

## CELIMÉ VORTSÊH

(sell-eh-mah vorht-say)

Mother was a whore, was the first lesson, standing there under the eaves outside the back of what you'd come to know as the servants chalet. Repeating it over and over until you cried wasn't enough for your keeper, who insisted on beating you with barbed vine at an age where everything is memory. It's just the first and it sticks. Mother was a whore.

For the most part, those early memories are only occluded by that first memory of your keeper. Happiness wasn't something you missed entirely; there is that small grace you know it exists. Never alone, but always without a mother, life with the servants didn't appear to be grooming for eventual slavery, but a time of freedom, if only within certain confines and set boundaries.

Lusham, head of the serfs, a short young woman whose appearance would be smirched later in derogatory terms of her alien race - that she was a dwarf meant nothing to you and still doesn't. It was her that you first remember, surrogate as she was. Always watching out for you, taking you into the city of Bentara, explaining how everything works, how people look at the world, showing you wondrous shops and markets. But that eagerness and intelligent absorption of knowledge stole away that doe-eyed ignorant bliss.

Your keeper, your beater, your teacher, Mistress Urînæchær - the woman who gave your first of many lessons. Now, happiness could only be achieved through effort and obsequious pleasing, otherwise the whip would bring bleeding. Unique schooling was dished out at every waking hour, rules, puzzles, and challenge after challenge, tests and abuse, strict was the regime, a regime unquiet, foreshadowed in slight comments whispered by Mistress Urînæchær.

Every lesson is relief from pain back to pain. Caged to near starvation just to teach the ability to escape, thrown into the Bay of Izar to teach swimming, tortured and scarred to teach mental fortitude, sneaking, hiding, stealing... each with its punishment and anything failed brought *whip with teeth*. Praise came though, Mistress Urînæchær had a glimmer of something more than lust in her eye when you succeeded and that glimmer, if only a shadow of the glimmer Lusham used to beam with, was worth the pain to escape it.

Lusham still did visit after Mistress Urînæchær removed you from the servants, concerned greatly, fussing always but never a word. They were strange days and nights, most often after *whip with teeth*, when she would come and nurse you to strength. One night Mistress Urînæchær caught Lusham tending your lashes, and the next day was the first of the household without your motherly friend.

As the years aged you, so did Mistress Urînæchær release you, and freedom was sweeter than even that paling glimmer in her eye. Small trials, strict rules, break them

and the punishment was severe. Severe, that was shown to you after the first excursion into Bentara where upon returning successful and proud, Mistress Urînæchær smiled and congratulated you at the same time she wrapping *whip with teeth* around your neck. Dragged and screaming into the dungeon under the villa, the box she locked you in with the spiders wasn't to be opened from within.

Many years were spent refining everything taught within the villa, striving to achieve the level that Mistress Urînæchær rapidly set and re-set. The concept of freedom, of escape from Mistress Urînæchær took a slow growth from the moment you first tasted the air unfettered. Seed it did, and grow and cast its branches into every fibre of your system until plans soon were laid out, money was saved, every task pushed harder than usual so as to accomplish more in the hours unaccounted for. Everything was perfect and absolutely all that could be accounted for had been. And then it all dissolved with the arrival of Ventine.

I've been watching you for some time now. His words were like the trigger to releasing a wall of warm, smothering grease that quivered. Sorcerer and Court Advisor, Ventine, a powerful man not just in the political arena where he held strength, but also in his well-known standing as Sorcerer extraordinaire. Even on those nights in transit sitting huddled in corners for the right moment to proceed, the name Ventine was hushed with consternation. His words meant nothing, but this presence, his being only empowered what was already deemed as true by the masses. Mistress Urînæchær fawned, whipped herself at the feet of Ventine. I'll be watching you. His last chilling words stamped onto your chest by licentious leer.

Entrapment again. The lights shuttered out and the pain, as the effort once delivered with object of desire now lay smothered. It took Lusham to awaken that desire again, catching you as you blundered outside. As the fear of capture at the arms of Ventine faded replaced with relived submission her words were serious and her manner agitated. Your life will be sad until the past sets you free. Nothing more. No glimmer of hope, even acceptance depressing to bear.

