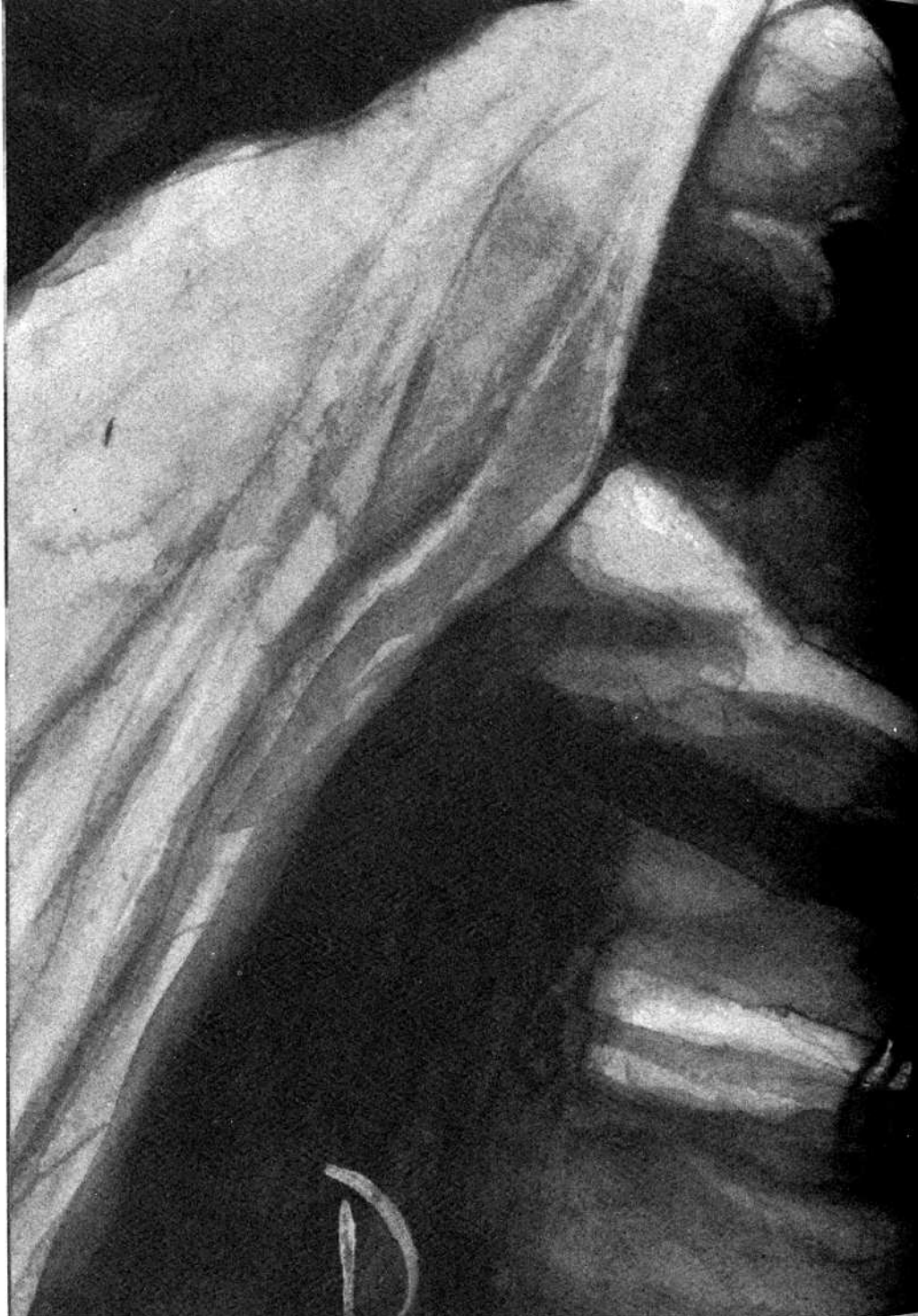
When I have finished my speech before your austere Council, I am to be put to death. You will force upon me the Gilgul, the destruction of my soul and all that makes me who we are, and then destroy the empty shell that is my body. You do this deed, commit this heinous act upon me, because you have found me guilty of consorting with demons and betraying the Council of the Nine Traditions to your enemies. I stand before you prepared to face our death. There are situations in this sadly failing world that cannot be controlled by my magicks; the fate you have presented me is one such.

I have asked for this last chance to speak before my peers. The Primi, in their doubtless infinite wisdom, have graciously permitted me my final speech before you. I will not plead my case a second time. You know the details of my actions and would surely find any attempts on my part to beg for mercy both amusing and pathetic. To say nothing of boring. No one present at this assembly came forth on so cold a winter's night¹ to hear speeches; I am here through no choice of my own and you, my esteemed colleagues, came here to watch an execution. For that reason I shall endeavor to make this statement as brief as I can while assuring that my explanations and warnings to the venerable Council and the Traditions represented here are properly represented.

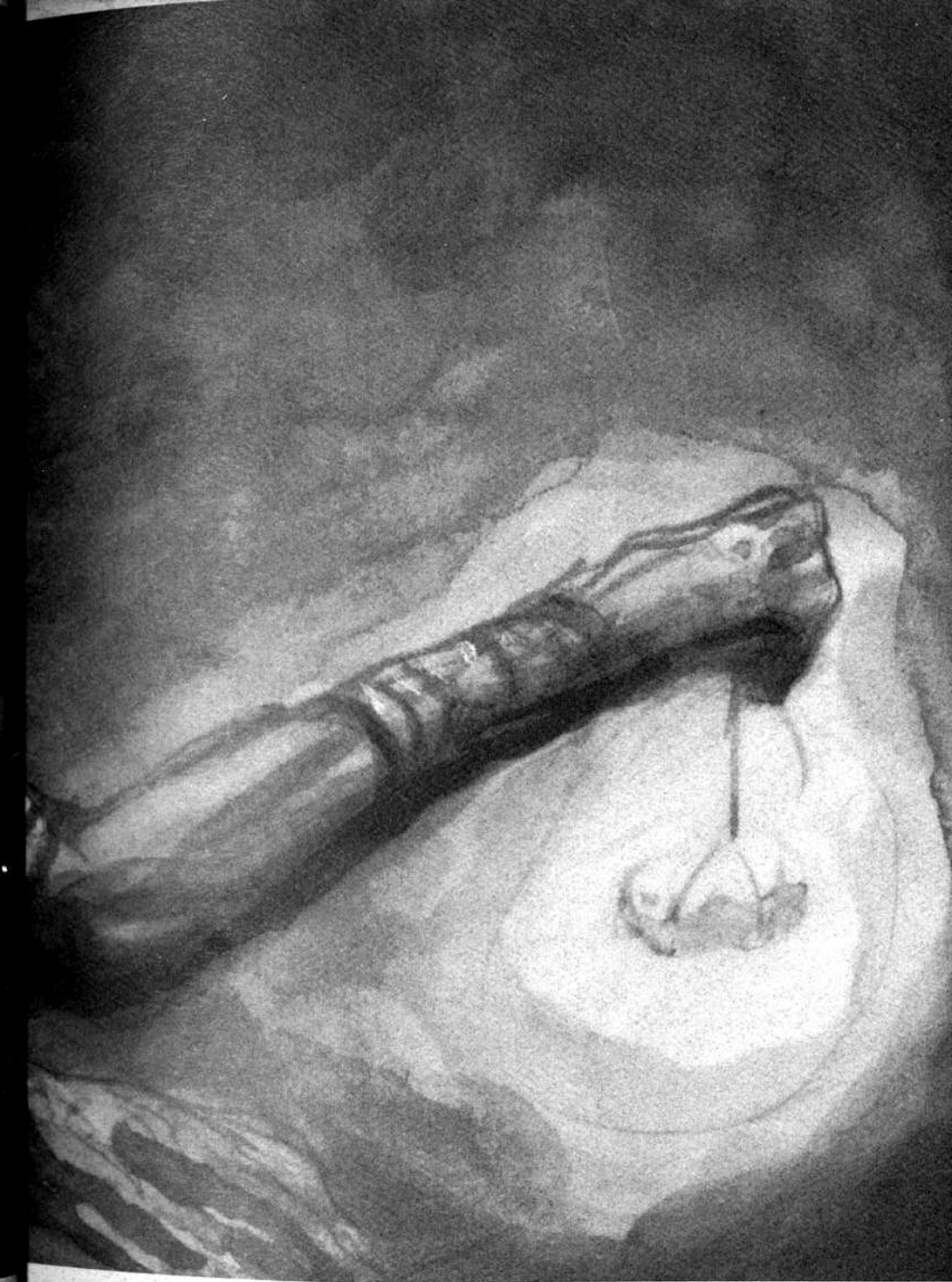
I will begin by clarifying the reasons for which I am now to die.

¹ It was winter inside Horizon at the time of Heylel's execution.

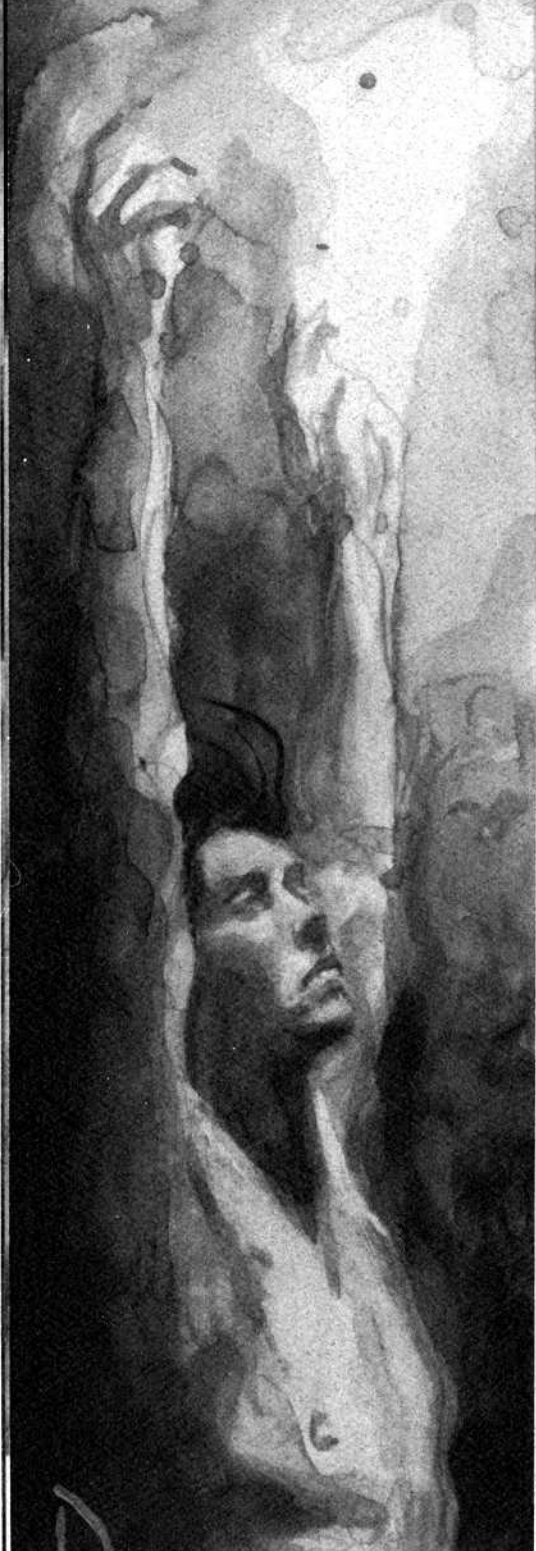




On the charges of Diabolism I must,



in good conscience, maintain my innocence.




I have never consorted with Demons, Devils, Imps, Minions of the Underworld or Succubi. I have never needed their assistance in managing my life, nor would I sell my Immortal Soul for anything as petty as money or power. We have had sufficient amounts of both in my life to keep me satisfied. Throughout my time among the Solificati and my years associating with the Nine Traditions, we have never been known to lie. I have no reason to do so now. I did not follow the Christian God, nor the Muslim God, nor the God of the Jews. I have never seen the need for Allah, Buddha, Mohammed, Yahweh, Jehovah or any of the other numerous incarnations referred to as gods.² Why then, would I find reason to believe in or worship their counterparts among the Infernal?

I see by the looks on many of the faces before me that my words have offended some and make sense to others. I do not apologize for my words any more than you intend to apologize for your actions against me. Nor, for that matter, would either apology be accepted with grace at this late time.

On the charges that I Betrayed the First Cabal of the Nine Mystick Traditions, we must admit our guilt. After four years of traveling with my distinguished associates in the mission of enlightenment and mercy, I did in fact Betray my friends and comrades to the Cabal of Pure Thought, that most dreaded among the Order of Reason's pathetic ranks. Despite your hatred, I would now assure you that I suffered the loss of my dear friends Fall Breeze, Master Louis DuMonte of the House Queasitor, Daud-Allah Abu Hisham, Ibn-Muqia al-Baghdadi and the later death of Cygnus Moro far more than anyone present at this time, with the possible exceptions of my few remaining

² It is safe to assume that Heylel did not understand the true concepts behind the Buddha. In his defense, the philosophies of the Far Easterners were a mystery to almost everyone in Europe at that time.

colleagues among the First Cabal.³



I need not see the outrage in your eyes, nor hear the whispers from the crowd to understand how little you believe me. Just the same, I suffer their loss as only a friend and lover could. In sacrificing the Council's chosen Nine, I lost not only my Cabal, I lost also my children; the one hope I had left to me that we would, in some small way, continue to exist beyond the approaching sunrise. I have lost much more than you will ever know.

Most of you, dear colleagues, only understand that your precious First Cabal has been Betrayed; in some cases, the representative of your Tradition has died because of a foul act of Betrayal from within. The Solificati among you must know great grief indeed, for it was your chosen one who instigated this "Great Betrayal." I know that the mages with whom I have journeyed these last four years, those whom I have fought beside, argued with and debated in countless situations, have been tortured, murdered or worse as a result of my actions. You cannot know how heavy a burden that knowledge is upon my shoulders.

Such dreams we had! Oh, that I had tears left to cry for the loss of those dreams. We shared visions of a unity that would bring the Order of Reason to its demise! I, Heylel Teomim, who am two united as one, believed with all of our heart that all of the Traditions could hold steady and true in their beliefs, could live in harmony as we ourselves have done for lo these many years. I, who had created the Philosopher's Stone, did dare to dream that Nine could become One and

³ For the sake of expediency, I have deleted the full titles used by Heylel from this speech. In every case, he stated the name of the individuals and continued on with their proper titles, the Traditions they belonged to, and their countries of origin. Also for the sake of convenience, I have used the shortened versions of the First Cabal's names in the production of this document.



survive the Insanity of Reason. You say that I am remorseless, that I revel in the demise of so glorious a vision? You accuse me of consorting with forces beyond the realm of even the Awakened? You pathetic fools! I am all that you would want to be: the perfect balance of Man and Woman, the ideal symbol of forced unity and inner harmony. How can you consider that my Betrayal could be less than insufferable agony?

I watched as Fall Breeze, the woman who taught me so very much about the ways of her people and her Tradition, fought valiantly against the heartless devils who serve the Cabal of Pure Thought. I watched as she was wounded again and again, yet struggled on to save her friends from the evil that I brought forth. With only her hands and her feet as weapons, I saw her decimate soldier after soldier until she stood atop a mountain of corpses. For as long as I live and breathe, I will never forget the look of unholy hatred that Walking Hawk cast my way as sweet Fall Breeze died in his arms. Of all those within the First Cabal, Fall Breeze alone accepted my unique deformities as simple facts of life — she alone never questioned how I had come to exist as I do. Every wound she suffered, I too endured and still feel nightly as I close my eyes and try to find some peace in slumber.

The sound of Louis DuMonte's bones breaking echoes forever in my ears, and his wounded voice as he recognized me among the Order's ranks haunts me still. Louis was a dour man, but even he shared a jest with me and even he clutches at my heart.

Daud-Allah fell before the weapons brought forth by my Betrayal. A brave and noble man destroyed by my actions. For four hundred years he served his people and his nation, an example to all who believed as he did, and my vile conduct brought an end to a man who was truly a living legend among the Persians. He was an accomplished warrior, but a magnificent scholar also, and a good friend. Do you think it possible for me to forget his screams of pain? Such agonies should never be suffered, and they should surely never be suffered by a man of such honor. If all of the Batini were as noble as he, then they may yet have a chance of saving the rest of you.

I know that the innocence and tenderness of Sister Bernadette was destroyed by the actions we brought to pass. I realize that her sweet songs of ingenuousness will never again ring clearly enough to please even the most fickle of gods, and I suffer from the certainty that this too is my fault.

I know that Akrites Salonikas — a man so passionate, so filled with life and the sheer pleasure that life has to offer, whose boundless joys could fill the heavens above with happiness — will never smile the same way again. I know that dear Akrites will never be able to think of me as anything but an enemy when he thinks of me at all. This knowledge wounds me grievously. The pain cuts lines of shame across my very soul.

Better than any of my judges, I understand that Eloine, the mother of my children and the only woman I considered worthy as a mate, will evermore look upon her memories of our times together with revulsion and curse my name with every beat of her heart. I feel the unspeakable loss of her children, and I feel the burning hatred of her eyes upon me when she discovered whose actions had torn them from her breasts. I have no knowledge of what happened to my children. I know not if they live or if they have died. Do they suffer hideous tortures at the hands of the Order of Reason? Perhaps they do not, but my mind haunts me with their fear-driven cries every hour of every day.⁴

⁴ I should point out that despite all of my efforts, I have never found any reference to the names of Heyle and Eloine's children. I have looked desperately, but to no avail. My search for information on the Twins of the Morning Star continues, but at this time there is nothing. This has proven most frustrating.

Cygnus Moro was my friend! Do you think me heartless enough not to suffer along with all who knew him? Do you think it caused me no pain to learn that he had not only died, but died a slow and torturous death? Fools! Many of you would whisper about him even now, calling him a vile creature, and a servitor of Dark Forces. He was a just man, and fair. Do not judge those whom you have never met. Were all here as honest as Cygnus was in life, my actions would never have been necessary.

For so very long, I could not understand why Walking Hawk loathed my existence. True, he did his best to hide his feelings from us, but we knew just the same. To find that hatred justified was the last possible fate I would wanted to suffer. He is a brave, noble man, despite his seemingly barbaric ways. I would beg his forgiveness for my transgressions, save I fear he might actually be willing to forgive us, and that would make my shame a hundred times as hard to bear.

You think to punish me by destroying my soul and ending my miserable life? I say unto you that you will do me a great service. Anguish such as I feel cannot be long endured without succumbing to madness. By destroying my soul, you destroy also any fears I have that there may actually be an Inferno waiting to consume me in the pits of Hell, where surely I would suffer if not for your kind deed. And truly, I have no desire to reincarnate again, for I know in my heart that every incarnation would still feel the shame of what I have done to the eight people I came to love as my family. How could respite from such certain damnation be anything but a blessing?

Do not believe that I committed my sins against the First Cabal simply from spite. Know that what I did was necessary to make you fools understand how close to the edge of oblivion you tread. I did not hate those who went with me to preserve our way of life; I loved them dearly and still do. Our hatred I save for the unworthy leaders of the Nine Traditions, who would fight a war against themselves before bothering to engage their true enemies.

I did not wish the deaths of my comrades — I wished their capture. I did not flee from the vile attack that killed over half our numbers; I started back to this very hall, prepared to demand the unity of the Nine in saving my Cabal from the madness of Reason!

For all the love we shared with the First Cabal, I also saw the flaws of each Tradition, held forth by their finest representatives for all who would willingly look to see. I saw the slow-burning fires of hatred that steadily grew between Daud-Allah and Sister Bernadette. The source of their argument? That most deadly of all sins, the refusal to understand one another's beliefs or to accept that their Faiths shared the same God, the same goals. I watched the constant arguments between Fall Breeze and Cygnus Moro, who let petty disputes from the past and their own hubris keep them apart. They refused to accept the wisdom that each had to offer, seeing only the history that both shared.

I have seen the contempt with which the Order of Hermes views all others, and watched as my beloved Eloine of the Verbena reciprocated the same. I have seen friends joined in unity, then separated by snide comments and bitter failures. I have seen the Seers rage against the Dreamspeakers for attempting to reach the same vision in different ways. I have endured the maddening arguments between Fall Breeze and Eloine, each despising the other for daring to approach the universal Ascension we all desire from different tangents.

Are you all mad? Why can you not see that these differences must be set aside if your Nine Traditions ever hope to defeat the Order of Reason? You stand before me and accuse me of treachery and consorting with Demons. I stand before you and accuse you of monumental arrogance, unconscionable hubris and the inability to see

beyond your own narrow visions! You would hunt down and convert or destroy the self-Awakened for being different. How then does this make you better than the Order of Reason? You have dismissed the lesser Crafts⁵ as unworthy of your consideration, sneering in contempt of their narrow views, brushing aside your potential allies in the battle for Ascension. Is this then the measure of your wisdom? How dare you judge those who would walk a different Path, when you can no longer even find the road yourselves? You look down upon the Sleepers as blind pawns, forgetting that they hold the dreams which can control reality. Who then is truly asleep? You meekly step aside and try to preach the Truth to deafened ears, while the Inquisition burns the bodies of Magi who do not see the world in ways that each of you find acceptable, and all the while your enemies grow stronger.

Where is your courage? You seek to teach Truth to the Sleepers while the Order of Reason alters that same Truth forever, yet you cannot even agree amongst yourselves as to what the Truth is! How then can you hope to win? You cannot defeat your mutual enemy unless you can first find unity among yourselves!