Your mother was a whore. From Sel-kai, who dumped you with Mistress Urînæchær who took you. Your mother once lived here in Bentara, strode the court of Count Korel and outraged it, driven into exile. Of this, Mistress Urînæchær told you during severe reprimand, her composure challenged during excess inciting her rage to new heights by provoking her control to waver. This thing, family, you've seen it in the windows of Bentara, but all you have are a few bitter words from a mountain of hate.

Your first birthday, eighteen years, Mistress Urînæchær says since you first arrived, celebrated in the dungeon dressed up with all manner of decoration. Not your true birthday but as close to one as you'll get. Initially feeling more a celebration for her than for you the liberating news announced to the spectacle of notable yet alien men and women gathered you would cherish. Freedom not just for one night but for as long as it would take. Mistress Urînæchær delighted the peculiar pantomime that

clapped and approved to the announcement of your departure to Sarnak within the year to work among the Directorate Headquarters. Knowledge of life beyond Bentara wasn't something offered to you in training, moreover it was something blanketed, but rumours of the large city sprang to mind; a city of Amazon warriors and diplomats. As the night progressed the consideration it was some hoax to torment you could not be shaken, but most of the memories of that night following the announcement are buried, removed from your hands except the unalterable fear of remembering. Ventine was there in the dungeon with the rest of those strange guests and what transpired you have either forgotten or... From that night on inception into a form of social life became another weekly lesson, though more a surreal mad performance. Not just breaking into houses, but application of etiquette, clothing and step, would form the backbone to gaining entry to socialites' homes and hearts. Prying on the prosperous if only for a short time, time enough for Mistress Urînæchær.

A year later the order is plain, travel to Sarnak, and arrange work within the Directorate Headquarters to work your way up the ladder of trust and report everything back to Mistress Urînæchær. She in turn promising to let Ventine know you are progressing correctly through weekly letters requested from you. Yet one more lesson remained before travel to Sarnak, being the attendance at the official opening of the newly constructed Library by Count Korel. The formal attendance as young noble of Danarchis now leaving for Sarnak formed the beginning of your masquerade to carry on to the Amazon city. A year spent in deception establishing the role to play had worked. Everything was set, again. Dressed in finery, but not overdone, you appraised the crowd milling about the newly minted books and freshly laminated shelves with the way only you could, finding opportunity and targets conversation to listen to. Perhaps it was this that brought you to the attention of Bryce Korel, the Count's seventeen old son, who mentioned as much to you, with him two companions alert and tense. It was the first person to speak to you without cue. A stumbling reply of not knowing many of the faces and something about out of town you are sure you replied just before Mistress Urînæchær swooped to greet and save you, young Bryce's words trailing, "Another claw for that talon but...". Her words eclipsed his as her pretension of friendship smothered you away. Ventine moved closer and the boy left his own father's contribution to the city. That night was the last beating you had.

Three days later, standing with a small bag and a week's worth of coins including enough to get you upon the arriving carriage. Mistress Urînæchær beside you, dressed smart, nose held above those poor and disenfranchised. No word said, boarding swift and the horses too. Soon Bentara withdrew and Sarnak welcomed.

## :: a d m i n i s t r a t i o n o f t h e d i r e c t o r a t e ::

Why Sarnak? That was a question only in retrospect, deep in retrospect and one that came shortly thereafter the questioning and kept in suspense for five cycles of the moon, Orhan. All Mistress Urînæchær told you were that you should apply for work in the Directorate Headquarters in Administration and get to know everyone and do your best to rise up the ladder. Never once had you been so free, with the task of interacting en masse with people. Usually you watched them, scouting for flaws, now you would play under their eyes, rather than away from them.

Sarnak, the city, its people and a large portion of land along the coast to the southwest up the steep valley behind the city to the east. On the eastern front the state is guarded from the north by the mystical Emerald Forest, and on the south by the Morbek Highlands and the small path south to the Charn Plateau in Uj. The city-state of Sarnak is a realm run and controlled by women with men set in their place as cleaners, housewives, subservient to the only intelligent voice which saved the people of Sarnak many many thousands of years ago. A representative democracy ruled by an elected Directorate of five women from within the Administration Centre's hall of the Directorate Headquarters where debating chambers echo with the strong voices not of argument, but of constructive debate. Offices for the Ministers and their sub-Ministers are contained within the Directorate Headquarters.

Men are not permitted within the Directorate unless in a role of cleaner. Men are not permitted to vote, let alone hold station, cannot own land or are permitted to carry weapons (except a quarterstaff). Men walk with their eyes cast down and never speak in raised voice, and address all women as "Mistress".

Many are the Ministries that operate with the power of the Directorate who manage many portfolios through their aides. There is one Minister per portfolio, and each Minister has an Assistant Minister and Secretary Minister, other legal aide and general staff are employed to keep each Ministry running smoothly.

All Ministers and their assistants debate within the Administration Centre Debating Halls under the advisement of the Directorate who observe and govern much as judges. The Directorate appoints the Ministers for their skills being presumably best suited for the portfolio while they in turn appoint an Assistant Minister who will, or the Minister depending, choose a Secretary Minister from the many scribes and law students within the Directorate Headquarters.

*Ministry of Trade;* Where you slipped into the fold and rose through the ranks to Secretary Minister of Trade. You answer first to your Minister, Rinda Rînæchâr, whom you've found everything to be obsequious about to whenever she deems it necessary to work. For the most part she barely speaks to those that have made her standard. Velta ka Norno, Assistant Minister is to whom you answer most. Though aware of Rinda's lackluster performance in areas she is a quiet and diligent supervisor who teaches as well as carries on most of the needed trade diplomacy and important administration for Sarnak. The destructive essænce storms of the recent winter

invoked a changing time of trade for Sarnak as the Sea of Gold and the Bay of Izar is a dangerous route. Overland and over-sky trading comes more and more to Sarnak, so much so Velta has passed on the smaller of trade negotiations directly to you.

*Ministry of Arts;* You first tried to work for this Ministry but Vanya Auros, Secretary Minister, proved vicious and callous ridiculing your application in an impromptu interview. Even at that time it was obvious she had been taking Sniff (Gort), her eyes so glazed and her manner irrational. Miso Khilandîm, Assistant Minister, from what you have seen at public events is licentious and if anything a role model for the younger Vanya who follows her about like a dog. Yhera Minor, the current Minister, is an elderly woman of great wisdom who once was on the Directorate Council – her revitalization of the gardens in the city is still inspiring.

*Treasury;* The treasury is powerful and controls all distribution of monies to the various ministries. Demidice Kuran, the Treasurer, is as infallible and honest as politicians could ever hope to be. She is fair and has kept Sarnak strong in times of strife with her intelligent application of her duty. Isola Urrai, the current Assistant Minister you've avoided ever since first meeting her, a challenge to your cover, herself an exile from Danarchis. Melyra Tamirynath, Secretary Treasurer, is daughter of the current Minister of Agriculture, Khera Tamirynath.

*Ministry of Justice;* Carecarya Annestiril, the Minister you know to be addicted to Zapic leaf, a euphoric and highly expensive drug, her judgment and her Ministry rapidly falling apart. Aryeril Mesantellë, Assistant Minister carries much of Carecarya's oversights, but for the most part is regulated to collecting and administering taxes and the penalties. She appears to be struggling with the recent addition of Falkenna to Sarnak's fold. Irquen Naryamar is a strong young woman, whose debating skills have risen her through the ranks and is quite friendly to you.

*Ministry of War;* occupied with threats outside the city and in meeting any danger, the Ministry controls the army of Sarnak. Of late there has been tension between the Ministry of War and the Ministry of Security, namely over the dominion of the navy, whether it is for defence or offence, though both claim use of it. Just recently the Ministry conquered the coastal town of Falkenna on the road to Bentara. The Amazonian warriors are well trained and highly disciplined and proved more than a match for the Falkennan knights entrapped in steel shells. Merilenya Indórin is the current Minister of War, a former general of the army herself, retired at her age of sixty from the frontline. Zîrâ Elahes, Assistant Minister is brash and all brawn yet somehow completes her duty regardless of her crippling injury to her legs. Thula Iolande is the Secretary Minister.