Surely your Council of Nine would be better called the Council of Nine Thousand! The finest representatives of each Tradition could hold no common ground, save their mutual contempt for one another. Am I the only ones who can see how even now the Nine segregate themselves and stand on separate grounds, even when unified to observe my destruction? Look upon yourselves and weep! For if you cannot find solidarity in destroying your one Great Betrayer, you can surely have no hope of standing together against the growing tides of Reason and Science!

⁵ Those smaller magickal societies who would not participate in our Convocation.



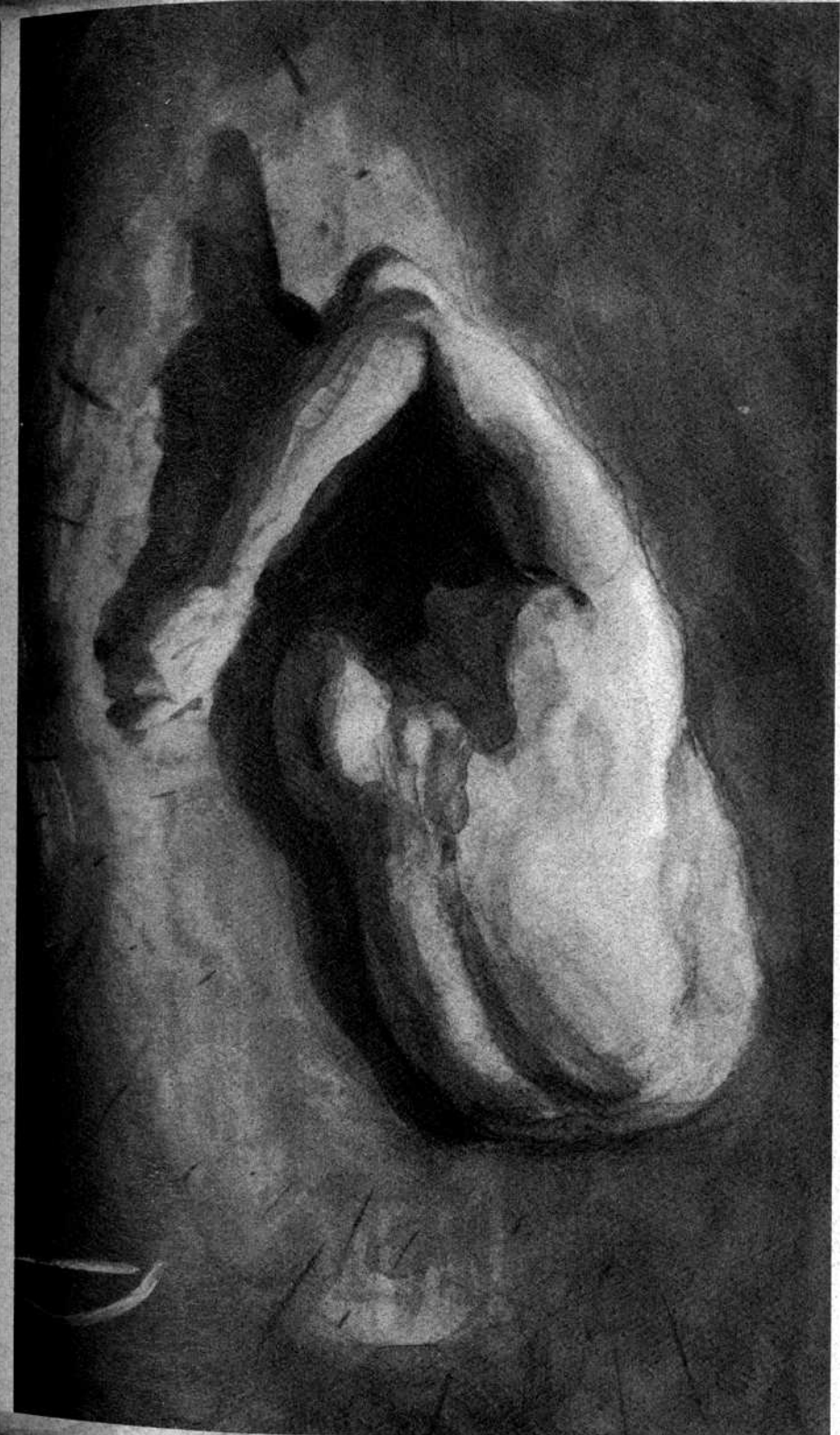
Why did I Betray the ambassadors of the Traditions to the Order of Reason? In truth there were many among your own followers who whispered of leaving the Nine and joining with the enemy you would all destroy. "Oh," you say, "surely this is a lie! Surely none of our chosen would consider so vile an act." Imbeciles! Our own ears heard the talk of the *hidden* betrayers! And hidden they will remain, for those who have died by my deeds need not have their names tarnished by my words; those who still live must surely see by now that the Cabal of Pure Thought, indeed, the entire Order of Reason, is merciless and flawed, a gem of amazing beauty that holds no value and can bring only pain and poverty where pleasure and wealth are coveted. Have they not endured the hot irons of these madmen already?

Upon hearing of my Betrayal, the Council of Nine demanded my capture, and so it came to pass. For one brief, glorious moment the Nine were truly united as One, seeking to bring a stop to the evil that is Heylel Teomim, now called Heylel Thoabath. In a matter of less than a fortnight I was found, questioned, tortured, tried and convicted. In truth I was not hard to find. Nonetheless, for that span of time your Traditions were truly able to act in concert. Your great ordeal is over, the Great Betrayer captured and all are here to watch us die. How long then, until the great unity falls into factions again? Why, then, can you not unite a second time to bring a halt to the madness that is the Order of Reason? We have succeeded in showing you the strength that comes when focused together on a single vision, yet I have failed to keep you united against an enemy far greater than I. The only true hope the Traditions have before them is to remember the Truths we all know and revere: the Pure Ones crumbled and fell because they lacked cohesion and no longer desired to be as One. Since that time, we have all struggled to once again be together, the shards of reality assembled again and capable of so much more than any could dream of achieving separately. You must strive to unite the Spheres you each revere as a singular, greater Sphere, as surely the Pure Ones once used All as One before the Great Shattering! If you would achieve universal Ascension, how can you do less?

All of our life before the merging of Julius de Medici and Mia de Napoli, I struggled to understand how Ascension could come to pass. I have joined the humble, impoverished, weaknesses of an orphaned woman raised in the streets with the educated wealth of a man born of power and breeding. I have fused myself into the being that stands before you and I have proven myself superior to my separate selves. Learn as I have learned, unite the Traditions as I have united myself and then, perhaps, you Nine Traditions can Ascend.

I am but one being. You are legion. Your enemy grows in numbers, yet they manage to work as one, and so your dreams of a perfect world will fall in ruin. The only ones who can stop the end of our world and our dreams stand before me, outraged that I would speak so against them. I look upon you and fear that our words have fallen on ears of stone, incapable of hearing the truth, any truth, save that which each set of ears pursues individually.

For the sake of all you love, prove me wrong! Show yourselves above the differences that keep you apart, and rise to reconquer the world and reestablish our World as it was meant to be. If you can do this, if you can unite your forces and right all that the Order of Reason has worked to destroy, then I will know that our death served a purpose. I will know that the fall of the First Cabal was not in vain! If you cannot accomplish so easy a task, then I pity you who will survive beyond the first rays of the dawning sun. My souls will have been destroyed, torn asunder in one brief flash of pain. If you fail in this task, your souls will wither slowly and die in increments too small to measure. In comparison, my death will be a sweet, gentle thing.

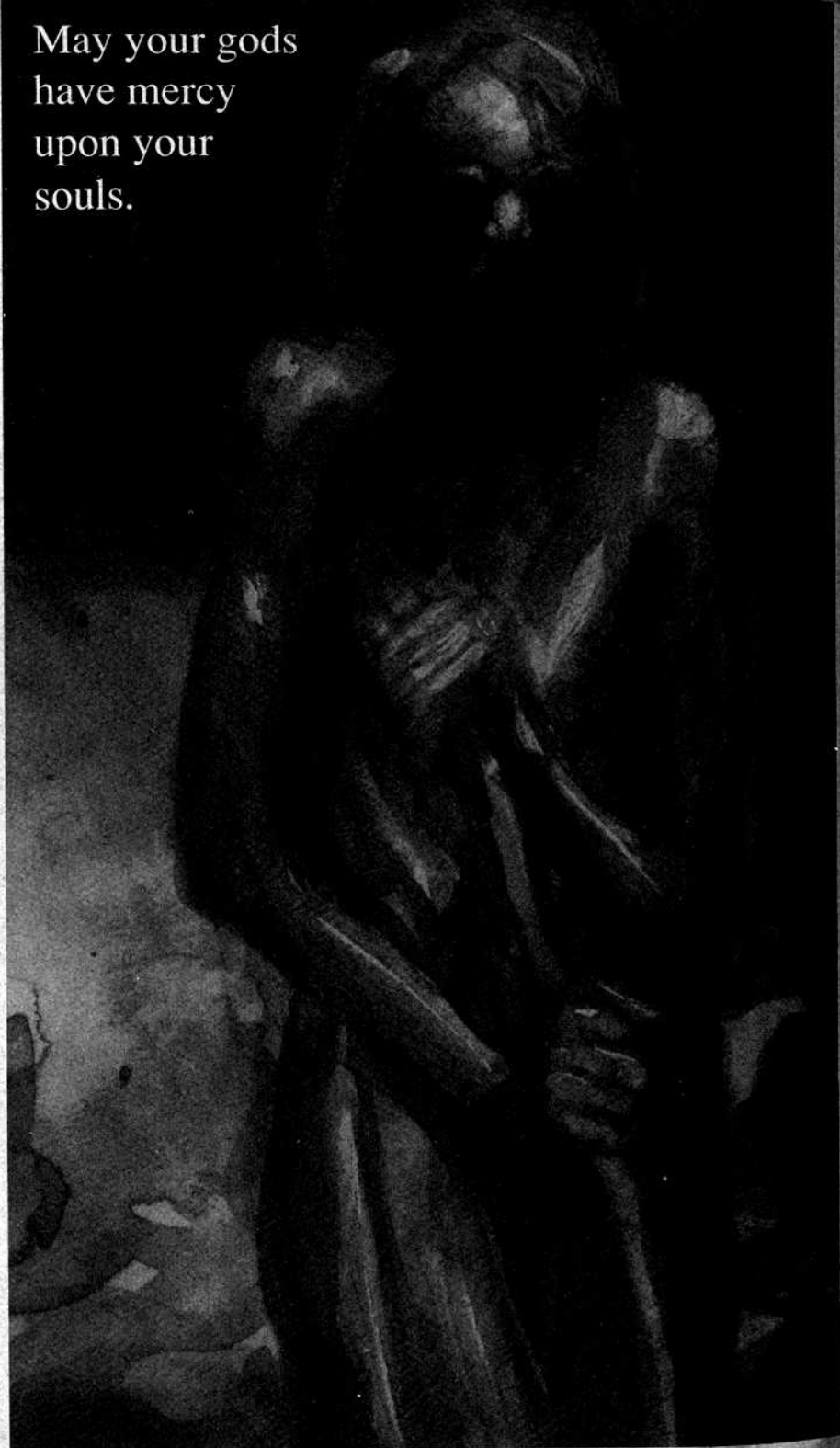




I thank you for listening to my final words.
I am now prepared to die.



May your gods
have mercy
upon your
souls.



The Remembrances of ELOINE

Some stories are harder to bear than others. I will always remember Eloine as a child, for I knew her from her youth; perhaps that comforts me in some way. I can still see firelight dancing along her crimson hair. Her earthy beauty never failed to touch my heart. The inconsolable grief she suffered in her final years burdens me even now.

Recently a Verbena, who demanded anonymity, handed me a robe of half-rotted fabric, secreted from the prison in which Eloine was held captive. The effort of will it must have taken to transcribe this document is astonishing, especially since Eloine had forsaken the Art at the time of the Testament's writing. Despite its uncommon origin, I am certain, for many reasons, that this document preserves the final words of Eloine.

Love and lust lead many of our kind into unions we may later regret. Yet without these passions, I can say from experience that we lose sight of all that is human within us. Few mages need fear the magnitude of Eloine's folly, but that anonymous Verbena and I both feel that this confession may prove useful to young mages faced with similar dilemmas.

Some, herself included, condemned Eloine for her relationship with the Betrayer. She clearly lost the trial held within her heart. I am a historian in my current capacity, yet I challenge any who read this Testament to deliver a judgment of guilty. I cannot.

EARTH MY BODY...

I chant these words my father taught me, so familiar, so much imbedded in the core of my being, and yet I no longer feel their meaning reverberate through me as once it did. I have lost my passion. My soul wails, inconsolable, for too many betrayals have bathed the earth with blood and turned the air to a firestorm. The Art of Blood is lost to me; I can no longer read the red river. I am all but extinguished.

There is, in this cell I call home, this Inquisitor's dungeon which I have allowed myself to be enclosed by, a White Mouse. This earth creature visits me daily, as if sent by the Great Mother of All Wyck, Lilith herself, for were not White Mice always found in Her temple? As they scurried about and fed from the holy grains, did they not carry within their tiny physical manifestations the essence of ancient magick?

Because I know from whence it comes, I feed this tiny messenger from the pitiful crumbs my torturers deign to provide. Crumbs that barely keep my tormented body alive.

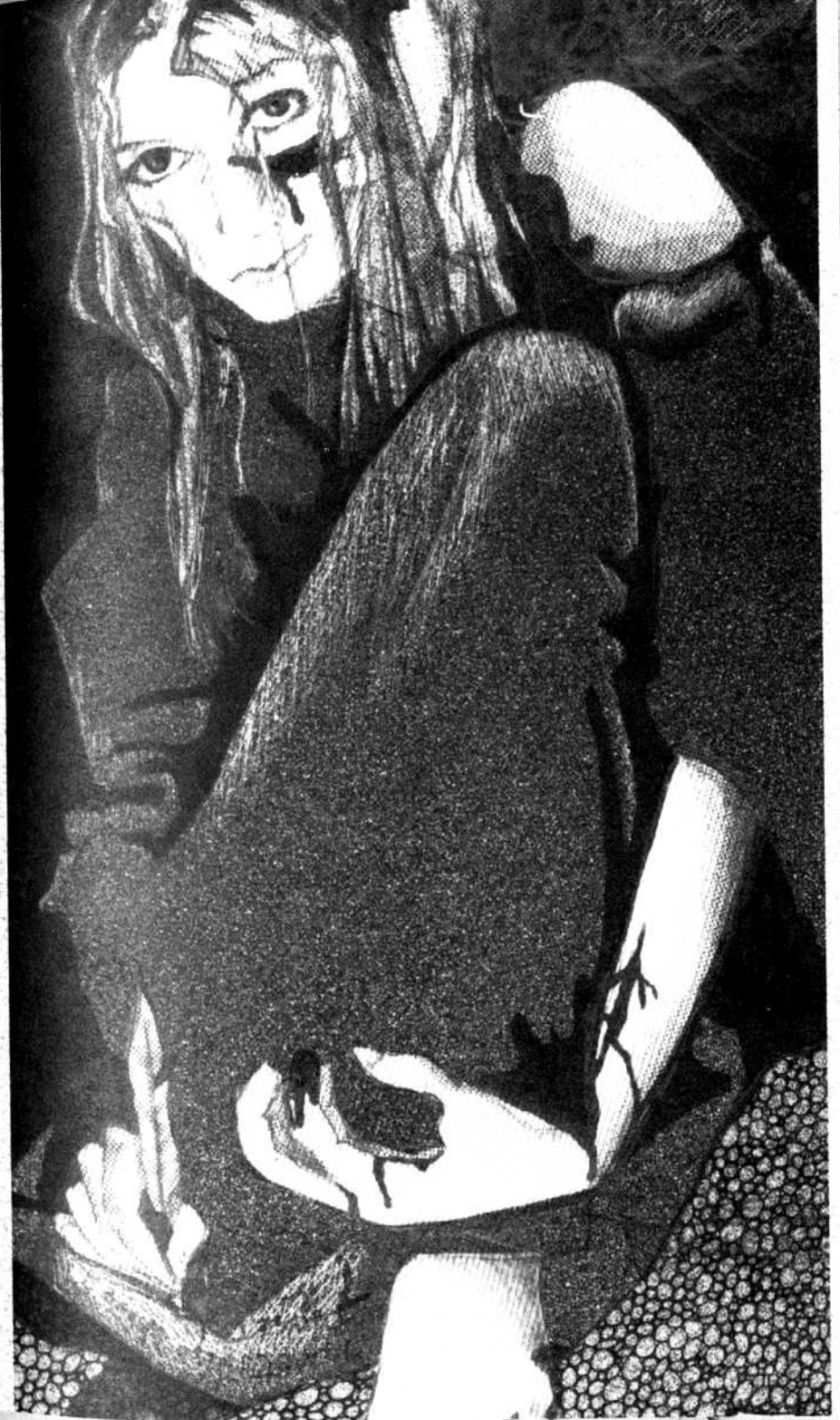
My name is Eloine. I write this not with ink, but with my blood. I use the quill of a dove that perched on my window and left behind a feather — who knows how long ago? I recognized it as a sign. There is a need to record what I have experienced. Regardless of my personal loss of faith, I retain enough belief to recognize that no one can predict the effect of any act.

My script soaks into the fabric of my simple wool garment, my only parchment. I can at least write, and for that gift, I must thank my parents. But the Cabal of Pure Thought would assure me that this tattered cloth will not stand the test of time. That may be. I am more inclined toward their bleak view than I had ever believed possible. Indeed, fabric, like the body, rots. But rot, as with all the materials She uses to weave Her universe, only changes form.

When the smallest molds consume my story, etched so painstakingly into this lamb's fur, they may ride the four winds, or be carried by a mythic animal of the night and find refuge in the dreams of my sisters and brothers. Let no one say that, in my forsaken hour, I did forsake others. The White Mouse has told me I must write my story, for She has commanded it. And in all things, Her will must be done, especially if Magick is to survive.

I want to believe that all that has transpired, both with the Magi, and with me personally, has not been in vain. I struggle to believe that the spirit of all that the Magi are will Ascend.

I want to believe. But I cannot.



EARTH MY BODY WATER MY BLOOD...

The year was 1466, although when time spirals, numbers become irrelevant. Chronos swallowed time, and The Cabal of Pure Thought bows to this deity's rules, which divide day from night, month by week, year into so many sections. But Kairus, the last child born to Jupiter, she understood what the True Magi have always known — time is eternal. For me, in this body which I have permitted to become worn, that year is as yesterday. My age in mortal years is irrelevant, although I feel that too many have passed.

I had followed many friends of my family's acquaintance to a Grand convocation held in a magickal land. In my youthful joy, I wished to impress the Magi who gathered, but feared I would be one seed lost among many. Nevertheless, I reveled in the festivity. One warm night, I danced naked and alone by the fire. Flames sprang up, connecting earth to sky. Bark crackled, and smoke filled my nostrils. My dance was a request, for I had long loved to sequester the Goddess in this manner and whisper in Her ear my hopes for the future — that enlightenment would spread far and wide and peace reign.

As the soles of my feet mingled with the soil, my spirit soared. The clear sky above allowed many stars. My father's songs swelled from my belly and the sound that came from me fragmented until my movements and sounds aligned. My voice seemed to split into at least two distinct tones.

Unknown to me, Bernadette, an older woman with the body of a girl, whom I had made friends with, had come and sat by the fire. At first I did not notice her. Suddenly another voice joined me in the song. My eyes were closed, but even without opening them, I knew it was my soul sister.

The two parts of my voice drifted up to the sky, and sank into the earth. Her voice spiraled through me, connecting all the planes of existence on rungs that met again and again, eternally.

Bernadette was like none I had met before, and her friendship meant much to me. She was not Wyck, but a member of a strange group of oral Sorcerers who used their voices to blend matter and Spirit.

For all the years of my life, Nightshade and other, older women of my Tradition had warned of these singing Magi. Because they were Sorcerers, they were to be respected, and yet the spaces between the elders' words betrayed that they did not trust these singers. To we who are tied to the Earth, to our Mother, the notion of ignoring Her physical form, as the Chorus seems to do, is not to our taste.

But that night, when Bernadette joined me, I was so enraptured by her song that the warnings of the past fell away completely. Before me sat a most beautiful creature. Her raven hair glowed as firelight flickered over it, a touching contrast to my gleaming fiery locks. My voice joined hers in a new song, for I could not contain myself — her

sounds seemed to call out for others to blend with. The beauty of our union rose through the dark night like a brilliant moon, bent on illuminating the entire sky. Her voice was first low and mine high, then very naturally we shifted and hers rose while mine fell. I could almost feel my body leaving the earth and then plunging deep into it, leaving me moist both inside and out.

As beautifully as we blended, I stopped singing in order to better hear her. Her voice was fresh, new, and yet it was as though I had been listening to it for millennia. Time lost all meaning, even the meaning of being eternal. I slipped into the sound and became it, moving, floating, ascending and descending, expanding and contracting with my dance, my body sustaining the earth even as the song fed me. And when she stopped singing I was left full and vibrating.

"Two voices of majesty and humility. We can appreciate that."

I turned abruptly. Standing behind me, firelight illuminating his stark features, was the strangest Sorcerer I had ever seen, and one new to the camp, or at least new to me. Tall, slim, standing still yet giving the sense of being in motion, his face was a classical sculpture, nearly perfect. Dark eyes glanced down a long straight nose, from me to Bernadette.





"Who are you?" I demanded.
 "Heylel Teomim, of the Solificati." He gestured as he spoke. His short auburn hair reminded me of busts and paintings I'd seen of Roman emperors. His features too were patrician, his manner aloof, although he seemed to be laughing at me in particular.

"Why do you say 'We'? Who else are you speaking for?" I asked, hands on hips. Not only had he interrupted this moment, but I did not appreciate his haughty nature.

He began to pace then, and looked down at me in a provocative manner, as though no one had ever challenged him before. "I said 'I'."

"No you didn't. You heard him, Bernadette."

Bernadette was silent, her lips parted in awe, her sky-blue eyes fixed on this Solificato as if he were a demigod. True, I also found him attractive enough, interesting in a peculiar way, and yet I was scrupulously honest and could not retract what I knew to be the truth.

As if reading my mind, he said, "You are direct and pure of mind and body, which appeals to me. And you..." he looked to Bernadette, "your soul is innocent. Together you would make the ideal mate, should such be required."

"Mate? For whom?" I cried. My arms crossed over my breasts. I was enraged at the audacity of this creature, for he spoke like a human, and not as a Magus at all. Certainly not like a Verbena. Coupling amongst my own kind was nearly always at the women's instigation, and then only when the moon was full.

He continued pacing, his dark eyes flashing, and I had to look twice, for it seemed they changed color. In fact, his entire form altered, softened, and then firmed again. What illusion was this? I wondered. Bernadette looked struck dumb; I could not count on her.

Suddenly he stopped and stared past me, straight ahead, as if listening. "They have decided," he said softly, with a finality that rippled through me.

With that he looked at me, his deep dark eyes lingering, and then he was gone. I stood watching him retreat into the darkness, and found myself shivering as if a cold rain had fallen. I turned to Bernadette. She watched until he disappeared, and then continued to stare off into the darkness after him. From her sweet face it was clear she had been won over by his beauty. I wondered, though, where she had left her sense, for he was too full of himself to bother with, in my opinion.

Later, in my tent, when the dark, forbidding Nightshade approached me, I felt the Life in Mother Earth rise up through my bones and fill me with terror at the magnitude of the task she set before me. I knelt at the feet of this Renowned Sorceress, quivering, head bowed, listening to her harsh, seductive voice declare how I would represent my Tradition. I was overwhelmed with both fear and excitement. "Your strength shall sway or crush our enemies. Your enthusiasm and humility will permit you to touch what is common in all. Through your grasp of and blending of our Knowledge, honor and blessing shall be brought to all Magi, and we shall be eternally in your debt. Your name shall be blessed and carried forth into the centuries, spoken with reverence and awe. For did not your parents beseech me at the moment of your birth to name you? I named you Eloine, the Protector, the Chosen One."

Her words burrowed deep into my heart and lodged there, like a beautiful rose, whose scent would forever fill me and, by extension, all those whom the Goddess Herself, through me, chose to touch.

Little did I know that the rose would shrivel and die, leaving nothing but thorns of bitterness and regret. And when I now think of Nightshade's words, my heart feels heavy, like cracked stone which cannot be repaired, which cannot support the life of a delicate flower.

Before the next sunset, I had met the other Adepts.

One from India, Cygnos Moro, was a seductive-looking Magus, but the aura of death surrounding him put many off. Apart from brief flirtations, he prayed constantly, and kept his own counsel. Louis DuMonte, a wizard, was perhaps the one most akin to myself in that he practiced many of the Arts I was familiar with. He was aggressive, though, and I could tell that others were annoyed by his attempts to lead. Fall Breeze, a sharp-featured Oriental girl, I must say, never appealed to me. That feeling was mutual. It was as though we had originated on different worlds, and our Traditions could not have been more at odds. The one called Daud-Allah was by far the eldest. His obsession with the Christian Bible proved irritating to most, although I found his voice as he quoted scripture comforting. There was also copper-skinned Walking Hawk, who used a mask to read dreams; Akrites Salonikas, a Seer, no less; and my delightful friend, Bernadette. Much to my dismay, though, the ninth member of our Cabal, and the one whom I would least have chosen, was the Solificato, Heylel.

Individually, we underwent private instruction by the sages of our Traditions, then more instruction as a group, learning the strengths and weaknesses of one another so that we might offer the best assistance to alienated Practitioners we encountered. Finally we appeared before the Council of Nine.

A ceremony invested us individually and as a group with the challenge and hopes of the Council. Words were spoken which to this day I cannot properly recall. Each Tradition leader blessed us. I was moved to tears and to shouts of joy. Only Nightshade's words remain with me.

"Your success in the external is a measure of your internal success. As we Nine came together, so you Nine must unite. As we have been able to achieve a unity for the good of the Magi, so, too, you must find a way to achieve unity and reflect the values we have imparted. Ascension hinges on your efforts to merge yet respect differences. You have each been chosen because you best are able to hold this paradox. And it is through me now that the Great Mother bequeaths you Her blessing."

XXVII L ÉTOIL

Under The Stars, Teoprance kneels upon the earth naked to show her humility. She carefully pours life giving water from the invisible world into this one to nourish humanity with knowledge. The Blackbird upon the Tree of Life sings to her of divine thought. It is immortality teaching her and through her teaching mankind. She is united with the cosmos. Woe to the world if she fail in her duties.



Her words filled me with the truth and fullness of my purpose. We knelt on the cold stone and Nightshade anointed each forehead with scented oil. She touched fire to the oil and the spot burned without consuming. "But be warned, Adepts! The Great Mother is also capable of cursing." Her voice rang through me. "Receive without consuming, give without forfeiting." For a moment, her eyes locked onto mine. "Do not permit hubris to blind you!"

It was as if a great pit opened beneath my feet and I teetered on the brink, frozen in terror until she broke our contact.



I glanced at my fellow Adepts. Each had been affected. Each appeared ready for our adventure: to seek out potential friend and foe among Sorcerers, to allay human fears, to overcome our enemies, to bring to the Magi the honor, glory and unity that leads to Ascension. The final set of eyes that sought out mine were Heylel's. In the candlelight, his features seemed more rounded, his intense irises pale, not dark. This transformation startled me, yet I was excited by the spark of desire conveyed there, desire I knew I had inspired. Had I but known then what I now know, I would have stabbed him through the heart!

EARTH MY BODY WATER MY BLOOD AJR MY BREATH...

We moved through the land on our mission with great fervour. That ardour soon cooled. Despite all the grand words and invocations, ours was not a collective of like souls, but disparate beings, thrust together in what increasingly appeared an unnatural manner toward a goal which soon came to feel impossible.

Daud-Allah and Bernadette fought constantly, over little things, over large issues. She struggled to cleanse herself of the hostility which had invaded her, but it was clear the battle was lost the moment it began, and her glorious voice suffered. Cygnus Moro, Fall Breeze and Walking Hawk were not European, and therefore suspect to the rest, and yet it was not as though those three were able to get along amongst themselves. To the contrary, at best they avoided one another, at worst Fall Breeze physically intimidated Cygnus Moro, and they came to blows. I was not guiltless. Fall Breeze and I found inventive ways to annoy one another, for her incessant aggression grated.

"Why is it," I once demanded, "that you resort to hostility so readily? Have you no Magick Arts you have perfected?"



This brought a not unexpected reaction, annoyingly in *my own* tongue, which she had mastered: "Unlike the feeble skills you have acquired, the disciplines I master bring spirit through body."

"In a violent manner. Through the use of force."

"Do is utilized to *avoid* violence."

"Then why is it you so often encounter hostility? Or is it engender?"

To which she spat at the ground at my feet. "Your 'Art,' as you call it, is to dance? How is that beneficial? It is a hedonistic indulgence. Lascivious in the extreme! Discipline is not required, and without discipline there is no control. Only through control can the soul center within the body. An enlightened Sorceress would know this."

"How can you find the soul when you are so busy controlling how and where and when it will manifest?"

This argument, like many others, was ended by Heylel. His way was not to intervene in a manner that concluded discussion, but in a way which expanded it, for he was a master of philosophy. I quickly came to respect his discourses. He could chide those who reveled in this low form of conflict without permitting them to indulge in self-pity.

But this is not how Heylel spent most of his time. Normally he was quiet, always watching, seemingly searching. On enough occasions, I found him watching me. I sensed a response from deep within me that grew until the moon became full to bursting. On that night I sought him out.



The Jordan is a structure that reaches to heaven. It is the work of one swelled with pride who wishes to raise one self up to the level of God through material means. The lightning strikes, it represents Divine Justice. Those who try to create their own Divinity are punished.



XVI La Maison Diev

Warmth, Thoughtless Risk, Punishable Pride

I stood alone in a clearing, breasts naked, arms raised to the Heavens. In the distance a storm swelled, racing toward our camp. The wind howled through the branches around me.

I chanted my father's words, pointing to the encroaching lightning that split the sky. In the two directions I pointed — North and South — lightning bolted from the tips of my fingers into the clouds. In an instant, that power reversed direction and coursed through my body, shocking me, leaving me breathless. My body felt on fire, moist, swollen like the moon. I felt possessed.

As if in a trance, I turned. My eyes beheld Heylel's colorful tent. An owl, perched atop, hooted; the eerie sound chilled me as I opened the tent flap. With the aid of the moon, I peered in. The scent of sage wafted out — each of the Adepts purified the place where he or she slept. At least we had one tradition in common.

Heylel's form stretched the length of the canvas. He lay on his back on a doubled blanket, uncovered, for the humidity had increased as the storm approached. Normally he was in motion, pacing, tapping his fingers impatiently. This unaccustomed stillness unnerved me.

But I felt nervous for other reasons. I had never coupled with any but Verbena, and then infrequently. My ecstasies were easily reached alone, through dance, and song, through rituals and potions blended and drunk in the name of the Goddess, who blessed me with knowledge and passion. But this night I knew that I was being directed, for I felt myself almost led to his bedside.

"Heylel?" I called softly, crouching beside him.

Silently he reached out for me. His fingers on my hot skin forced a gasp from my lips, nearly propelled me to the edge of sanity. That night, in the darkness, his face felt firm and long, although many times in the light it had seemed to shift and soften.

He remained passive while I hurriedly removed his robe, and lifted my skirts. His body was quiet yet aroused, as though he had been expecting me. I straddled his hips and felt this alien being enter me.

I had in my pouch tiny blue-black berries, hard, slightly bitter, and bit into one. I tried to slip one between Heylel's lips, but his hand blocked mine. Within seconds, as the berry broke apart on my tongue, my senses heightened.

I will not speak of the time we spent together, that night, and other nights when the moon filled, and passion ruled. What is private must remain so, and this intimacy needs no elaboration. Verbena everywhere will know of the rapture which overwhelmed me, although they may not understand my attraction to this one who was both male and female and yet neither. I only mention these moments for where they led me.

Curiously, Heylel and I did not speak of our nights together. And I told no one. Perhaps because of this, what we shared became a wedge between myself and the other Adepts. Many times, when disputes arose, I felt torn between what I knew to be a proper course of action, and what Heylel ascribed to, yet I could not stand against him. In effect, I abstained from participating. I know now that my silence contributed to the awful outcome.

Over the four years the Nine Adepts traveled together, I cannot say we accomplished nothing. Indeed, there were moments that amazed me, when I came to believe the Council of Nine had known all along what true and deep Magick would be wrought.

But four years can be a long time, and the internal strife outweighed the communion of our group. Wounds were created which never healed. Bernadette, long in love with Heylel yet incapable of actualizing her desires, felt injured by the intimacy she sensed he and I shared. Our friendship suffered greatly and finally collapsed when I bore twins from this union.

Heylel, always distant and superior, became more so. His cynicism grew and the haughty trait I first noticed became impossible for the others to cope with. Knowing him to the extent I did, and I admit now that I knew him little, I among all the others could see from whence his pain was derived. He embodied the potential, and also the schism of the Magi. I could see all this, and understand his aloofness. I could forgive much. But a moment occurred that pierced my blind lust for him and altered my feelings forever. While I could forgive much, this I could not.

One morning, as the sun rose above the mountains, while I nursed my little ones in solitude, I sensed a presence. I turned. Heylel stood behind me. As he looked down, the enmity in his eyes felt like a knife to my heart. Spontaneously I pulled my babes closer. I knew instantly that he was a threat to the twins. From that time on we were estranged. And perhaps that estrangement contributed to what followed.

One morning, Heylel disappeared.

There was talk. Louis DuMonte decreed this was in the best interests of our goals, a sign, in fact, that we should join the Order of Reason as swiftly as possible.¹ Most of the others were not convinced of this course of action. Confusion led to paralysis. Gloom pervaded the air. We struggled to continue on, for what else could we do? Return home and admit defeat? We could only go forward, but a link had broken, and the chain, weak though it had always been, became impossible — it could not hold.

A fortnight later, under the dying moon, Walking Hawk woke us in darkness to gather around the fading embers and hear his dream.

¹ This sentiment, odd as it may seem, was not uncommon among the Hermetic Orders at the time, especially after the Houses were forced to band together as one Tradition by decree of the other eight. The resentment stirred within the Order(s) of Hermes continues into modern times, hence our references to the original Houses within our formal titles.

As the mask altered, and his voice changed, he became each dream being,² as we seven listened quietly.

Oceans of blood flooded the earth.

Magi and mortals alike were enchained.

Nine stars streaked across the heavens — stars of destiny, to wish upon. Suddenly, one star changed direction. The others sank into the horizon and burnt out.

Bernadette and I, estranged for some time over Heylel, looked to one another in horror, both understanding deeply the significance of the dream. Her azure eyes misted over, as did mine. I held a twin in each arm, and she reached out to take my little girl. Her gesture touched me to the roots of my being. But as we sat side by side, weeping, listening to Louis DuMonte rattle on, to Fall Breeze demanding to be heard, to the dogmatic Daud-Allah's logical explanation of the dream, I sensed it was too late. Our moment had come and gone. We only waited for the Fate to arrive which we had so unknowingly constructed with our arrogance and defensiveness.

Fate arrived swiftly. In the morning, the troops of the Cabal of Pure Thought, led by Heylel, descended on our camp. Akrites Salonikas escaped. The fighting that ensued was vicious. Bernadette stood by my side, like myself armed with a sword, attempting to protect the twins. Louis DuMonte fought bravely, as did my nemesis Fall Breeze, and even the logical Daud-Allah proved courageous in battle. These three Magi were felled by our enemies. As I think back on them, and their deaths, I am ashamed at the differences that kept us apart. May Lilith forgive me! And when we meet again, may each of these Sorcerers know that I am humbled before their sacrifice.

That sacrifice, though, proved to be in vain. My babes were ripped from my breast all under the watchful, cold eyes of Heylel. I begged for mercy, not for myself, but for my children. *Our* children. My pleas fell on the deaf ears of the Cabal of Pure Thought, and the ears most deaf were Heylel's. I have not seen the twins since. I can only pray to the Great Mother that they are safe.

We were cast by these Warriors of their God into a vision of their Hell. My skin writhes to think of the horrors there, so similar to what I and my sisters here now endure. Eventually, we were rescued from the prison of "Pure Thought." Heylel was brought to trial. My babes were never found. Even at his death, Heylel claimed to have rescued them but knew nothing of their fate.³

During the trial, he stared at me with eyes changing shape and color, with a face softening and hardening. Goddess help me, but I could see his suffering! For a moment, for just one moment, love and regret may have flickered in his eyes.

Surely others will relate the tale, of how we suffered, and were freed. Of how the Traditions exacted revenge. I cannot be expected to write it all. I can, however, tell of how I roamed the earth alone, distraught, begging for a sign that my children survived this holocaust, and the holocaust which followed. The one mortals call The Inquisition.

Suffice it to say that my heart is broken. Had my desires not betrayed me, had my passion for Heylel not blinded me, perhaps I would have faced earlier on what I now know to have been lacking with the Nine Adepts. I might have stood up to Heylel, confronted his weakness, altered the balance. I may have altered Fate.

Without heart, I abandoned my Tradition, abandoned Magick. I allowed my body to wither, and fell into the hands of mortal Inquisitors who mistook me for what they call a Witch, though I practice no Magick now.

I weep, yet my eyes can cry no more tears. My rose is dead and I am too numb to even feel the thorns.

² It is said that Walking Hawk's mask transformed him into the images of the visions he had seen.

³ Actually, as we have seen, he himself confessed that he knew not where the twins had gone. I think perhaps Eloine attributed more guilt to her Betrayer than he deserved.



EARTH MY BODY
WATER MY BLOOD
AJR MY BREATH
FJRE MY SPJRJT

This White Mouse the Goddess has sent me embodies The Art of The Fates, that Magick which I have had such trouble learning. Entropy touches all in Her Universe. But a heart of stone?⁴ How can renewal take place where there is no life to transform? Soon the mortals will come for me. I am a caterpillar about to enter a chrysalis, proceeding into nothingness, into stillness, there to await what will transpire. I have no hope. The only knowledge I possess is but one small piece of the puzzle of Life.

Faith is a basic energy, and yet is this not what I have been taught from birth on to strive for? Faith is our salvation, what can turn darkness to light, give hope to the hopeless, and transform anything in the universe. I have led myself to this catacomb and must enter and wait until transmutation occurs. But I cannot find my faith.

This tiny creature sits between my feet and stares up at me. I reach down and pick up the White Mouse. Life is constant transformation, it seems to tell me. The one definite that She Herself decrees. I had forgotten about this Art, the one I could never master, the one which I am now offered.

The White Mouse crawls from my palm into my lap and waits. I wait as well; it is all I can do. They will take me to the fires. I will be tied to the stake and the straw beneath me lit. Flames will singe my skin and I pray to the Goddess that enough smoke will rise that I may suffocate before I suffer that ultimate pain and humiliation.

These mortals, in a grotesque parody of what the Cabal of Pure Thought acted out, will curse me as Witch. In their eyes, I am responsible for so much suffering. And indeed, through hubris, I have caused my share.

Suddenly, the Goddess reveals this: I have done much good as well. The Council of Nine, and the Nine Adepts were naive. Our naiveté will taint future Sorcerers. But our intent was pure, and that, too, will color those Practitioners yet to be born. Perhaps they can learn from our mistakes. From somewhere comes the faith that they will.

I cannot forestall Death, for I have brought myself to this point. But the White Mouse reminds me that Death is not the end. What I had forgotten is now what I understand most: Death leads to Rebirth. And there are many types of Death.

As I ponder this, the White Mouse crawls up my tunic. Gradually it changes color and becomes a brilliant silver. The brightness after so long in darkness blinds me. As I cry out, the Silver Mouse slips between my lips, races over my tongue and is down my throat in an instant. I feel alive!

With life comes awareness. I refuse to face the Death prescribed by these foolish mortals! I am Wyck! The Goddess has opened my eyes and revealed to me the Fates. I feel something buried beneath my cold stone heart, and I sense the new seed implanted between the cracks, one that craves existence. Life breeds life. There are always more choices. I choose to move along the thread opening before my eyes, that will lead me out of this Hell. I forgive myself. I forgive all of us, even Heylel. I will return. The Magi will survive. And, Goddess willing, together we will Ascend.

The Song of
BERNADETTE

Like Nicodemus who came in the night to Jesus, searching for religious truths, Sister Bernadette embarked upon a life-long quest for spiritual peace. It began in the small village of Domremy, Champagne, where she grew up as a neighbor to Joan of Arc. It would take her from the cloistered halls of the Dominican nuns, to the torture chambers of the Inquisition, to the camps of a dozen false, apocalyptic prophets, and finally to the Celestial Choir in the Horizon Chantry, where she was found, bloody and beaten, on Valoran's doorstep.

But that was just the beginning of her journey. Amid much controversy, the new Apprentice was chosen to represent the Choir on the fragile Path of the Great Mission. Her journey would be filled with unrequited love, shattered friendships, and much soul-searching.

Unfortunately, much of her deathbed confession, Song of Bernadette, has been lost to the ravages of time. There is much we do not know about her life. But, she will always be remembered for her healing, her devotion, and her music. Perhaps, somewhere, a complete copy of the text remains. We can only hope that someday an enterprising archaeologist will discover such a treasure.

The translation, with accompanying footnotes, was done by Celestial Chorister Sister Imagna-Nicole, the great granddaughter of Sister Bernadette's confessor. She is considered the preeminent scholar regarding the life of Sister Bernadette, and Bernadette's role in the Grand Convocation and the mission of the Cabal.

⁴Perhaps this image refers to an Earth gone fallow, from greenery to bare stone. I believe she compares herself to the Earth here (see the later reference), but I am not certain.

A note from Sister Imagna-Nicole:

Psychologists, now, would undoubtedly diagnose Sister Bernadette as suffering from a Multiple Personality Disorder. This disorder was revealed in the form of a physical manifestation. When she wished to meditate or was faced with a problem, she created a choir of physical duplicates to debate the issue in song, each body singing a different viewpoint. She had little need for food or sleep, and spent most nights in this meditation-song. A few of her traveling companions found this nightly lullaby pleasant, though others may have found it annoying.

Wise and mysterious are the ways of the Lord. Sister Bernadette's illness gave birth to some of the most beautiful and complex music ever created by the Celestial Chorus. My ancestress recorded the composition and confession at the dying mage's request, and the seal of confession was broken only at her express wish. Between movements VI. and VII. the ancient Chorister rested and made known that her life's story should be available to those learning the history of the Nine after her death.