*Ministry of Agriculture;* deals with the growing of food and mining within the city-state of Sarnak, which includes the recently taken Falkenna, whose mines have swelled Sarnak's coffers overshadowing its own mining failures. Khera Tamirynath is the Minister who controls and oversees the Order of the First Leaf, a non-religious order of Animists devoted to improving Sarnak's agriculture through use of the Essence. Anyante Varen, Assistant Minister, works closely with the Order and the small farm communities in establishing good practices with help from the Secretary Minister, Achre Iraldrane.

*Ministry of Security;* You've hid well from them your past, despite enquiries. This Ministry is in full control of the Shaitan, which though considered part of the army,

are more in the Ministry of Security's pocket than any other of late. Reconnaissance, sabotage, assassination & defense seem all part & parcel of the Shaitan whose members remain secret, known only to the Minister herself, or at least so it is perceived. Vanda Xanes is the current Minister, an aloof and intelligent woman whose family have taken positions within the Ministry. Her daughter, Francesca Xanes, is an extremely competent Assistant Minister of whom you've spent more time with than most. Ever since you have known her she has been troubled by something. Myri Sinvoril, a cousin of the Xanes family, is determined and hard working, but shy and quiet.

*The Directorate*; have remained quite aloof from your reach and research, speaking only to them at social events, and always polite in greetings, they are the hub of the city, absolute and each woman is wise beyond words. The Directorate consists of Ami Coirë, Isil Yasteril, Osidred Indemanwë, Adjia Mannas, and Maredeen Aerond.

The death of the Katra of Stroane, the recent conquest of Falkenna, and Sarnak's itch for expansion; these are the tasks that Mistress Urînæchær, and undoubtedly Ventine have prescribed. All have proven hard to chase down. While during the day the dutiful Secretary Minister of Trade you may be, at night the stalking and shadowing listening begins. It is how you have discovered the secret antics of many of the women in power, the drugs, harem abuse and debauchery once lauded as the realm of the male, has seeped into the corridors of power within Sarnak. But it takes more than scandal to interest Mistress Urînæchær. Of the assassination of the Katra of Stroane, internal rumours you've picked up on are that the young country maid the Katra married was Shaitan. Just whom you've run into wall after wall, however, one breach is in the Ministry of Security, no less than Francesca Xanes with whom you've built certain confidences. Access to the Ministry's Security files is what you seek. The recent conquest of Falkenna seems to have been a ploy of sorts on part of the Ministry of War. General feeling is that the Ministry of Security who in the last decade absorbed the Shaitan into its control rather than under the army threatens them. This acquisition has bolstered the army's standing and surprised many with the increased precision and strategy of the army's unsuspected attack. The mines of Falkenna have proved a great source of wealth into Sarnak bolstering its already growing profit of late. But the recent paradigm shift between the two Ministries has already swung back to the Department of Security. Motions have already been put in place to restrict the Ministry of War's totality of control over the decisions of war.

:: o f g o d s a n d m a n ::

Now, when past is sought in momentary reflection, the wandering mind considers the gaps implicit, inconsistencies with truth later discovered, and conflict of ideology in the strictness sense. The challenge of Sarnak was felt across all levels of being. Every aspect, ability met with this, and beliefs were part and parcel. Right and wrong, good and bad, the concept of duality is a difficult one to accept even now among such a system of duality, democracy.

Life with Mistress Urînæchær was without a spiritual outlook of the sorts others are familiar with. Sadism then indifference or vice versa, the more she sent you out within the boundaries of Bentara the more you were used as a tool. Either way, that tool was abused.

There was a palpable sense of not being cohesive within Sarnak, and perhaps the lack of its gods to encumber the circumstances was a good thing. Atheistic to an extreme, regarding the gods as nothing more than deified egocentrics, usually male, Sarnaki women do not even allow shrines within their lands. But the challenge lay with ethics and morality, in small doses they may have been.