She chose a modification of the French Motet for her musical form. Clearly, it was well-suited to her peculiarities. It is sung by three or more voices, each voice reciting a different narrative that is related in some way to the other lines. The bottom line is invariably a metaphorical interpretation of the events occurring in the lines above.

The text can be read two ways. Following a single voice line from beginning to end, the first part first, then each other one in turn, will give you a complete story line. Following all of the voice lines simultaneously will illustrate the underlying patterns and themes of the piece.

Due to space limitations, we have been unable to reproduce the complete score accompanying these lyrics, nor have we the room to record all of the musical records we possess. As her life continued for more than two hundred and fifty years after those events, obviously there are many songs which have little to do with the interests of this book. I have reproduced here the movements of Sister Bernadette's Song pertinent to her role in *Les Grande Mission*.

Here follows the deathbed confession of
Sister Bernadette of the Celestial Chorus.

Born in the year of our LORD 1421,
Gathered to the Celestial fold in 1457,
Ascended unto the right hand of GOD
in the year of our LORD 1723.

Last rites administered by Sister Imagna.

Because Sister Bernadette's life was blessed
so richly by the LORD, a single voice could
not perform her song,
and a choir was manifest by the LORD.
Truly, a miracle was performed.

Witnessed this day of our LORD,
the Third of March, 1723.

Signed,
Sister Imagna

I. In the Beginning

Largo sostenuto

I
Waves of De struction! Scourge the land. Black plague!

II
Where is the church? High on the hill. Transcribing books.

III
Waves of De struction! A great Flood. Not Water but Blood.

IV

A

I
Death! Fa - mine! Death! War without end.¹

II
Our cries they don't hear Their bellies are full

III
Death! Apocalypse! Death! Save us from sin.

IV

- I. Who are these Robbers? Thieves in the Night.
- II. Who are these Monks? Who throw off their robes?
- III. Who are these Prophets? The third bunch this week.
- IV. _____

- I. Your Neighbor. Your Brother. Stealing food for a Child.
- II. Take to the land. Take to the hoe. The Church grips the Crown
- III. But he's had a vision! I'd rather have bread.
- IV. _____ Child-

- I. Die in the grain fields. Turned from your homes.
- II. In an iron tight fist. But God slips through
- III. Have you heard Joan of Arc? (Why can't you be more like her?)
- IV. _____

- I. The peasants!
- II. Their fingers
- III. She'll lead us to freedom! (Why can't you be like her?)²
- IV. Is _____

- I. The peasants! Revolt!
- II. To the people Below!
- III. Restore the crown. Why can't you be like her?
- IV. _____ Born.³

¹ A reference to the 100 Years War which decimated the economic resources of France as she lost both land and population to the English conquerors.

² Joan of Arc grew up in the same village as Bernadette; quite probably they were neighbors. Joan is believed to have been about five years older, so young Bernadette would have been raised on the tales of Joan's adventures and accomplishments. She was clearly the pride of the village. Bernadette compared herself to Joan, (as quite likely did her parents) and invariably appeared in her own eyes to be inferior. It was a life-long, one-way rivalry.

³ Bernadette is believed to have been born in 1421 to simple French peasants in the small village of Domremy, Champagne.

II. Bernadette's Song

Delirante

I. A sick-ness crept across the land.

II. Foolish girl Backward in man-ner. So far from home.
Cold dark cell. So little food. So much like home.

III. Did I es-cape the Grand In-quisition?

IV. Black clouds Ga - - - ther - - -

- I. Stealing across our thresh-hold.
- II. Foolish girl! Books! Why can't you learn?
Incomprehensible. Books? Why must we write?⁶
- III. My eyes were opened! To those false prophets.
- IV. Day turned to night.

⁴ Much has been written about the cyclical nature of Bernadette's life, and that is shown clearly in the second movement of Bernadette's Song. Her early life story is told chronologically if the voices are read straight through in numerical order. When this piece is performed, and the voice lines are sung simultaneously, the cycles of ups and downs, times of grace and turmoil, are clearly illustrated. Voice II tells the story of her days as a Dominican novice. The voice line splits — the bottom line clearly stating the feelings of a distressed, young Bernadette, and the upper line representing the Church authority figures, sometimes the Mother Superior, other nuns or the Grand Inquisitor. It is interesting to note that when she performed this piece, the image that had been singing the second voice split again. The "clone" singing the authority line took on a much darker, almost threatening physical aspect. Clearly, Sister Bernadette's days in the convent were not pleasant ones.

⁵ Dominicans take a vow of absolute poverty. Bernadette was used to the lifestyle so it was not a great hardship, but she had secretly hoped, when she left home, to find something better than what she already had.

⁶ The Dominicans served as the Pope's theologians, presided over the Inquisition, kept the Index of Forbidden Books, and aided and fostered the development of art, literature, theology and philosophy. The medieval encyclopedia, *Speculum Majus*, was written and compiled by Dominican Vincent of Beauvais, and St. Thomas Aquinas was also among their members. While a convent or religious order was an excellent choice for Bernadette, her temperament and talents were not a good fit with the Dominican philosophy. She could not read — education was an expensive luxury not afforded to peasant girls. It was a closely guarded secret that in her life, which spanned more than three centuries, she never mastered the art of reading.

- I. The icy fingers of Death Wrapped around my throat.
- II. The Lord will not Listen to such pitiful prayers.
Can the Lord not Hear our prayers?
- III. No more to be a tool In their dark work.
- IV. Thunder! Shook! The World.

- I. Torn from my bo - dy
- II. Foolish girl — Why can't you learn?
Meaningless words in a foreign tongue.
- III. Bruising my feet
- IV. Dark. Dark. Lightning tore the sky!

- I. I wandered the dark desert alone.
- II. Our Mass is sung in Latin.
Can't the Lord speak French?
- III. On stones in the path
- IV. And the heavens were split open.

- I. An icy hand clenched mine. I was surrounded
- II. The girl cannot paint! The girl cannot think!
Is this Really
- III. I trusted Him To guide me.
- IV. A great flood rained Down.

- I. By an un-natural throng.
- II. The girl does not know her scripture!
The work of the Lord?
- III. Christ our Lord Wandered
- IV. I cowered exhausted

- I. Thousands of Faces! Thousands of Hands.
- II. Send her to the Inquisition.
Is this what He wanted from me?
- III. The Wilderness Forty days and Forty Nights.⁷
- IV. In the Mud.

- I. With each chilling touch
- II. She can carry water and stoke the fire
Is there a job that I can do?
- III. And yet I wandered
- IV. Afraid to lift my face.

⁷ A reference to the Bible story of Jesus, when he went into the Wilderness and was tempted by the devil, as told in St. Matthew, Chapter 4 verses 1-11.

- I. I was transported to their lands.
- II. Let the child minister
There did I lay hands of comfort
- III. In the darkness
- IV. The first rays of a new dawn

- I. Holy and unholy were the visions shewn
- II. To the heretics at night.
On the brows of the infirm.
- III. For lo, one *thousand* nights.⁸
- IV. Slowly crept across my brow.

- I. At last my spirit crawled
- II. Oh Inquisitor —
I did but mold like clay
- III. Deceived by many False Prophets
- IV. I was a Gentile lying bloody and broken⁹

- I. Back into my tortured, sleeping body
- II. The wounds are gone.
The bent and twisted images
- III. The Lord spoke too softly, I could not hear.
- IV. On the side of the road.

- I. Awakened, my mind still reeled
- II. What miracle is this?
To match the vision of perfection
- III. The Black Hounds of the Inquisition
- IV. A Samaritan. A Good Samaritan

⁸ An artistic exaggeration. Bernadette only lived to be 302 years old. She left the Order and the Inquisition after they began using her to condemn innocent people for economic or political reasons. She did condemn a few mages, but she was able to justify this to herself, later in life, because she had judged them according to the religious issues of heresy. Therefore, the mages were treated no better and no worse than the other people who came before her. One night, in 1443, as she embarked on a secret, politically motivated mission with the Grand Inquisitor, she fled the camp. She had been with the Dominican Order for twelve years. She then joined up with one after another of the bands of penitents, flagellants and followers of the new messiahs and charismatic "saints" who were preparing for the coming of the new religious age. She is believed to have devoted herself to healing many of those suffering from the Black Plague. It is likely that she worked alongside hedge witches, physicians and mages as a wandering doctor. No one is sure just how many years Bernadette spent touring the country as a side-show miracle worker for false prophets, who used her talents to bring in money. It is clear that she became enamored with various religious movements and leaders, worked devoutly, and quickly became disillusioned with them. It was a pattern that was to repeat itself over and over again. From things she said in conversation, one must assume that she led that bohemian life for well over a decade.

⁹ A retelling of the Good Samaritan Bible story, as recorded in the book of St. Luke, chapter 10, verses 30-37.

- I. From all that I had seen.¹⁰
- II. What miracle is this?
That resides in each man's heart.
- III. Snapping at my heels.
- IV. Nursed my wounds.

- I. The Hand of God, of Death, had pointed
- II. Child come closer Look at that sinner
Mother Superior Can't you see the shadows
- III. Exhausted and hungry I collapsed on the ground
- IV. And seated On his ass

- I. To the road I was to take
- II. What do you see?
That do each of us surround?
- III. Sure that death was near.
- IV. That lowly ho-nor-ed

- I. Casting off all that was worldly.
- II. Can you tell sick from well?
Where the body is bruised.
- III. I a-woke —
- IV. Be — ast

- I. I did give Myself
- II. Muslim from Christian. Evil from Good?
The spirit is broken. The heart rent in two.¹¹
- III. On Valoran's Doorstep.
- IV. Of Bur — -r-den.

¹⁰ A terrifying description of her Avatar being Awakened. Because of Bernadette's simple view of life, she thought they were religious visions brought to her by angels or demons. Scholars continue to search for other cases where the Plague or other serious illnesses trigger the Awakening of a person's Avatar. Considering the number of persons reporting religious visions during this period, the scholars may be on the right track.

¹¹ Bernadette remained, throughout her life, a Christian and a Healer in the most simple and purest forms. Her magickal abilities are best understood along these lines. Her healing abilities came from no educational training. She reportedly saw the Perfect White form which should be, and black and gray images where a sickness of body, soul or mind had warped the image. With a laying of hands on both body and spiritual image, she simply molded the dark areas until they conformed with the white outline. More than once, she compared this process to working with clay. A person's aura revealed many things to Bernadette. Besides issues of health, she could tell if a person was "good" or "evil," or, to greater interest to her Dominican superiors, Christian or Heretic.

- I. At an Oh! So tender age
 II. At last Sister Bernadette Has found her place
 At last I— Have found my place
 III. Celestial music Poured into my life
 IV. Delivered Me
- I. To the Order Of the Dominican Brides of God.
 II. In the Order. Judging and Punishing The heretics of the land.
 In the Order. Reading and Healing The people of the land.
 III. My words were Struck dumb. The Song began.¹²
 IV. In the Rea — lms Of Hor - i - zon.

¹² Sister Bernadette's appearance on Valoran's doorstep at the Grand Convocation remains a mystery to this day. Even at the end, Bernadette claimed to not remember where she collapsed. It is probable that she wandered dazed and feverish for days. It has been impossible even to pinpoint what country she was in at the time. It has never been discovered who found her, or how she was transported to the Horizon Chantry. However, it is well recorded that Valoran himself nursed her back to health, while conducting the difficult negotiations to establish the magick system and Spheres. During Sister Bernadette's recuperation, she converted to the Celestial Chorus. This was the match that Bernadette had searched for, for so long. Their musical, oral-based tradition appealed to her. All of their liturgy, prayers and most important communications are sung. Celestial Chorus meetings resemble nothing so much as an opera. As Bernadette confessed her sins to Brother Valoran, she began to sing. And from that moment on, she never spoke again. That phenomenon was not entirely unusual among Celestial Chorus members at that time, although it is extremely rare among members today.

III. The Adepts (Who Were These People)

Andantino con Sognado

The musical score consists of ten staves, labeled I through X. Each staff contains a line of music with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: 'Who?' (I, II, III, IV, V, VII, VIII), 'Who were these people?' (III), 'Who were those people?' (IX), 'Who? People? Who?' (VI), and 'The A depts. The A depts.' (X). The lyrics 'Young mages all' appear at the end of most lines. A small '13' is written above the final note of the first staff.

¹³ "Young mages" refers to the Adepts' status as mages, not to their chronological age. Bernadette was only 45 years old when she began her journey with the cabal, but Daud-Allah was reputed to be 450 years old.

I Hy lel Theomin Tho a bath

II

III

IV Cygnus Morro at your service

V Who?

VI

VII Fall Breeze If You Please.

VIII Who? Wal king

IX

X Who?

Master Louis DuMonte

Who? A krites Salonikas

Daud Allah Abu Hisham Ib n Mugla al Bagh da di

Hawk Who?

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

X

E lo ine

Sis ter Ber na de tte

Who? Who?

- I. S—O—L—I—F—I—C—A—T—O!
- II. V—E—R—B—E—N—A!
- III. O—R—D—E—R O—F H—E—R—M—E—S!
- IV. E—U—T—H—A—N—A—T—O—S!
- V. S—E—E—R O—F C—H—R—O—N—O—S!
- VI. A—H—L—I—B—A—T—I—N!
- VII. A—K—A—S—H—I—C B—R—O—T—H—E—R!
- VIII. D—R—E—A—M—S—P—E—A—K—E—R!
- IX. C—E—L—E—S—T—I—A—L C—H—O—R—U—S!
- X. Spheres of Se-par-a-tion.

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| I. Heylel | He was an angel | I worshipped from afar. |
| II. Eloine | WITCH! | Woman of Black Magick. |
| III. Master Louis | Prideful Wizard | You raise yourself |
| IV. Cygnus | Balance Bringer? | Your life is chaos. |
| V. Akrites | Man out of time. | Escaped from Gomorrah. ¹⁴ |
| VI. Daud-Allah | He who follows | The river of life. |
| VII. Fall Breeze | Woe unto you | Beautiful woman |
| VIII. Walking Hawk | Speak no more. | From a dark continent |
| IX. Then there was | Me. | Most humble and lowly. |
| X. The Lord | Made His children | In many colors. |

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| I. I basked in the light | Of his multi-colored eyes. |
| II. Our souls are looped | And knotted through all ages. |
| III. Far above all others, | Heed the word of the Lord. |
| IV. Your holy work so like | The Inquisition when it was pure. ¹⁵ |
| V. How enticing are | The ways of sin and flesh. |
| VI. But you have wandered | Off the path. On to rocky ground. |
| VII. You know right from wrong | But still do nothing. |
| VIII. Perhaps, not of this earth. | So incomprehensible to me. |
| IX. Lowest of all | The Celestial Chorus. Yet, |
| X. In many colors | The Lord made us all. |

¹⁴ Biblical reference to the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which were destroyed by the hand of the Lord when not 10 righteous people could be found there. The story is told in the Book of Genesis, Chapter 18 verse 17 through Chapter 19 verse 30.

¹⁵ The other members of the Cabal did not know of Bernadette's participation in the Inquisition, though it seems clear that she still believes in the rightness of the cause. She left the Inquisition because it had become corrupt, not because she felt the conversion or punishment of heretics was wrong. Whether she kept her role in the Inquisition a secret because she was ashamed of the corruption or because she was on the council of Valoran, it was a wise move. Had the Cabal known, or had it been discovered at the Convocation, she likely would have been lynched. Far too many of the mages in attendance had been persecuted by the Inquisition, and many mages had already lost their lives to it, although the organized persecution of mages by the Inquisition would not come for several decades. Some scholars believe that Eloine alone knew of Bernadette's secret past. Others claim that Heylel and Daud-Allah had guessed. However, it seems unlikely to this scholar that Daud-Allah would have become such good friends with Bernadette had he known, considering his claim to have killed more than one hundred Crusaders.

- I. He smiled at me. My feet felt no weight.
- II. Friend. Sister. Mor-tal En-em-y.
- III. Last in Heaven Who walks first on Earth.¹⁶
- IV. Can't you see? Some souls can be saved
- V. How dare you! Seek to defile me!
- VI. Too many books Dilute the word of God.¹⁷
- VII. Evil walks! In your midst.¹⁸
- VIII. Speak no more. SPEAK No More!¹⁹
- IX. Valoran chose me. I know not why.²⁰
- X. And so must his Angels be.²¹

¹⁶ Biblical paraphrasing of the Book of St. Mark, Chapter 9, verses 33 - 35. The Scripture reads: *And he (Jesus) came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, (the Twelve Disciples) "What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?" But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat them down, and called the twelve and saith unto them, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all."*

¹⁷ Clearly, Bernadette's inability to read and her earlier negative experiences with the Dominicans lie at the root of her disagreement with Daud-Allah. Records show that he had a remarkable memory and was well versed in many religious texts. It is said he could read and recite Scripture in five languages — and did so often.

¹⁸ Scholars are unsure what this refers to. The most popular theory is that it dates back to a minor political disagreement that developed at the Convocation, and refers to another Akashic Brother that Sister Bernadette did not approve of. It is equally possible that the two simply did not get along during the sojourn. There is very little evidence to uphold either theory.

¹⁹ Clearly Bernadette had difficulty accepting Walking Hawk's Dreamspeaking. She could see the similarities to the religious visions; at the time she grew up, monks, hermits and peasant girls were equally likely to entertain religious visitations and visions. However, the focus on nature and the animal kingdom disturbed her. Archangels brought religious visions — not red birds and raccoons. It also disturbed her that so much of the interpretation was left to Walking Hawk. Bernadette had little faith in a mortal's ability to understand the will of God. That's why he sent angels — to make the message clear. For these reasons, Bernadette entertained serious worries that Walking Hawk's visions came from an evil spirit sent by the Devil. Therefore, she frequently argued in favor of doing the exact opposite of whatever Walking Hawk's Dreamspeaking suggested.

²⁰ Bernadette is being coy here, even on her death bed. Recorded documents from Valoran state unequivocally that this mission was an act of atonement for her sins committed while an agent of the Inquisition. However, this too, rings untrue. There was strong competition to represent each Tradition on this quest. The Adepts chosen were the individuals who best represented the traits of each Tradition. Records show that there was much controversy when Valoran chose a new convert to represent the Celestial Chorus. Valoran, in his wisdom, would not entrust the future of that which he had worked so hard for, to an errand of penitence and atonement. While he was not a master of the Time Sphere, could it be possible that he had a vision of the future, which showed him the necessity of Bernadette's fall from Grace?

²¹ In Bernadette's simple, religious view, mages are angels. This was a belief she never lost. Her Christian beliefs encompassed only those forms of being described in the Bible. Since mages clearly had supernatural powers not given to mankind as a whole, mages must be angels. But, as Bernadette said many times, even angels can fall from the Grace of God. It is unclear whether she believed *herself* to be an angel. More likely, she likened herself to the Old Testament prophets, who through the power of prayer and the will of God, were able to perform certain miracles and interpret signs. This would help to explain her feelings of inferiority when comparing herself to the other members of the Cabal.

- I. But he had little time for me
- II. Naked does she cavort with wood devils
- III. Humble yourself before the Serpent in your soul
- IV. Before the body is consumed by fire.
- V. Incense, drugs, sex, pain: the music you dance to.
- VI. You who are so busy parroting quotations
- VII. This DO you preach is the path to Hell
- VIII. Are your dreams evil visions?
- IX. I speak no foreign tongues.²²
- X. Beware! Beware!

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| I. Leader of the group by day. | His nights consumed by Eloine. ²³ |
| II. Am I her Salvation? | Or she: My Damnation? |
| III. Paradox! Strikes you down. | Descendant of that first snake. ²⁴ |
| IV. Is there a woman | You have not taken to your bed? |
| V. You cannot stalk | The back corridors of time Forever! |
| VI. Perhaps you should Stop! | And pray. |
| VII. You skip along merrily | Leading others to their fate. |
| VIII. Brought by devils | To deceive. |
| IX. Dark secret hidden | In my heart. Corrupted Inquisition. |
| X. From God's Grace | Even Angels can Fall. |

²² Bernadette was the only member of the group who did not speak more than one language. It was a source of shame that was magnified by her earlier experiences with the Dominicans. On that basis alone, she nearly refused the call to go on the mission. Valoran, in his wisdom, said, *"The Lord has made us of many colors. He has given us many talents and many tongues. Others have great knowledge and learning. But you alone walk the simple path. You can see the value in the hearts of those overlooked by others. Your ability to heal the sick transcends all boundaries. The music you sing lifts up the heart in any tongue."* — As recorded in *The Book of Valoran*, Chapter 29, verses 19-20.

²³ Bernadette never acknowledged the fact that Heylel was a hermaphrodite. Throughout her life she referred to Heylel only as a man. However, this was understandable. Probably she never acknowledged her own sexuality. Bernadette was only 10 when she joined the Dominican convent and took a vow of chastity. There is no record of her ever marrying or bearing children. Her account certainly suggests that she was in love with Heylel, but she worshipped him from afar. Her religious beliefs would not allow her to do anything more. This did not stop her from envying Eloine, who consummated her feelings with Heylel, and bore twins from the union.

It is well documented that Akrites had romantic inclinations toward Bernadette, though whether it was unrequited love or mere physical lust, this scholar is unsure. Certainly Sister Bernadette's feelings toward Akrites softened as the years passed, but there is nothing to suggest that he was successful in his pursuit.

²⁴ Bernadette was deathly afraid of snakes always. There are unconfirmed accounts of a disaster of epic proportions involving Bernadette and a cult of snake handlers during her Bohemian period. In this text, the "first snake" probably refers to the serpent in the Garden of Eden who was the devil, in the guise of a snake sent to tempt Adam and Eve to sin, as told in the Bible in the book of Genesis, Chapter 2 verse 15 through Chapter 3 verse 20.

- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.
- V.
- VI.
- VII.
- VIII.
- IX.
- X. Judgment Day waits even for you.

- I. Gentle and Wise were Always his words.
- II. Woman who dances and Joins in my song.
- III. The Lord rejoices in The honest and brave.
- IV. Through death is the World cleansed from sin.
- V. When the road was rough Always did he give his hand.
- VI. Still we had much To talk about.
- VII. Graceful as a willow Strong as a clap of thunder.
- VIII. And yet he did smile When he heard my music.
- IX. I did my best As healer and Sister
- X. This is the path The Lord laid before us.

- I. First among mages who wandered the path
- II. Your friendship and strength cloaked me from harm.
- III. Noble descendant of Solomon the Wise.²⁵
- IV. Husband of a black mother — Kali.²⁶
- V. When my muscles cried in pain, gentle were
- VI. Pleasant were our conversations.²⁷
- VII. All that you had you shared with others.
- VIII. Did Christ wear new garb to visit your land?
- IX. I did my best to comfort them all.
- X. Who can comprehend the Master's Plan?

²⁵ Here Bernadette is comparing Master Louis to King Solomon, a wise and noble judge, whose wisdom is recorded in many of the Old Testament books of the Bible. Master Louis was of the House Queasitor, literally, "House of Judges," and he was called upon to settle many disputes on the trail.

²⁶ Whether Bernadette was deceived, confused or just being tactful here, it's hard to say. Cygnus Moro was raised a Muslim but fell in with a forbidden Kali-serving sect. He claimed a dramatic Awakening which involved a vision of him copulating with "The Black Mother" (Kali) herself, after he fought a successful battle with Turkish gaolers to free a group of Hindus punished for the sect's evil actions.

²⁷ Not for long. What began as animated discussions around the campfire that would last far into the night, soon turned to bitter arguments over small details. Other accounts of the mission show that Daud-Allah and Sister Bernadette spoke not a word to each other during the final year of their mission.

- I. An inner vision We could not share.
- II. Wild is your beauty Oh, Glorious Mother!
- III. When you wore your robes Your verdicts were true.
- IV. You had food and coins For beggars and peasants.
- V. His hands to massage them. His incense did calm me.²⁸
- VI. You gave me a sword And taught me to fight.
- VII. Woe unto your enemies. Your hands cut like steel.
- VIII. A False Faced Mask of Magick Screams with visions in the night.
- IX. I sang them to sleep When they were weary.
- X. We cleave together Our humble Cabal

- I. He was a prophet Misunderstood in his own land.
- II. I who could sense life Did midwife for your babes.
- III. You kept your own counsel And forged the trail ahead.²⁹
- IV. And a patient ear For those who sought a confidant.
- V. Oft I rode with him On Chronos, camel and familiar.
- VI. I pray God makes a place In Heaven for a Muslim so devout.
- VII. Your heart never quivered Against Warlocks, Orphans or Nephandi.
- VIII. Brave Indian warrior Man who is called Turtle of the Hill.³⁰
- IX. I did the Lord's work With a Celestial Song.
- X. We cleave together Separate we'd fall.

- I. "Come sisters and brothers - fol-low me."
- II. Nine Traditions make the Sphere whole.
- III. Nine Traditions make the Sphere whole.
- IV. Nine Traditions make the Sphere whole.
- V. Nine Traditions make the Sphere whole.
- VI. Nine Traditions make the Sphere whole.
- VII. Nine Traditions make the Sphere whole.
- VIII. Nine Traditions make the Sphere whole.
- IX. Nine Traditions make the Sphere whole.
- X. Many are the messages we carry among us.

²⁸ The incense Bernadette refers to is hashish. Records show that when Akrites was sexually excited his body produced hashish smoke. While it had a calming effect on Bernadette, clearly Akrites was not experiencing the same state of mind. In light of the fact that he was a Seer of Chronos, an Ecstasy Cultist, his restraint while under such sexual tension is remarkable — and commendable.

²⁹ This was a tactful way of saying Master Louis tended to walk alone several paces ahead of the rest of the Cabal. He was a notorious snob who made a point of pitching his tent upwind and away from the group.

³⁰ This is a not-quite-correct interpretation of Walking Hawk's lineage and address. Records show he was a member of the Turtle clan of the Indian tribe now known as the Seneca. At the time, they referred to themselves as Djiionondo-wanenake, roughly translated as "People of the Hill."

- I. "The path is steep - mind your step."
- II. The path the Counsel has laid before us.
- III. The path the Counsel has laid before us.
- IV. The path the Counsel has laid before us.
- V. The path the Counsel has laid before us.
- VI. The path the Counsel has laid before us.
- VII. The path the Counsel has laid before us.
- VIII. The path the Counsel has laid before us.
- IX. The path the Counsel has laid before us.
- X. This multitude will bring more to the light.

- I. "Our chain is as strong as the weakest link."
- II. Hand in hand we'll ascend the mountain.
- III. Hand in hand we'll ascend the mountain.
- IV. Hand in hand we'll ascend the mountain.
- V. Hand in hand we'll ascend the mountain.
- VI. Hand in hand we'll ascend the mountain.
- VII. Hand in hand we'll ascend the mountain.
- VIII. Hand in hand we'll ascend the mountain.
- IX. Hand in hand we'll ascend the mountain.
- X. Than any one could walking alone.

- I. The Journey Begins.
- II. The Journey Begins.
- III. The Journey Begins.
- IV. The Journey Begins.
- V. The Journey Begins.
- VI. The Journey Begins.
- VII. The Journey Begins.
- VIII. The Journey Begins.
- IX. The Journey Begins.
- X. The Journey Begins.

IV. In the Lion's Den

Allegro con moto

I. Died in battle. Horrible were the fates that be fell us

II. Captured and tortured. Cruel Fate Crueler Order!

III. Where is love? How could he have done this to me? *Where is love?

IV. All is lost. Lost. Doomed to Die

- I. Tearing the sun From its place of slumber
- II. Our hands bound by ropes Our mouth gagged tight
- III. I prayed to you. And you came.
- IV. Nine are the stars That shoot across Heaven

- I. The Order of Reason Thundered into our camp.
- II. Led by long leashes Attached to White horses
- III. Astride a white horse With the Order of Reason!
- IV. Stars of Destiny To wish upon.

- I. We all (Even I!) Raised our swords in battle.
- II. Prisoners of War Grimly marching toward Death.
- III. Betraying All Who loved you - Even your babes!
- IV. Suddenly one star Changes direction!

- I. On the front lines! (Oh Fierce Warriors!)
- II. Locked in dungeons Far below ground.
- III. Who among us Have not loved you?
- IV. Oh what will happen To the other eight?

- I. Master Louis! Sweet Fall Breeze! Daud-Allah!
- II. Oh what Magick? What Message? Can penetrate this?
- III. Caressed your cheek? Shuddered at the warm touch of your hand?³¹
- IV. They sank unto the horizon. And burnt out.

- I. "Away!" they cried. "We will hold them!"
- II. Alone in my cell My mind reached out
- III. How can you scorn us all? Oh! Where is Love?
- IV. Mortals and Mages Alike, enchained.

- I. "Continue the work that we have begun!"
- II. To Walking Hawk, Eloine, Cygnus Moro
- III. Oh sweet Akrites, what was your fate?
- IV. Who will stoke the dying embers?

- I. The Tylalus Wizard the first to fall.
- II. To comfort their tears and ease their pain
- III. Tis worse, no worst, not knowing
- IV. When oceans of blood flow over the Earth?

- I. The serpents of Paradox bared their fangs
- II. But their faith is dead. What Hope is left?
- III. Do you lie dead on the battlefield still?
- IV. When the forces of Darkness ascend.³²

- I. Do you languish still in a Paradox Realm?
- II. To a mother whose babes were ripped from her breast
- III. Through clashing swords and thundering hooves
- IV. What hubris! What vanity! We Nine had held.

- I. A terrible frenzy his death did cause
- II. At night my gaoler came to me
- III. Darling Akrites I could not find your side
- IV. What chance? Nine Adepts wandering in the night?

³¹ Some Cult of Ecstasy scholars claim this line supports their belief that every member of the Cabal had an affair with Heylel. While his hermaphroditic nature makes that technically possible, this scholar believes that the Cultists are allowing their own decadent tendencies and personal predilections to cloud their view.

³² A retelling of Walking Hawk's prophetic dream, which he recounted around the camp fire the night before the group was betrayed and captured.

- I. In the heart of the woman warrior
- II. A Dominican sister I had known
- III. Do you lay dead or did you escape alive?
- IV. How could the Council send such a small band?

- I. The blood of a dozen mortals
- II. A secret mission of mercy
- III. At night I see you in my dreams
- IV. On a mission to save Magick

- I. And two mages stained her battle sword
- II. At the bedside of the others
- III. And smell the smoke of your perfume
- IV. In a war, army must fight army

- I. Daud-Allah's body was cut to shreds
- II. I shaped their spirits and healed their wounds
- III. Your arms entwine me in a caress³³
- IV. We were blood sacrifices to a more

- I. Still he battled on.
- II. **Cygnus Moro!**
- III. I will never feel.
- IV. Powerful god.

- I. Fleeing the battle, I turned for one last look
- II. My Magick was not strong enough to save you.
- III. Oh, where is love? In my dreams a champion comes.
- IV. Wrists and feet bound to the sacrifice altar

- I. Would that God had changed me there
- II. Your screams shook the prison walls!
- III. Heylel! Steps down from his white horse.
- IV. Hands and feet nailed to the cross.

³³ The Cult of Ecstasy scholars further contend that this line supports a myth, popular in their circles, that Bernadette and Akrites had an affair during his self-imposed exile in the Arctic during the early part of the 17th Century. This scholar has found nothing to justify this historical gossip.

XII. The Great Debate³⁷

Vivace Spiritoso
Soprano solo

I

How fare thee Bernadette? Hylel spake unto me. Sweet were his words and

radiant his face. As he appeared before me in my prison cell. Like the Angel

Ga bri el to comfort and to guide me in my time of trouble.

His voice was more beautiful than a whole Choir of Angels.

- I. Into a pillar of salt on the path.³⁴
- II. Your curses killed a score of Inquisitors
- III. His changeling eyes flashing with jealous anger.
- IV. I hear dice tumble - the guards are casting lots.³⁵

- I. Two women, Two babes, Two wounded warriors
- II. And still they seared the flesh from your skin
- III. Champion against Champion - a Battle to the Death!
- IV. My cup overflows with vinegar and gall.

- I. Could not out - run the army of Death.
- II. Drove spikes through your hands, a spear through your side.
- III. As I awake, your visions vanish
- IV. In the sixth hour, a darkness falls.

- I. The enemy has won.
- II. A bloody shroud remains.
- III. I am left alone.
- IV. Eli, Eli! Lama sabach-thani?³⁶

- II. "Come away with me my love,"
- III. The Order of Reason is aptly named
- IV. Rejoin the work of the Inquisition
- V. Return to the convent, Renew your vows
- VI. Hark the words of a new prophet
- VII. Listen to the Celestial music
- VIII. I could go home - I'm not Joan of Arc.

- II. (Finally my lover declares his heart!)
- III. Many lies have been told about us
- IV. We must destroy evil to save the good
- V. Your Dominican Sisters await thee there
- VI. The hour of salvation is at hand
- VII. Let Valoran's wisdom speak to you
- VIII. My sword is dull and my back is weak.

³⁴ A Biblical reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. As his family was fleeing from the city, Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. The story is recorded in the book of Genesis, Chapter 19, verses 24-26.

³⁵ The last section of In The Lion's Den is filled with Biblical references to the crucifixion of Christ, as recorded in the book of St. Matthew, Chapter 27.

³⁶ As recorded in the book of St. Matthew, Chapter 27, verse 46: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is to say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

³⁷ In the final piece, Sister Bernadette varies from the traditional motet form. The bottom base line, which normally serves as a metaphorical interpretation of the song, is gone. It is replaced by the first voice, which performs only solos.

- II. Great would be our magick and even greater our love.
- III. You've followed your heart and look where it's got you
- IV. If thy hand offend thee, cut it off, saith the Lord³⁸
- V. There are fields to tend and the sick to heal
- VI. Spread my new testament throughout the land
- VII. The magick and the music of the Choir is true
- VIII. Saint Catherine, Saint Margaret and Saint Michael

- II. What need have we for the unenlightened?
- III. Time to listen to your brain
- IV. And did not Mary Magdalene
- V. Fair was Esther in the eyes of the Lord
- VI. Said the Lord at the Mount of Olives
- VII. God needs our magick to save the world
- VIII. Have never visited me in my cell.³⁹

- II. Even these mages from the so-called Traditions
- III. We can rid the world of disease and poverty
- IV. Of whom seven demons were cast out
- V. Though she was queen she was devoted to
- VI. Many false prophets shall arise and deceive
- VII. A holy war against the Order of Reason
- VIII. I could work in the fields beside my mother

- II. Cannot pull the scales from their eyes
- III. No more hunger, No more pain.
- IV. Praise the Lord when the demons were gone?⁴⁰
- V. Saving her people and serving her King⁴¹
- VI. When the end of the world is near⁴²
- VII. You've seen enough to know it must be fought.
- VIII. Have a husband. A house. Many children.

³⁸ From the holy book of St. Matthew, Chapter 18, verse 8, "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life (Heaven) halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet and be cast into everlasting fire."

³⁹ The three saints are said to have appeared repeatedly to Joan of Arc to give her guidance and comfort.

⁴⁰ The story is told in the holy book of St. Luke, Chapter 8, Verse 2.

⁴¹ For the story of this wise and inspirational woman, see the holy Book of Esther, as recorded in the Old Testament.

⁴² Jesus spoke of the signs of the second coming and the end of world, as he gathered the twelve disciples together on the Mount of Olives. These prophecies are told in the holy book of St. Matthew, Chapter 24.

- II. But what need of them, have you and I?
- III. If peasant and mage give up superstition
- IV. Repent and rejoin our holy mission
- V. Sister rejoin us in the convent
- VI. I am the one, true, disciple
- VII. If the Traditions are victorious
- VIII. Children are blessed in the eyes of the Lord.⁴³

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| II. Together | we two | can Ascend. |
| III. Together | we all | can Ascend. |
| IV. By the Flames of Purification | the righteous | can Ascend. |
| V. As brides of the Lord | we | can Ascend. |
| VI. Only through me | the people | can Ascend. |
| VII. Together | we all | can Ascend. |
| VIII. Through the children | I | can Ascend. |

⁴³ "But Jesus rebuked them, saying, 'Suffer the little children and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'" As recorded in the holy book of St. Matthew, Chapter 19, Verse 14.

Soprano Solo

I. MY EYES WERE OPENED
AND I WAS NO MORE DECEIVED
BY THE HONEYED WORDS
OF THE SERPENT-PROPHET
THE HOLY LIGHT
HIT THE MIRROR PRISM
THE FRAGMENTS OF COLOR
FUSED INTO A SOLID BEAM.
ALL IS VANITY,
SAID JOB THE PROPHET.
GREAT FOLLY
LIES DOWN EVERY PATH.

Choral

- II. There is no love in Teomim's heart for me,
His destiny is far greater, far blacker, than that.
- III. The Order of Reason has too narrow a vision
The Lord rejoices in the multitudes of life.
- IV. The cruel acts of the Inquisition are blasphemy.
Where is the Golden Rule in their work?
- V. I have no place in the Dominican Convent
The Lord's work is not done behind cloistered walls.
- VI. Many are the new prophets I have followed
Each left me more disillusioned than before.
- VII. I can not fight the war of the mages
Their power is lost in the separation of the Spheres.
- VIII. I am neither a farmer, nor Joan of Arc.
The village life is not for me.

Soprano Solo **

I. I AM ALL OF THESE THINGS —
AND YET I AM NONE.
BETRAYAL AND BLASPHEMY
FILL EACH OF THESE PATHS.
GOD SENT ME A SIGN
IN THE FRAGMENTS OF LIGHT.
MY GOAL IS SOLITARY —
AS MY PATH MUST BE.

I
MUST
MAKE
THE
MANY
VOICES —
ONE.

Finis

** According to the records of Sister Imagna, at this point the many cloned images of Sister
102 Bernadette merged into a single, radiant figure.

Epilogue: The Missing Years

The Tradition of the Celestial Choristers and the community of mages are poorer for having lost so much of the original text of *Song of Bernadette*.

I have reproduced the I, II, III, IX and XII movements, here. Many of the songs of the cabal's wanderings over their four years together have been lost, and there is a 200-year gap between movement XII, "The Great Debate" and the next song, which documents Sister Bernadette's trip home to Domremy Champagne to visit the grave of her mother.

Some scholars believe Sister Bernadette sailed to the New World and visited Walking Hawk and his tribe.

Others claim that Bernadette was reunited with Akrites in the Horizon Chantry, and followed him to his Arctic exile. Some go so far as to suggest that the two were married and raised many children, and that to this day, there exists a secret tradition of Arctic mages who are direct descendants of the two.

Likely, we shall never know.

— Sister Imagna-Nicole

The Revelation of AKRITES SALONIKAS THE SEER

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

—John 8:32

*And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it;
and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.*

—Revelation 9:6

Temporal manipulation during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was among the most controversial of magicks in Europe, as it provoked disturbing questions about fate and personal responsibility: if precognition showed a person committing a certain act, did that mean he was bound to his fate? Further, what responsibility did the clairvoyant have to God (or god), to humanity, and to himself to reveal or to prevent harmful or sinful acts, and even to be on the lookout for them?

Akrites Salonikas, one of the greatest Ecstatics in recorded history, as well as one of the most controversial figures in the March of the Nine, found himself pioneering the ethics of temporal manipulation. Perhaps it was precisely because of the magnitude of his talents that he did so. In this sense, his Revelation is perhaps the most important of a number of manuscripts still extant revealing Salonikas' involvement in temporal ethics. Recorded during Salonikas' self-imposed exile in the Arctic by the late Assam the Wanderer (1562 - 1824) — Salonikas' apprentice during the early part of the seventeenth century — these invaluable historic revelations were later delivered to the library of an insignificant monastery just outside of Rostock, Germany, a library which this editor later acquired from the Cultists at the Theater von der Blinden Chantry near Hamburg. When Assam returned to the Arctic in 1705, Akrites had disappeared without a trace. Despite the fact that in them Akrites refers to himself as a "dead man of heavy heart," no one has yet definitively discovered what became of this legendary Seer.

Earlier manuscripts reveal that Akrites had lived for a time in the Arctic during the height of the witch trials in Europe, perhaps to escape the danger, perhaps because he could not stand to see the horrors that humanity committed against itself. In one of these manuscripts, Akrites, apparently aware of how he would be perceived in Europe at the time, refers to himself as "the lustic deville with skin darke and yet riches in abundaunce" (Salonikas, Verbi Addititii, p. 188). Whether he is indeed a "deville" is, as he would wish it, for Chronos to decide.

Author's Addendum¹

Thou and I art contemporaries, Porthos, for which reason me-seemeth fitting that I, a dead man of right heavy heart, reveal guarded secrets to a brother who liveth still, yet is of no lighter heart. I write this revelation and confession in confidence — confidence that thou discloseth not its contents either directly or indirectly, by commission or by omission, until the time that thou list to reveal them for to serve the greater good. That time already I wot well, and soon, by thy standards of time, thou cometh to understand that this said revelation must be preserved until the Traditions' hour of need. No oaths do I desire, I foresee that thou observeth my trust.

As thou knoweth full well, but for the weal of our readers that do not, several centuries ago (to thee) chanceth to occur a great Betrayal, like unto that which murders the ascendant Caesar during the glory of Rome. As I purpose to serve the great Passions of man, this letter unto the sons and daughters of the future must uncover the font of that said treachery — the very soul of Heylel the Betrayal — and the noble minds of those who sought to make that being for-ever impotent.

To which end, to thee I entrust the tale of an happening which occureth at the close of the second year of the March of the Nine (the mission upon which the right wise Council of Nine embarked us). Which happening was closely yoked to the nature of the Betrayal and, of no less importance, eminently appertinent to thy mission in this said book. Further, herein I confess an understanding of the acts of the Seers and of the Traditions, for as much as they hath been related to me by the redoubted Ecstatic, Prateeti Rashiveda, and also of the late Heylel Teomim Thoabath as well. Finally, and me-seemeth of most importance, to thee I offer my visions of a future without thy past, to wit, a future in which Heylel be not permitted to betray the First Cabal and be not subsequently sentenced to Gilgul and death. Herein, then, is the Revelation which I bequeath to my beloved sons and daughters for the sake of All, that this said Revelation may profit unto the hearers of it.

¹ Editor's note — Because of the largely inaccessible nature of the language in this text, as well as in subsequent texts written by Akrites Salonikas (he was, after all, trained in what younger followers of the Art would today call "antiquated" Latin and, to further complicate matters, almost always spoke in the present tense), I have chosen to update and clarify the language in "The Penitent's Wish" and in "Praedictum Apocalypsis" ("The Prophecy of the Apocalypse"). Please note, however, that I have left Salonikas' prefatory remarks in their originals (my translation) in order to impart a sense of their flavour. In subsequent books, I will reproduce the whole of these manuscripts, as well as related texts, intact, both in bound form and, thanks to a group of dedicated young scholars, on the Net.



The Penitent's Wish

Every now and then I had to close my eyes as I learned to navigate these white lands, for, unless one took care, one could be blinded by their brilliance. It was a land of dangerous beauty where everything seemed to blend into everything else by degrees. The ocean, never far from the Norwegian village of Kirkenes in any direction, was choked with ice floes, scintillating like a thousand facets of a chiseled gemstone. The steep slopes that hugged the fjords were like palatial walls of blue-white ice, beautiful, almost magickal, but frigid and unalive. The cold sun stared into the frozen faces of the placid lakes like a vain queen into mirrors of exceptional clarity. The plains that swept upwards to the plateaus the natives called fjelds were snowladen, also beautiful and dangerous. It was a land in which you could lose your vision if you stared into its beauty too long.

The Euthanatos Cygnus Moro had already done so, which was just as well. I had always felt that he should not have been permitted to accompany us on our mission, for his heresy, the heresy of his Tradition, was unbounded. The blindfold he wore for his snowblindness chafed his pride, and it was probably good for him.

To add to the danger that we already faced, I knew that there was another among us suffering from pride even greater than Moro's — to such a degree that I suspected betrayal — but at the time I did not know who it was. It was during this mission that I was to discover the identity of that Betrayal once and for all.

Our quarry this day was Tormod of Kirkenes, an old Norwegian Craft mage who, presently, was fleeing for his hut on the fjeld. The long climb up to the fjeld was harder than it seemed. Behind me, Fall Breeze, our temperamental but open-hearted Akashic representative, cautiously led the blindfolded Moro up, catching him when he slipped on the icy gravel beneath the snow. I helped Bernadette, who, at times, was waist-high in snow. Among the Cabal, the Solificatus Heylel seemed to expend the least effort navigating the terrain, the snow slipping past him as if in harmony with his being. Ahead, and still evading our pursuit, we could hear Tormod muttering "*Forsiktig! Forsiktig!*" ("Carefully! Carefully!") to himself as he waded and plunged through deep snow drifts toward his small hut.

Heylel reached the top of the embankment first and, in so doing, sent a cascade of snow down upon our heads. Taken unawares, Moro lost his footing, screamed, tumbled back down the slope to the very bottom, and was knocked unconscious. I briefly wondered what blessed thoughts of mortality and reincarnation had flashed through his brain in that moment of vertigo, as I continued to struggle up the steep slope, holding Bernadette's hand. I confess that I was not terribly concerned with the deathgiver's fate. Yet, for reasons I dare not fathom, Fall Breeze and the Verbena Eloine, short-sighted Eloine, descended again to help the Euthanatos.

By the time Bernadette and I reached the cabin, Heylel had cornered Tormod. The old wizard stood with his back to the cabin door, hand on the latch, wisps of gray hair from his beard lifted by the frigid wind. He wore only a light garment of sackcloth, tattered with use, but certainly not enough to fend off the cold. Nevertheless, the old hermit neither seemed to be affected by the cold, nor showed signs of having lived in these hostile environs for decades, as he was reputed to have done. His face was old, but cherubic, his cheeks plump, red, and smooth, his forehead unwrinkled. Only his eyes, which flashed angrily at us, his thin gray beard, and his frail frame revealed his extreme age.

I had learned scraps of Norse as we traveled north and thus was able to follow Tormod's stream of expletives. After all, he had been living here as a hermit for decades before we rudely came to disturb him. The chances that the Primi had never set foot on this remote glacier of a land, let alone bothered with this seemingly insignificant old man, were great. I doubted that the Order of Reason could even conceive of such a backward locale as the one in which he lived.

Nevertheless, while this was our last stop on the northern leg of our mission, at least four of us — Heylel, Bernadette, my strange, close friend the Dreamspeaker Walking Hawk, and I — felt



that our message must reach everyone who could make a difference, no matter whether we had to travel to the four corners of the earth, into the deepest dreams of humanity, or into the blackest reaches of the Tellurian. And our questioning had revealed that Tormod of Kirkenes had once demonstrated great powers — powers that many of us could not duplicate — before he had publicly sworn never again to partake of the “devil’s powers.” Yet, despite his abilities, I was little impressed: power is one thing, love is another. Throughout his life, this man had demonstrated no love for humanity, no immersion in the Passions, no involvement in the cycle of life.

Still, I could not judge too harshly. Many of our Cabal members had not met my expectations until they joined the Cabal, either. And, even then, they had to *join*, not just be chosen for the duty. They had to consecrate their hearts, minds, and souls to the salvation of humanity, whether that meant glory or death for us all. After the pride most of us secretly felt in our hearts had worn away with the daily routine, the travel, the rhetoric, the entreaties, and the violence, what was left was a Cabal worthy of being called so. We had our weaknesses, but we were, at least at the outset, united. Later, we fragmented as a result of pride, but never, I think, as a result of hubris. That dangerous sin belonged to only one among our company.

Still steaming despite the cold, Tormod seemed upset at being disturbed so near his hermitage. Summoning as much aplomb as I could manage, I tailored my expression to calm the man, doffing my fur-trimmed hat — my warm scalp immediately regretting it — and bowing deeply before the old Norwegian. I replaced my hat and held my hands out before me in a gesture of

peace. Tormod eyed me suspiciously, no doubt taking in my facial features, which betrayed my apparently untrustworthy Persian and Greek heritage. This was going to be a challenge.

Once the rest of the Cabal arrived, they were not forthcoming with suggestions, probably because most of them had fought and now resented the decision to travel this far north. Heylel seemed to step back in amusement to watch the spectacle. Walking Hawk offered no aid, as he ordinarily left matters of diplomacy to others when in Europe. And I refused to look at Bernadette, afraid that she in fact knew what to do. Tormod frowned, his earlobes and plump cheeks reddening with indignant ire. Before he exploded, I decided to try to reach his mind, rather than playing court jester with mimed movements and imprecise hand signals. I fingered the earrings studding my right ear, a habit adopted during my apprenticeship in Bokhara, then pressed my palms together as if praying in the Christian manner. Tormod’s mind was resistant,

but not hostile, as I slowly pierced the veil separating my thoughts from his.

A whirl of incongruent images peppered with emotions flooded my mind, but I took hold of



myself and willed a mental floodgate erected. A cautious greeting passed from my mind to his, a barely perceptible nod to his age and wisdom. An emotion reached out from his mind, tentatively touching mine — a gruff nod to my talents and a brief, querying impulse accompanied by an image of a Catholic archbishop which was quickly, intentionally dissipated, as if it were an embarrassing mistake. Curious, I mirrored the image of the archbishop back to Tormod's mind, a *faux pas* which I now wish with every fiber of my being that I had not committed.

You see, Tormod, as I later learned, had briefly wondered if the Church had secretly sent us to murder him — superficially, for his alleged crimes against God and, in truth, for his knowledge of the archbishop's petty political secrets. After all, wilderness provides the most secret of tombs, and, as yet, Tormod did not know, or perhaps could not sense, that we were respectable mages. Perhaps he thought that we were a motley crew of Church assassins. Perhaps he saw my image of the archbishop as an outright threat. Whatever his perception of me, suddenly I felt a flood of hostility, guilt, and anger channeled at me. I tried to disconnect from his mind before he could harm me, but I succeeded only partially, and much of the attack came through.

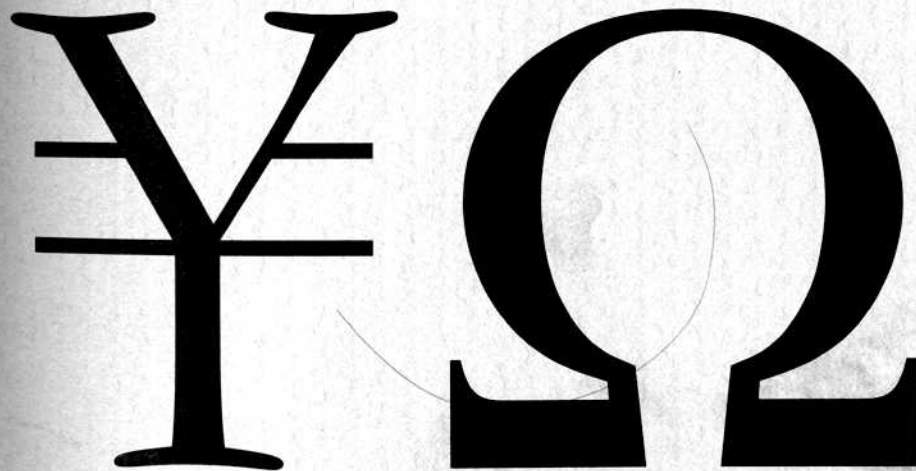
Bernadette later related to me a coherent version of what had happened. Apparently, Tormod had suddenly disappeared, and, simultaneously, I fell to the ground, writhing in the snow. I began to speak in a language none of them could understand, although I recall speaking the old man's language. I had no idea that I was writhing on the ground, only that my tongue had taken control of my mouth, and that I was having a vision. Bernadette tried to calm me, though I am quite sure that she thought I was in need of spiritual, not physical, assistance. Accustomed to my Ecstatic fits, the others dispersed, in search of Tormod. Heylel simply looked around at the backs of the receding Cabal members, then, with a knowing wink at Bernadette, tried the doorlatch to the cabin.

Huddled inside was the old man. He growled something at Heylel, but Heylel simply walked into the room, crouched near the fireplace, and started working the tinder with his delicate hands. Tormod was visibly furious, but was unwilling to force Heylel to leave, perhaps confused by who or what he was, or intimidated by who he *thought* Heylel was.

Bernadette dragged me, still speaking in tongues, across the threshold of the one-room hut and the bare floorboards, and heaved me onto the bed by herself. She crossed the room again, latched the door shut, and pulled the inside shutters closed across the latched door. Neither Heylel nor Bernadette bothered to recall the other members of the Cabal. I could only guess at their reasons.

During this time, as I have said, I experienced a vision, perhaps spurred by Tormod's attack. At times, it was highly symbolic. At other times, it simply reported the future. Yet, throughout the vision, I sensed that the two, the symbolic and the precognitive, were closely intertwined. It was as if Tormod's mind had a propensity for the symbolic, while my own mind habitually understood the precognitive, and the two minds were working as one to reveal something to me. Overlaid on the vision was the overwhelming sense that Tormod wanted me to grant him a simple wish, the nature of which I could not determine, as unmastered emotion is a blunt tool for precise communication.

The vision went something like this:²



² At this point in the original manuscript, the symbol $\Upsilon\Omega$ appears, linked to strong Mind magick. When accessed, this symbol permits the reader to reexperience the vision, particularly the emotions, that Salonikas presumably saw and felt at this time. Because this vision is not described in Salonikas' own words, I have asked Marina Rampullo, Ecstatic Master here at Doissetep, to lend us her expertise in the field of Visionary Translation and Interpretation, a task which she has graciously accepted. What follows, then, is an interpretation of Salonikas' experience, and, Rampullo cautions, is to be taken as such. Regrettably, the nature of publishing makes it unfeasible to transfer the magick contained in the symbol to every copy of this book. The Net version of this material will contain the vision in whole.

The snowladen hills, icy cliffs, frozen lakes, they race toward me, as if the whole world shifts beneath my feet. Suddenly, blood drips from the Sky — plink, plink, like raindrops — a few at first, then more, and then suddenly a pelting torrent of blood, as if the Sun, with a sharp, bright ray, had slashed the Sky in the jugular. The whole world screams as one, as if, it is later said, “a million voices had suddenly cried out as one, and were suddenly silenced.”

...We trudge through the snow, pursuing our quarry, who has as much disdain for us as we have, I suddenly realize, for him. We pull ourselves up the slope, helping each other, meter by meter. Ahead, the Sun strains up over the top of the cliff, carelessly dislodging a chunk of ice, which tumbles toward us like disdainful criticism from a trusted priest. The Sun’s dislodged ice thunders down the cliff, striking Night and bearing him down to the bottom, where he remains. With Discipline, Nature, wending her way up, returns to and heals Night. I feel a sudden flash of anger. And all the time, Passion and Faith continue to ascend without falter, only waist deep in the frigid snow that the Sun seems to own. The Sun disappears over the Horizon. I feel surprised at my relief upon seeing Night mantle the Sky in its gentle folds.

...Another night, a new moon. Though I sit before a roaring fire, the chill of the dark freezes my bones. Through the onyx eyes of a raven, I look down upon our camp, the people in it, and see the future, carrion for raptors. Bernadette, Eloine, Moro, the Hermetic Louis DuMonte, Walking Hawk, Fall Breeze, and the profound Ahl-i-Batin Daud-Allah — they dispassionately perform their camp duties about the fire, moving about as if hobbled with heavy chains upon their ankles. Their backs are bent with great sorrow, and they scarcely speak. All but two are present: myself and Heylel. The others have the air of those who are about to die. I shiver in terror, for these are the Chosen, those who are said to carry the will of the Nine in their hearts. Yet they seem no more spirited than the abused wench who empties chamberpots at the inn — forgotten, broken prisoners, starved of hope. Indeed, they have lost their will to live, for they have lost their will to fight. And this is terrifying to me, for, if the Chosen will not fight, who will?

Worse, what are these babes in our midst? Two — twins they appear — wrapped in swaddling clothes and cuddled against Eloine’s warm breast. Is Eloine to have children, then? And, yet, what a lapse of love or of judgment! To take infants on a mission such as ours, to expose them to such dangers, is an act of the self-involved.

One thing more worries me: why am I not present among the Cabal? Am I, then, to die before this vision comes to be? If not, where am I? And where is Heylel?

...But Heylel Teomim — honored leader of the Chosen, entrusted ally, and, I realize as I watch Eloine dart a poisonous glance at Heylel, father, and mother, of the twin innocents — comes. He rides over the rise with a troop of horsemen and the deathgiving Sun, as it is known to desert dwellers, at his back. The faces of the cavalry are in shadow, but they bear themselves arrogantly and I wager they warrant no good. Their steeds, white as the sun’s searing corona, steam and champ in the morning chill, eager to be released upon the valley below. Heylel halts his steed at the top of the hill, half-turned, his delicate hand held high in the air for the troops to see. I circle. Half of his noble face, the face of a patrician, is pale, bloodless, in the sun, the other half, dark, unknowable, in shadow. I wonder what he is thinking, for his brow is furrowed, but only for a moment. He turns back toward camp, his face now entirely in shadow, and lowers his hand. Silently, like the snow itself, the troops encircle the camp and descend. I shiver. My Ecstasy increases, and many things are revealed to me in a flood of vision. They are the Paths of History, the branches of Time that defy Fate:

I see: Myself sleeping fitfully in my tent, dreaming of betrayal, of failure, of surrender. A twig snaps outside, and I awaken. I crawl to the tent flap and push it aside. Outside, atop a pure white horse sits a gaunt figure of a man, a mage it seems, for in his eyes, as in the eyes of all who Will magick, I see the flame of Primus, that eternal Passion, flickering like a will-o’-the-wisp. Yet dull like those of the dead, his eyes seem to value utility alone and disdain emotion, curiosity, and the aesthetic. He beckons to me with a bony hand that suggests only defeat.

I see: The camp alerted, prepared to do battle. Ever vigilant, Fall Breeze stands sentry on the crest of the hill, ramrod straight, muscles poised, ears, eyes, and mind attuned. Eloine scouts the forest, camouflaged as only a Verbena can be. Sweet Bernadette offers prayers to her God, praying for Heylel whom she loves (is she so blind that she thinks we cannot see?), and naively

ignorant of my passion for her. Walking Hawk puffs contemplatively at his *kinnikinick* as he sharpens the war club he calls a *tomahawk*. The rest fortify themselves according to their customs. I do not see the point in remaining in plain view. Why fight as the enemy wishes, for what is honor to those who do not know the face of god?

Slipping into the tent where the infants are sleeping peacefully, unaware that parent battles parent, I lift their small basket and carry it gently outside camp, hoping to evade the watchful eyes of their mother. They stir, and I stumble into a run, fearful of the noise they might make. Chronos, my friend and familiar, joins me a mile from camp, and I hitch the babies’ basket between the two humps on his back (for he has chosen the shape of a camel) and send him back to civilization, where mercy, not justice, has the opportunity to befall them.³

I see: Heylel and myself sitting on a log in an idyllic clearing in the woods. I tell him of my vision, of the Betrayal, as he sits quietly, knees together, listening. Heylel’s professed hatred of the Order of Reason is apparent. What the Order has done to him, I do not know, but I have seen his eyes blaze with fury and his lips, usually full and beautiful, fall ugly with a bitter sneer at their mere mention. Still, I expect my message to elicit anger, but instead I get dignity. I am torturing myself and him and do not wish to continue.

Heylel takes a deep breath, unintentionally pulling my eyes to her round breasts (for he, or they, are in their female aspect today). She does not look disturbed; merely thoughtful. “What you say may come to pass, my friend,” she says, “but if it should, rest assured that I will have a noble reason for doing so.” My eyes grow wide. “Do you, then, have such plans?” She puts a delicate hand on my knee and shakes her head. “Of course not. But do you consider it wise to mention it to me? You have planted the seed of speculation in my mind.” Heylel’s lips curl in a seductive smile, knowing that I know that she is playing mind games with me. “Do you even now not see that you must learn to use wisely the wisdom Chronos grants you?”

I see: Myself sleeping fitfully, awakening before dawn, knowing what is to befall us. I steel myself to abide my decision. Nothing has ever been harder than this: that I allow Heylel to betray himself and us, that my allies are killed and the Circle of Nine is broken, and that, despite what I know to be true, many will believe that, between Heylel and me, I have committed the worse betrayal. Nevertheless, I wait for the coming of the Sun.

When it comes, it comes with a phalanx of Treachery’s soldiers, spearheaded by our oncrusted leader. On white steeds they come, descending into our sleeping valley with the stealth of old age. I watch, always I watch, as Eloine emerges first from her tent, a strange look of recognition, then resignation, washing over her face. She cries out a warning to the rest of the Cabal, but it is too late. She and Bernadette scarcely have time to arm themselves, while the others are still pushing aside their blankets. I must leave to carry the evil news to the Nine. With a heavy heart, I slip away from the awful scene to rendezvous with Chronos, only briefly, imperceptibly, touching Bernadette’s mind with a farewell kiss.

When I awakened from the vision, Heylel told me that nine days had passed, I was surpassingly thirsty, and had a headache that matched the threat of the Order of Reason. Bernadette and the others had headed south to Danzig, where Heylel had arranged to rendezvous with them, for there were time-sensitive matters that had to be addressed there. It was an unusual turn of events, but none of us yet had been incapacitated for so long. As far as I can gather, it was an act of kindness for Heylel to remain with me.

When I awoke, I was immediately struck by just how much I had to think about, but I was not quite ready to begin thinking as my head seemed to have split in two. Instead, I turned to Heylel, who had wrapped me in a fur blanket and started a roaring fire in the hearth, and took his hand. I found it odd that he hesitated in giving it to me, then seemed to think better of it. Still, he did not seem to realize that I was feeling ambivalent about his apparent betrayal, and that I wanted to believe my vision had been merely a fever.

³ At this point and elsewhere throughout his vision, Salonikas’ tale seems to be at odds with that of Eloine’s regarding the fate of the twins. Although there is as yet no definitive answer to this discrepancy, it nevertheless might best be explained by the nature of Salonikas’ vision: he only describes what might have happened (“the Paths of History, the branches of Time that defy Fate”), and not necessarily what actually happened.

After some time, the cabin grew hot, and I grew restive. My mind began to work again, producing question after restless question. I had to decide two things: what to do with Tormod, who had been kind enough to let us stay — particularly after our intrusion — and what to do with Heylel if, indeed, my visions were not the product of a fevered mind. Looking around, for the first time I noticed that Tormod was not there. Heylel must have noticed my concern, for he answered before I asked the question: "He is dead."

The words struck wonder in my heart. He had seemed healthy enough when we had met. Had the Cabal killed him? Had I done something to him when he attacked? In self-defense, perhaps? Heylel answered, "Tormod of Kirkenes was caring for you in the sixth day of your trance." He paused, gathering himself like a cat about to pounce. "In a fit of vatic anguish," his eyes narrowed and his voice hinted at sarcasm, "you took Tormod's hand, and the old man withered before our eyes."

At first the news held no reality. But I thought about it and, little by little, the enormity of Heylel's statement hit me. By the Passions, I thought, what have I done? Could I have killed an innocent man before the very eyes of the Nine? Worse, I thought, have I killed a mage who could have helped the Council in its War? In that moment, I was very conscious of the fact that I was holding Heylel's hand, and that he was gripping mine tightly, as if in accusation. Yet, he continued, "Rest assured, it was through no fault of your own. It was merely an *accident*."

I managed to croak, "Then did everyone —"

Heylel shook his head. "No, only us."

That evening, I could not rest. Heylel slept next to me in the small bed that had been Tormod's, but my eyes refused to shut, for horror, guilt, and penitence had overwhelmed my heart. It did not matter that the event was unintentional. I feared that perhaps my lack of control over my magick had become too dangerous, and that the Council would have to sentence me to Gilgu because of it. It was, literally, by my own hand that Tormod, who had been caring for me, had been killed. At that moment, an impulse to see the actual event overcame me, so I stared into the dark rafters above the bed, and began to think backward. The night turned to dusk, and the dusk to morning — the dawn of the ninth day. Backward, I thought harder, back to the sixth day.

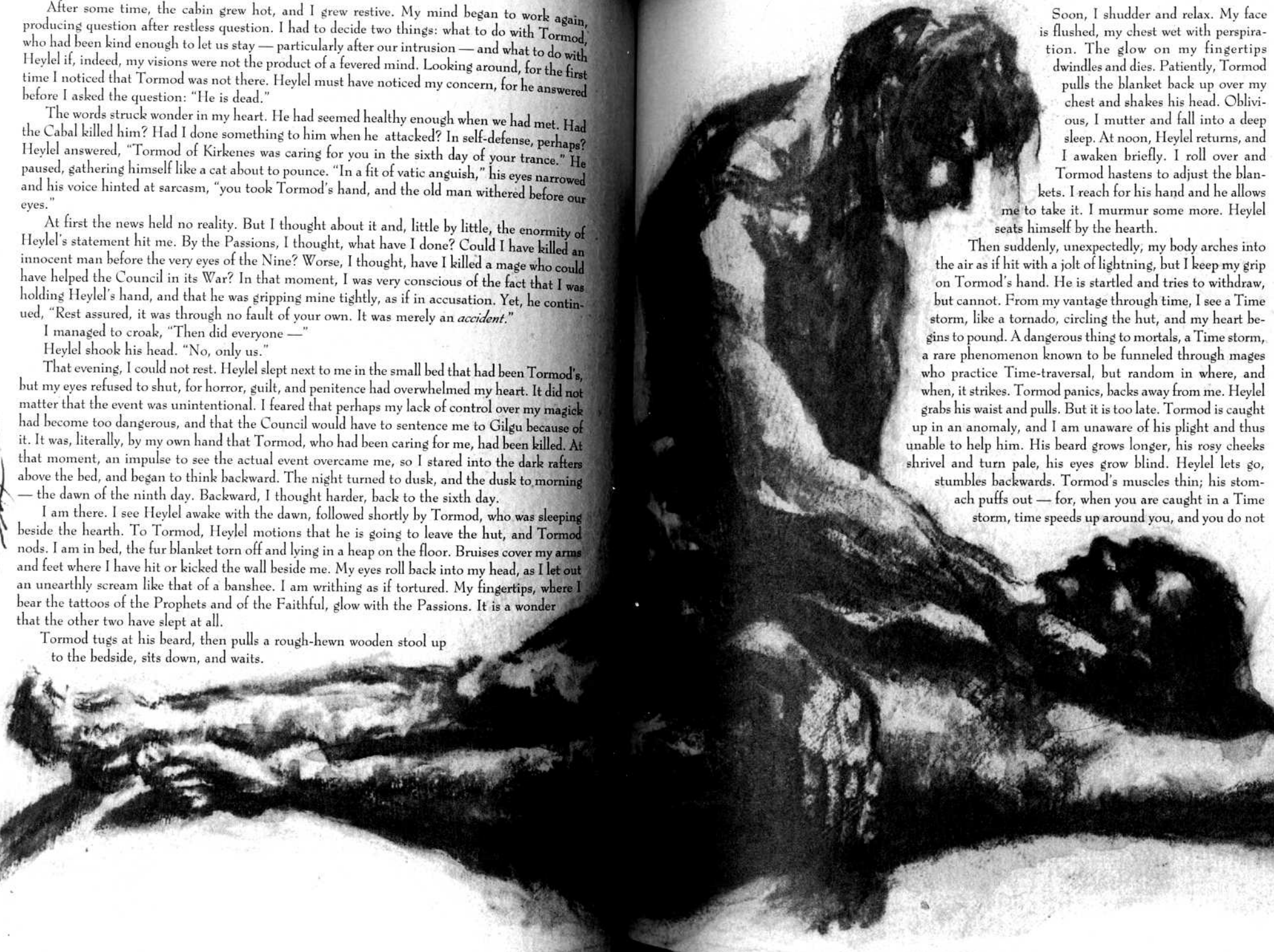
I am there. I see Heylel awake with the dawn, followed shortly by Tormod, who was sleeping beside the hearth. To Tormod, Heylel motions that he is going to leave the hut, and Tormod nods. I am in bed, the fur blanket torn off and lying in a heap on the floor. Bruises cover my arms and feet where I have hit or kicked the wall beside me. My eyes roll back into my head, as I let out an unearthly scream like that of a banshee. I am writhing as if tortured. My fingertips, where I bear the tattoos of the Prophets and of the Faithful, glow with the Passions. It is a wonder that the other two have slept at all.

Tormod tugs at his beard, then pulls a rough-hewn wooden stool up to the bedside, sits down, and waits.

Soon, I shudder and relax. My face is flushed, my chest wet with perspiration. The glow on my fingertips dwindles and dies. Patiently, Tormod pulls the blanket back up over my chest and shakes his head. Oblivious, I mutter and fall into a deep sleep. At noon, Heylel returns, and I awaken briefly. I roll over and Tormod hastens to adjust the blankets. I reach for his hand and he allows me to take it. I murmur some more. Heylel seats himself by the hearth.

Then suddenly, unexpectedly, my body arches into the air as if hit with a jolt of lightning, but I keep my grip on Tormod's hand. He is startled and tries to withdraw, but cannot. From my vantage through time, I see a Time storm, like a tornado, circling the hut, and my heart begins to pound. A dangerous thing to mortals, a Time storm, a rare phenomenon known to be funneled through mages who practice Time-traversal, but random in where, and when, it strikes. Tormod panics, backs away from me. Heylel grabs his waist and pulls. But it is too late. Tormod is caught up in an anomaly, and I am unaware of his plight and thus unable to help him. His beard grows longer, his rosy cheeks shrivel and turn pale, his eyes grow blind. Heylel lets go, stumbles backwards. Tormod's muscles thin; his stomach puffs out — for, when you are caught in a Time storm, time speeds up around you, and you do not

C. A. S. G.



have time to maintain yourself. Tormod withers, suffocates (for he cannot gulp in enough air to satisfy his accelerated body), and starves. In a final plea for aid, he turns toward Heylel and stretches his free arm out to him. Before Heylel can respond, Tormod's body blackens and crumbles into a still pile of bones and decaying skin.

It all happens so fast.⁴

Oblivious, I continue to mutter, then begin to writhe anew. Heylel is transfixed, blood draining from his face. From across time, I cover my eyes and weep. I leave that day to the vultures of the past.

If Tormod had been a penitent dressed only in sackcloth, I had taken up his oath. I was not Christian, but Christians are not the only ones who feel remorse. Under such circumstances, I could not conceive of rejoining the Cabal. So I vowed to bury myself in sorrow for a past I could not heal. My wish that night was for oblivion, sacred Oblivion, Passion's necessary opposite, as the Christian Devil is Christ's opposite.

Yet I was torn by the enormity of such a vow. If I abandoned my vow to the Council, would I not be even more shamed than I was now? With hot tears streaming down my face, I lay quietly in bed with Heylel next to me, his breathing serene and undisturbed by inner turmoil. I fought to keep from sobbing, so as not to awaken Heylel and embarrass myself, but my breath caught, and he quietly awoke. At first he was not aware of my tears, but after a while he heard me and reached over to touch my cheek.

I could not have guessed that the arrogant, logical, sometimes sardonic Heylel could be so gentle, and I suddenly felt the need to embrace him, feel his warmth against my chest, sense his life acknowledge my own. Tenderly, he returned the embrace, as if he knew the anguish that arises from a betrayal of trust. Seeming to understand my need, he wiped the tears from my cheeks, pushed my shoulders back down to the pallet, and settled in beside me. Neither he nor I slept the rest of the night, nor did we speak. But he was there, sharing the stillness, the oblivion, with me so that I would not feel so alone. How could this be the one who betrays the Council, the Traditions, indeed, all of humanity?

That night, I decided to continue my travels with the Cabal. But I also vowed that I would return to the Arctic wilderness to pay my dues to the one who had died at my hand and to ponder the secrets that were lost with his death. You, Porthos, and you readers of this book, are my witnesses that I have respected that vow, for I write this from the wilds of the Arctic, in seclusion from the horrors of the world as it now is, my only company Assam.

⁴ Editor's note: This "Time storm" may have been an early Paradox effect, a harbinger, as it were, of the consensus reality for which the Order of Reason was fighting. Exceedingly rare nowadays as reality has "solidified," its existence is nevertheless corroborated by other accounts from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (e.g., see Dominicus Caeli's *Ars Magica et Portenti Rari*, p. xiv and xxi and Alfred Huxley's *The Nature of Things to Come*, pp. 137-154).



Praedictum Apocalypsis

*Then of the Venom handled thus a Medicine I did make,
Which Venom kills, and saveth such as Venom chance to take.*

— Sir George Ripley, "Vision," *The Twelve Gates*

Hear now, O sons and daughters of the Future, what would have befallen you had I not remained silent while Heylel Thoabath murdered and imprisoned my friends on that infamous morning in 1470.

I repeat Cicero as he attempts to convince Cataline to leave Rome, for Cataline, in the eyes of his country, was a Betrayer not unlike Heylel Thoabath:

Now, truly, what is this life of yours? For I shall speak with you thus, not as if I seemed to be moved by hatred, which I ought, but as if by pity, of which none is owed to you.

Earlier you came into the Senate. Who welcomed you out of such a crowd as this, out of so many of your friends and relatives? Do you wait for an insult to be spoken aloud when you have already been crushed by the gravest judgment of silence?

...Do you not think that you should leave the city? And if I saw that I was suspected so gravely by my fellow citizens, I should prefer to avoid them than to see their unfriendly eyes: do you hesitate to avoid the looks and the presence of those whose minds and senses you are wounding? If your parents feared you, nor were you able to calm them by any manner, you would withdraw from their eyes, as I think. Now your native land, which is the common parent of us all, fears you and judges that all along you have contemplated nothing but her murder.

Thus was Heylel Thoabath urged. None among our learned Senate wished him to remain among the ranks of mages, and the silence surrounding the issue spoke volumes. He was suspected of, as Cicero says, considering nothing but the murder of the Traditions — of freedom — and we feared what he had done and what he might continue to do. For it would not have been Fate or Destiny, nor the hand of some merciless god guiding the Betrayer, but simply, so simply, his decision that led Heylel to abandon the path of humanity for hubris.

But few among us *really* knew what Heylel was capable of, least of all the Betrayer himself. That was why I was urged to allow Heylel to betray our Cabal: for those of us who knew needed an excuse to blot the name of Heylel Teomim Thoabath forever from the Book of Life. We needed an event so heinous that we would even be justified in annihilating Heylel's Avatar, his eternal self. The well-documented Betrayal was just such an excuse.

As much as it pains me — for Heylel, in the end, was my friend — I confess that my visions were the key that unlocked the door to the trial. It was at the hut of Tormod of Kirkenes, whom I myself betrayed, that I learned of Heylel's inescapable future, that he would, in fact, betray us. A year would have to pass between then and my next important vision, and it was that second vision which frightened me into secretly seeking the Seers' counsel. That Prophecy of the Apocalypse, as I believe Porthos will call it, convinced me to take the path I took.

This is what I saw:

An army of darkness, yet falsely shining with the light of the pure, marches across the earth. Its footsoldiers, mindless automatons, flesh golems that would have been human had they lived in my centuries. Its generals, the Risen of the Order of Reason. Its leader, Heylel Teomim Thoabath.

For every path that Thoabath could take leads to but one destination: betrayal of the Traditions and of humanity. If we imprison him, he eats the Traditions away from within like a cancer. Even in prison, his seductive ideals attract followers like ants to honey, and they in turn win followers. Soon the Traditions, blindly following their new path, unite with the Order of Reason under the banner of Thoabath to rid the world of the unknown and the unknowable.

And if we allow him to betray the Nine and escape, he still grows stronger and eats away at the Traditions like leprosy. His lust to consume grows with each bite he takes, and his opposition crumbles beneath the force of his massive charisma. He is not a foe to be ignored.

And if he lives, machines, mechanisms made of metals and chemicals and energies, the highest dreams of the Alehemists and the Craftsmages, indeed of any of us, enact their merciless justice upon those who think, and particularly upon those who dream. Those who write are thrown into acid pits with their books and treatises and pleas to the populace.

There are mating programs for mortals and mages, where humans are taken to produce eugenically sound offspring. Children are born to machines, work as slaves, and, if they show promise, are cultivated to become footsoldiers or even leaders in the accursed army of Thoabath.

Magick, as we know it, is abolished. Machines surgically remove imagination and intuition from the brains of newborns. Those left with it are systematically purged or turned into automatons. After Thoabath utterly annihilates his opposition, there is only one reality: Reason. Reason without imagination. Reason united under mercilessness, efficiency, utility. Reason without humanity. And Heylel, single-handedly, has united the factions, those whose greed knows no bounds — indeed one might even suspect that the Nephandi have penetrated this society — those who strive for perfection, leaving humanity behind, those whose depravity engineers monstrosities for the Betrayer's cause, those who control the minds and hearts of the masses, and those who spy on the whole construct in order to destroy those few left with minds of their own.



In my vision, you who read this are dead or, worse, are turned into cursed machines made to serve Heylel. You, his servants, call him MOLOCH, but he is the same creature that we once knew, only shed of all vestiges of his former humanity. You obey his commands; like dogs, you obey the commands of those who serve under him. You cut the world off from the Tellurian. You hunt down and destroy its denizens. You gather to burn books — indeed, the first book you burn is this one. On Heylel's orders, you form death and experimental camps where Moloch's scholars test new theories on the tortured bodies and souls of the living. Your answer to poverty and disease is to bolster Moloch's hideous armies with your creations, the misshapen remains of breeding experiments from these camps. Your answer to war is to unite all factions under the infernal banner of Moloch the Betrayer of Humanity, with the threat of universal destruction. Your answer to passion is punishment. Your answer to diversity is sameness. You are the living embodiment of death. You rot from within.

And in its private chambers, Moloch's laugh resounds. A hollow laugh. The laugh of a creature that knows it has lost its way, but does not remember its birth-path. A creature that beckons through Time for us to annihilate it. For, despite its mercilessness, it desires mercy. It desires to escape its own Eden.

And yet, there is, as there always has been, a remnant. Nebulous, I see the desperate exodus of a small number of mages and servants. They use the very machines that Heylel has created to escape and settle in a strange land far from Earth. This remnant, severed of all ties and intending never to return to its lost homeworld, plays a role in the destruction of two successors in the distant future, but I cannot tell what it is.

I approached the Seers with this vision, and they, in their wisdom, verified the prophecy, and added to it prophecies that I am not at liberty to reveal. Nevertheless, these visions I submit to you, Porthos and the Sons and Daughters of Time, for your good futures. Despite all judgments, I know at least that my heart is not guilty of unworthy ambivalence, cowardice that would have cost humanity its soul. The choice was my own, and, though it pains me, I know that it was the right one. Therefore, do not judge me, I pray you, as a man without mercy nor as a man without honor. For, after all has been said, and after all has been done, only Chronos, the Sifter of Souls, can judge us. May Chronos show this humbled Seer mercy and judge me thus in the light of my knowledge.

Thus ends the Revelation of Akrites Salonikas the Seer

The Oratory of WALKING HAWK

In contrast to the ornate wordcraft of Akrites, who wrote in Classical Greek, the simple yet eloquent Seneca language conveys depthless emotion. I only regret that I could not retain the musicality of Walking Hawk's native tongue. Unlike the florid Europeans (myself included), these plain-spoken people cut to the heart of the matter in brisk phrases and honest, if unadorned, sentiment. It is for the stark warning and plaintive tone of Walking Hawk's oration that I have chosen this Testament to end my collection. One can almost see the clouds of oblivion creeping across the sky — an oblivion that soon consumed the Seneca, as it may yet consume our kind.

The following speech was made shortly after Walking Hawk returned to the land of his people, not long before his death. The speech was memorized and handed down orally from one generation to another, a warning of things to come. It was eventually recorded in the journal of a seventeenth-century French explorer, who carried the Oratory back across the sea. That journal now resides in my private collection, but Walking Hawk's words will live forever in the hearts of the Iroquois.

Brothers, let the council fire be lit and let all those who are present receive my word. Make welcome the brave warriors from the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga and the Cayuga Nations who have traveled far to be here tonight. Give them a place near the fire, so they may be warmed from the cold, and share with them your tobacco so they too can smoke their pipes.

My name is Walking Hawk and I am a member of the Turtle clan of the Djiionondo-wanenake, "People of the Hill." Some of you call my nation the Seneca. I have just returned from a very long journey. Many winters have I been away from my home. I stand before you now to tell of the things I have done and what I have seen.



Imaha '95



Seven winters ago, I was given a vision. In my dream, I saw myself traveling across the great waters to a strange land, where I would attend a council of medicine people. So powerful was this vision that it left me physically drained for days. I knew it was more than just a prophecy of the future — it was a summons.

Some of you laughed at me when I followed my vision and made two elm-bark canoes, each three times longer than a man is tall. You said, "Walking Hawk, why the canoes? Is a flood coming?" You laughed again when I tied the canoes together, lashing them side by side, and stretched moose hides over their tops to keep out the water. But you quit laughing when I made a wind-catcher¹ of elk skins and fastened it to the canoes. Never before had such a craft been seen in the land of my people. "He must have had a vision," you said. And you were right.

After that, many of you helped me to prepare for my journey. You rubbed the moosehide coverings with bear grease to make them waterproof. And you loaded the double-hulled canoe with dried meat and clay pots filled with water, so I would not thirst or be hungry on my trip. You even carried my canoe over the mountains to the great waters, pushing it off from the shore. I was sad that day when I said good-bye, for I did not know if I would ever see my loved ones again.

Brothers, my journey was long and filled with many hardships. The great waters were never still and their movement brought sickness upon me. For many days I lay in the bottom of the canoe, unable to eat, too weak to even move. I wanted only to feel the ground beneath my feet again, but there was no land to be seen anywhere. The sun beat down upon me and the salt spray dried my skin like leather.

¹ A sail.

Storms sprang up suddenly from clear skies to toss the canoe about, threatening to capsize it. The moose hides cracked, allowing water to enter the canoe and ruin my food. I suffered from hunger — and when my water supply ran low, I suffered from thirst too. Many times I started to turn back, but each time I did the voice inside my head urged me onward. Forever onward.

I prayed to the Great Spirit to carry me safely across the waters, for I knew he watched over me. When I prayed for a drink, he brought rain. When I prayed for food, a fish would jump into my boat. He guided me, protected me, gave me courage and strength.

Finally, after thirty days and nights, I landed on the rocky shore of a strange, unknown land.² A woman was there to meet me. She had been expecting me, for she was a person of great magick. A mage. Her name was Jaunda, and her skin was the color of night.

I see your smiles, Brothers, but I speak the truth. Jaunda was from a land far to the south, where the sun is always hot. She took me by the hand — for I was like a little child in this new country — and taught me how to speak French, one of her many tongues. She also taught me about her tribe, the Dreamspeakers, or as she called it, her "Tradition."

I studied with Jaunda for many moons, learning all that I could, and was adopted into the Dreamspeakers. Together, we traveled to a magickal place called Horizon, where a council of mages was held — the same council that I saw in my vision.

Brothers, we sit here tonight several hundred strong, but this council that I went to was a council of thousands. Never before have so many people of magick gathered together in one place. They came from all over the world to share their knowledge and let their voices be heard. There were black people and white people, and people whose skin looked yellow in the sunlight. Some had hair on their faces. Others had blue eyes, like the eyes of a blind man. They arrived by foot and rode up on giant elk-dogs, called horses. It is true, I swear it. My eyes were opened wide by many amazing sights. My ears filled with the sounds of many tongues.

The Grand Convocation was not a peace council, my friends. It was a council of war. The mages were angry that their enemies, the Order of Reason, wanted to destroy the Traditions and do away with their magick. For every person of medicine that I met, there were a thousand more whose eyes were blinded to the truth. "Sleepers" they were called, and they walked through life in darkness, victims of the Order of Reason's teachings.

After much arguing, the council's chiefs decided to choose one person from each Tradition to form the First Cabal. This Cabal would go forth to fight the Order of Reason and open the eyes of the Sleepers. I was very surprised when the Council selected me to represent the Dreamspeakers.

Brothers, the nine of us chosen for the First Cabal were as different as the flowers in the field... as different as the birds of the forest. But each of us was a person of knowledge. A person of magick.

² Walking Hawk landed in France, near the town of Les Sables-d'Olonne.

Akrites Salonikas was a young warrior with a fiery spirit. We had much in common, he and I, and I liked him very much. Like me, his parents had also been killed by enemy warriors. He was a pipe carrier too, though I did not care for the tobacco he smoked for it made me walk funny.

You would have liked Akrites, my Brothers. His heart was strong. Many nights we sat by the campfire and shared stories of battles and conquests. Some of the others did not like his stories, for they thought he was bragging. They did not understand that it is a warrior's nature, his right, to brag of the things he has done.

Another warrior who traveled with us was Cygnus Moro. He was as big as a bear, and just as strong. Few could beat him in a fight. Even our best warriors would find him a dangerous opponent.

I respected Cygnus for his strength and fighting skills, but I did not understand his teachings. The Euthanatos often help others to cross over into the spirit world — to reach Ascension, the enlightened state — whether they want to or not. They do not understand that life is a gift from the Great Spirit, one to be treasured.

Daud-Allah, an Elder, carried the words of his God in a book of talking leaves. I could not read his leaves, nor could I convince him that his God and mine were the same — just called by different names. He and Louis DuMonte argued so much about the rightness of their teachings that they made my ears hurt.

Not all of those who made up the First Cabal were men. Several women of magick also traveled with us. Bernadette was like a child trapped inside a woman's body. Her power was in the songs she sang, and the gentle touch of her hands. A great sadness walked with this woman, but I could never read her spirit to find out what caused it. I only hope that one day she finds happiness in her life.

Eloine belonged to a Tradition called the Verbena. Her magick, like mine, came from the earth, but I feel that she sometimes followed the wrong voice. A dark voice. Still, I treated her like a sister and we spent many hours sharing the knowledge of plants and spirits.

The third woman in our Cabal was Fall Breeze. She was a flower from the land of the rising sun, but she was a flower with many thorns. Fall Breeze trained her mind for peace, and she trained her body for war. I do not lie, my friends. Few among you could match her fighting skills. I have seen many men try to pluck the petals of this woman, only to discover how sharp her thorns really were.

Had I been a much younger man, I might have looked upon Fall Breeze with thoughts of making her my wife. Her smile was as warm as the sunshine, and when she laughed the birds hushed their songs to listen. But I was too old for such foolish thoughts. Instead, I adopted her into my family and she became the daughter I never had. We spent much time together, talking, laughing and enjoying each other's company.

Brothers, I see your curious looks and know that you have been counting. I have spoken of only eight Cabal members — seven plus myself. But now I will speak of the ninth member.

Heylel Teomin of the Solificato was neither a man or a woman, but both. I swear this to be true. One day Heylel was a woman. The next day he was a man. Two spirits — one good, the other evil — trapped inside one body, fighting for control. I did not know how Heylel could have two spirits at the same time, but I did not trust him because of it.

As you can see, the nine of us had very little in common. We were of different lands, cultures and customs. Still, we believed in what we were doing and put aside our differences to work together. For four winters we traveled the countryside, trying to stop the evil that the Order of Reason had spread.

Brothers, be glad that you have been born on this island³ where the forests are plentiful with game and life is good. Give thanks to the Great Spirit for putting you here. Across the great waters, Grandmother⁴ is sick. She has been poisoned by the Sleepers. Raped. Soon her spirit will leave that land, and all things of beauty will die.

Across the great waters, cities of stone cover the land like a repulsive rash. Gone are the forests where a man can be on his own to hunt and fish. Gone too are the animals of the forests, their names all but forgotten. Empty fields stretch as far as the eye can see. Only a few stunted trees remain. The rivers are all polluted; hunger and sickness are everywhere.

In the land of the Sleepers, I have seen houses of stone, as big as a village, that stretch high into the sky.⁵ In these houses live rich men, and armies of warriors who dress themselves in shiny stone.⁶ These rich men make war upon their neighbors for no reason, other than to satisfy their greed, while in the shadows of their houses the poor struggle to survive.

My eyes were filled with tears as I watched men and women work long hours raising livestock and vegetables to feed their children — only to have everything taken away from them by the rich men in the big houses. These men did not care that others went hungry while they ate. They thought only of their own stomachs. And when a man cried out for a little food to eat, he was dragged away from his wife and family, and imprisoned deep in the ground.

Men in black robes, who call themselves servants of God, ride through the land on elk-dogs, arresting those who do not pray to the Great Spirit in the same way they do. Men. Women. Children. It does not matter. All are taken from their homes and locked beneath the ground.

Brothers, these black robes are very evil and do terrible things in the name of their God. I have seen them peel the flesh from helpless victims while they still lived. And I have watched, unable to prevent it, as they boiled children alive in giant pots of oil. Their cries will live forever in my mind, Brothers. Forever in my heart.

Once, we came upon a little girl not far from the village where she lived. She was small and pale; her hair the color of honey. The black robes had raped and tortured her, leaving her beside the road to die. We tried to save her with our magick, but we were too late. She died in Eloine's arms. And though I took my knife and sliced deep my chest, the blood could not wash away the sorrow that I felt that day.

The terrible things we saw made us even more determined to win our fight, but because of our different beliefs none of us could agree on what should be done, or where we should go next. Everyone wanted to talk, but no one wanted to listen. It did not help that our enemies, the Order of Reason, rode ahead of us, telling the people that we were to blame for the sickness sweeping the countryside. The Sleepers, their eyes unopened to the truth, often believed the lies told about us and greeted our coming with shouts of anger. Twice, they threw rocks at us. I do not know which hurt the most; the stones or their angry words.

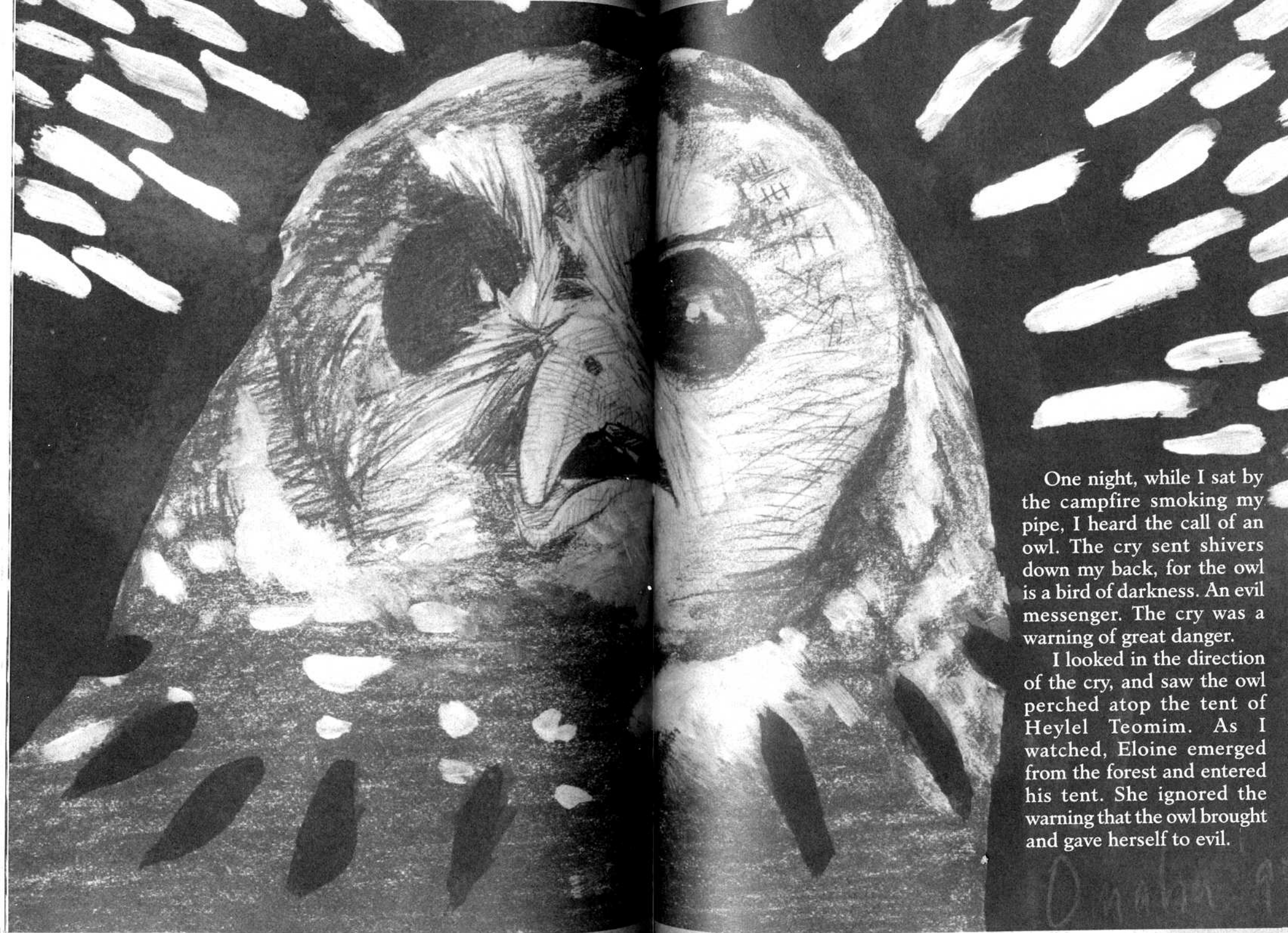
As the moons passed, a great darkness descended over the Cabal. We argued and fought constantly, sometimes coming to physical blows. Those who were once friends became bitter enemies. No one was spared from the foul mood that laid heavy upon our hearts. I am ashamed to admit that I too fell victim to this darkness, speaking harsh words to those I cared for. As we argued and fought, our magick grew weaker — while that of our enemies grew stronger.

³ Many American Indian tribes believed that North America was an island carried on the back of a giant turtle.

⁴ A common term for the Earth.

⁵ Castles, which must have been a wonder for a distant traveler.


⁶ Armor; another miracle taken for granted in Europe.



One night, while I sat by the campfire smoking my pipe, I heard the call of an owl. The cry sent shivers down my back, for the owl is a bird of darkness. An evil messenger. The cry was a warning of great danger.

I looked in the direction of the cry, and saw the owl perched atop the tent of Heylel Teomim. As I watched, Eloine emerged from the forest and entered his tent. She ignored the warning that the owl brought and gave herself to evil.

D. Anderson



Eloine and Heylel tried to hide their affair from the rest of us, but we saw what was happening. Bernadette was greatly angered by the relationship. She and Eloine had been close friends, and it hurt her when she was suddenly ignored. Maybe she too had feelings for Heylel, I do not know. I often saw Bernadette watching him from afar.

Like the story of Sky Woman — who gave birth to the Great Spirit and his twin brother, Evil Spirit — Eloine grew heavy with child and gave birth to twins. Such a blessing should have brought great happiness into their lives. Instead, their relationship fell apart. Not long after they broke apart, we awoke to find Heylel's tent empty and his things gone. He had left in the night, turning his back on Eloine and the Cabal.

Heylel's disappearance led to arguments about what should be done next. Some of our members believed that our mission had failed and wanted only to return to the council. Others spoke out against giving up. We discussed the matter late into the night, and finally agreed that we should continue on.

Fourteen nights later, a powerful vision came to me in a dream. In the vision, I stood upon a mountain and looked out over the land. Everything was peaceful. The forests were lush and green; the sun warm upon my face. Women sang songs as they worked in the fields below. Children ran and played. To the east, an eagle spiraled high in the sky. His hunting cry brought great joy to my heart.

Suddenly, a chill wind blew from the west. An evil wind. I turned in that direction, facing the land of the setting sun — the land from which darkness comes — and saw a flock of black birds racing toward me. With them came death.

As the birds flew over the land, giant cracks opened up in the ground. From these cracks flowed rivers of crimson. Grandmother's blood.

People screamed in terror as they fled from the birds and the evil they brought. The birds, excited by their cries, swept down upon the people, tearing their flesh with deadly claws. Those who were not killed were enslaved by hordes of Sleepers who followed the flock of birds. Even the eagle, sacred messenger of the Great Spirit, perished beneath the claws of the birds. I watched in horror as his torn and lifeless body spiraled slowly to the ground.

Turning away from the terrible scenes of death, I saw nine stars streak across the black sky from the north — from the direction of wisdom and learning. Suddenly, one of the stars changed direction and followed the black birds. The others burned out and fell as ashes to the ground.

When I awoke, I hurried to tell the others about my dream. They sat around the campfire, listening closely, as I shared my vision with them. When I was finished, they all agreed that the dream was a warning of great danger. Even then, no one could agree upon what was to be done. Louis DuMonte talked for great lengths about what my vision meant to him, while the others shouted to have their voices heard. In the end, we did nothing. The warning was ignored.

The next morning, I awoke to the sound of horses galloping through our camp and the shouts of angry men. Grabbing my tomahawk, I ran out of my tent to discover that we were being attacked by warriors from the Cabal of Pure Thought. With them rode Heylel. The man-woman had betrayed us and brought the enemy into our camp. The owl's warning had come true.

Brothers, when I saw Heylel with our enemies, my heart burned with anger, and my war-whoop echoed through the forest. Many men did I kill that morning — so many that the handle of my tomahawk was slick with their blood.



My companions also fought bravely. For those few, brief minutes of battle, we were a Cabal once again. Forgotten were the problems and arguments that had split us apart. Shoulder to shoulder stood Bernadette and Eloine. No longer enemies, they fought as sisters. One heart, One mind. Beyond them, Akrites and Cygnus Moro battled with sword and ax.⁷

Magick was also used that day. Powerful magick. I saw Louis DuMonte standing in the center of the battle, arrows flying all around him. His hands raised to the heavens, he called upon the powers of his Gods. And they answered him, my Brothers. They answered him.

Spirits flew to him from all directions, summoned by his anger. His pain. Thunder, lightning, rain. The wind howled like a wounded animal and the sun turned the color of blood. Louis shook his fist and a hundred trees were laid low. He stomped his feet and the ground moved.

Never before has such magick been called upon. Never has such power been seen. We were fighting for our lives — fighting for the lives of those yet unborn. We dared not lose. Even the Great Spirit must have looked down and trembled at the forces unleashed that morning.

But to call upon such magick is very dangerous, even for one as skilled as Louis DuMonte. Such power can be like a torch that glows too brightly, burning the fingers of he who wields it. The Hermetic Mage was strong, but he could not control the forces he called upon. He died in a clap of thunder and a fiery flash. All that was left of him were ashes, and they were scattered by the wind.

I turned away from the flash that killed DuMonte, only to see Fall Breeze surrounded by several of the enemy. I ran to help her, but she was stabbed through the chest before I could reach her.

I picked Fall Breeze up and carried her away from the fighting. Her blood stained my hands and dripped warm between my fingers. I wanted to heal her wound, to comfort her pain. but I could do none of these things. My medicine bag was still in my tent, and there was no time to get it. I could only hold her in my arms and gently stroke her hair, watching as her life slipped slowly away.

She died in my arms, Brothers. The little sister I never had. The daughter I've always wanted. A flower. Delicate. Soft. She died in my arms and my heart died with her.

I lowered her body gently to the ground and stood up. I no longer wanted to fight — no longer cared if I lived or died. All that was special to me lay dead at my feet. For the second time in my life, my family had been torn from me.

My tomahawk felt heavy in my hand. I let it slip from my fingers. I felt alone, and so very far from my home. I did not resist when the enemy grabbed me and wrestled me to the ground. They kicked and punched me many times, but I felt nothing. My body was numb with sorrow.

Several other Cabal members were also captured, though Akrites Salonikas managed to escape. Daud-Allah, Louis DuMonte and Fall Breeze died that morning. I will miss them all very much. Many songs will be sung about them. Their names will not be forgotten.

The four of us who were captured — Eloine, Bernadette, Cygnus Moro and myself — were taken to one of the giant stone houses and imprisoned beneath the ground.

Brothers, forgive me if my hands shake when I speak of our capture, but I suffered great pain at the hands of my enemy. My fingers were broken, and my toes, and hot knives were placed against my flesh. They took my clothes from me and forced me to sleep naked on a cold stone floor. When I shivered and begged for a robe to cover myself, they tied my arms behind my back and whipped me. I grew weak from the lack of food. Sick. Terrible sores covered my body. I had no water and had to drink my own urine to survive.

But I was not the only one who was treated badly. The others of the Cabal suffered too. I heard their screams as they were tortured. Long, terrible screams. My heart ached, but I could not help them. Cygnus Moro, the Euthanatos, died at the hands of those who imprisoned us. When I met him, only four winters earlier, he was young and strong. When he died, he was an old man.

Brothers, I thought I was going to die too, but the Great Spirit must have wanted otherwise. One night, as I lay in my cell, my door opened. I thought the black robes had come to torture me some more, but it was Akrites Salonikas who stood in the doorway. He had returned to rescue us, using his magick to sneak past the guards. With him were other mages.

Never have I been so happy to see someone as I was to see Akrites. My prayers had been answered, He was glad to see me too, and we both wept as we embraced. Together, we found the cells of Bernadette and Eloine, and made good our escape. Once free, we were given food and clothing, our sickness and wounds were healed by magick, and we were taken back to the realm called Horizon.

We were called before the Council of Nine to tell our stories. A few weeks later, the traitor Heylel Teomin was captured and also brought to Horizon.

I begged the council to let me kill the man-woman — to cut open his chest and eat both his hearts — but my request was denied. Instead, he was tried, found guilty of his crimes, and executed.

Brothers, I watched Heylel die and it was a good thing. Many people suffered and lost their lives as a result of his treachery. Because of him, our mission had failed. Darkness had won. Maybe it would have failed without his help. I do not know.

After the execution, I was again called before the council. They wanted to reward me for all I had done. They offered to use their magick to heal my sores and to make my right leg strong again,⁸ even to make me young. I told them that I wanted none of these things; I only wanted to go home.

Star-of-Eagles, chief of the Dreamspeakers, asked me to step forward. He gave me a knife of shiny stone as a gift. He then told me to close my eyes, which I did. When I opened them again I was no longer standing before the Council of Nine — I was in the land of my people.

Brothers, that was seven days ago. Since then, I have spent many hours talking with the spirits of this land, seeking advice from my guides. I offer this knife as proof that the tongue of Walking Hawk is straight; my story is true. Never before has such a knife been seen in our nation. I also offer it as a warning. An evil wind moans in the distance. Soon it will be upon us.

⁷ Once again, this is a divergence from the common version of the story. Perhaps Akrites did fight for a time. Then again, Walking Hawk may not have wanted to remember his friend as a coward.

⁸ Wounded in a fight with a Huron warrior, Walking Hawk walked with a slight limp.

Hear me, O Senecas, for I speak truly for your welfare. The Order of Reason will not be happy with just destroying the lives of their own people. They are like a hungry beast that gobbles up everything in sight. They will want more meat to eat and will come across the great waters in search of it. With them will come the Sleepers, who will take our land, burn our villages, and rape our women and children. None will be left to mourn the graves of our people. Even the names of our tribes will be forgotten.

I do not have two hearts; what I say is true. I have looked into the future and seen a great darkness. The things I speak of will soon come to pass. Maybe in a few winters. Maybe only in a few moons.

Think not, O brave men of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga and Cayuga, that this danger will pass you by. Your people will be as falling leaves, driven from their native lands by this evil storm. None will be safe. All will suffer.

I ask you, Head-men, Chiefs and brave warriors, shall we give up our land, the graves of our ancestors, and everything that is sacred to us without a struggle? Will you sit idly by and allow the black robes and Sleepers to take what is not theirs without a fight?

No, I say! Never! Forget not, O brave warriors, of the noble deeds of your ancestors. We must crush these intruders as one crushes the blood-sucking mosquitoes.

Brothers, I hear your shouts to strike the war pole and my heart is glad. Great are the warriors in the land of the longhouses. But be warned: the Sleepers are as many as the grains of sand upon the beach. We cannot fight such an enemy with spears and tomahawks. Only through magick can we defeat them. Only through Ascension can we survive.

Rise up O men of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca Nations. Rise up and hear my voice! Let my words fly as straight as arrows to your hearts.

Return to your homes and gather your loved ones. Bring them all here, and I will show you the Path that leads to Ascension. I will show you the light at the end of the trail.

Rise up, my brothers! Rise up! Listen to what I say! The end of our world grows near. Let us form one body, one heart, and defend to the last man our homes, our land, and the graves of our ancestors. Let us join together as one, a confederacy of Nations.⁸ Only as one can we hope to survive.

Rise up, my brothers! Sleep no more. Do you not hear them? The sound of wings? The black birds are coming, flying on the night wind. The black birds are coming, and with them comes death.

I have spoken.

⁸ The Seneca, Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga and Onondaga nations united to form the Iroquois Confederacy in the late 1600's — after the arrival of the white man to North America, and long after Walking Hawk's death. Still, many scholars believe that his speech about the First Cabal and the coming of the Sleepers, which was passed down orally from generation to generation, laid the groundwork for that union.



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AFTERWARD

Silence is the virtue of fools.
— Francis Bacon

The lessons have ended. Go in peace, but do not forget them, for these tales of salvation and damnation are our own.

The Nine were once as you are now; young, vital, frightened, proud, deceitful, loyal and alive. Let their warnings be the distant thunder as you proceed. Let their redemptions be your beacon. The Path they began is now your birthright. Tread it with care.

My tale is done, and I am sleepy. Tomorrow brings a new round of pitfalls I am ill-disposed to face. Perhaps those who crave my demise will share their treat to-morrow; perhaps not. No matter. My tale is told. And if this book has been a madman's labor, it has been performed with utmost love. I am relieved.

The lesson is done. The Master bids you farewell.
Keep to the Path.

Developer's Notes...where Credit Due is Given

This is a weird book. Not quite a history, an anthology or a polemic, but a little bit of each. I hope you've liked it.

The Fragile Path is a collaborative effort; this book would not have been possible without extensive contributions from a number of people. Everyone involved deserves to take a bow.

Working on this book has given me a lot of insights into societal factors and how they shape not only people, but paradigms as well. Hopefully, we've given you something to think about, too. Enjoy.

Credits: Concept, development, and Porthos sections by Phil Brucato. Editing and a huge amount of character write-ups by Laura Perkinson. *The Confessions of Herfel Tronim Thoubath* by James A. Moore. *The Remembrances of Ebon* by Nancy Kilpatrick. *The Song of Bernadette* — words and original score by Tina Jens. *The Revelation of Abrites Saloviska the Seer* by Beth Fischl. *The Oratory of Walking Hatck* by Oad Gombhuck. Porthos created by Stephen C. Brown and Phil Brucato. Events in the Histories of Council and Technocracy inspired by stories by Sam Clupp, Brian Campbell and Beth Fischl.

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