## :: of history and geography ::

Upon reflection it is clear that you were told what was deemed fit you should know. Most of your knowledge of the continent Emer you live on you've learned in the last year of work within the Directorate. Stumbling at first with knowledge garnered from books you slipped into the mantle of observing other people from other places and learning from them when you could. At least now you know enough to carry basic conversation. Kulthea, the Shadow World, you have heard it called and upon it, Emer, one of the myriad of continents in the West. Emer, the Great Continent with its past occluded in oppression even as it was hailed as the seat of civilization across the Shadow World.

- Danarchis:** A small, but powerful maritime kingdom located on the rocky peninsula of northeastern Hæstra. The Danarchan hillsides are replete with olives, which they export along with their much sort after wine, clams, shrimp and crabs. Some healing herbs are grown and exported as well. The Capital Artha, is now taking more steps to establishing permanent trading practice with Sarnak.
- Votania:** Geographically and historically, Votania is a place with few rivals in the picture of Kulthea. Once home to the Emperor of Emer, the Masters of Emer, and all those who have conquered Emer in one shape or form. The island lies near the centre of Emer, guarded by the Sea of Votania. The isle is rarely visible, clothed in a thick veil of mist and airships and traders avoid it on all costs.
- Bodlea:** More a region than any government or organized body, a land of rolling hills and valleys north of the Keyten river and south of Danarchis. Several Talath dales are here. Grains and cotton comprise the trade received from Bodlea and wool is sent to Bodlea from Sarnak.
- Miir:** South of Bodlea, a collection of lords and their city-states once under the banner of the Kings of Orian before the Katra of Stroane splintered the Orian pact some nine years past. Empty land and empty ruins, nothing much comes out of Miir.
- Stroane:** Once the heart of a growing empire under the Katra of Stroane. Over the last decade the once powerful land has shrunken in on itself, under coup after coup since the Katra's assassination. Sarnak does not trade with Stroane.
- Vornia:** Less a government, but an ancient region of several cities and farm enclosures. It is here in the city of Bentara you grew up. Strange upon reflection, you know less of Bentara than you do of Sarnak. Mostly always at night its streets were, and regimented time upon that. Sarnak imports much corn and wheat from Vornia.
- Emerald Forest:** Between the Bay of Izar and the Sea of Votania, this extensive forest is a haunted place that none can enter, and ironically drives trade through Sarnak from Uj passing to Hæstra.

## Izar Coastal

**Towns:** Sarnak recently captured Falkenna and this spur of the Forbidden Ridge yields diamonds and silver of which Sarnak taxes, as well as laying claim to the close salt mines. Jantanen trades gold with Sarnak, but has pulled back on negotiations with Falkenna's recent capture. Slyk is another rich Izarian town exporting wood, and many metals and gems but has not switched to Sarnak over the Port of Izar in these troubled times. Fen-Jorl and Baymar are more wealthy towns that avoid trade with Sarnak.

## Komaren

**Cluster:** Sarnak loathes this city and uses the Old Emer term, *sherikaan* (derogatory for men who prefer the intimate company of other men) for its inhabitants. Sarnak ships would undoubtedly be met with force.

**Port of Izar:** Located at the tip of the northern peninsula guarding the entrance to the bay of Izar, an independent city-state that up until the winter of 6053 had been eclipsing Sarnak's growth as trade centre. Partially destroyed in the storms it now faces hardship as the Sea of Gold proves to be a dangerous trade route now.

**Kaitaine:** One of the most famous trading ports in the west built on the island of Ciros, the largest city in Emer and devoted to trade and commerce. Many a skyship now pass through Sarnak on their journey to this legendary place to the southwest instead of resting at the Port of Izar.

## Tai-Emer

**Præten:** A maritime country east of Danarchis, aggressive and jealous of the trade passing through their waters from Danarchis to Sel Kai. Præten has been accused of piracy to supplement its economy.

## Lankan

**Empire:** One of the largest governments on Emer, cannot be overlooked. Quick minds and aggressiveness, they have conquered everywhere they have stood. For a culture without the ability to work iron, use the wheel or desire to sail, they have expanded considerably and threaten strong and close civilized trade cities.

**Ardania:** A lordly man with a seemingly unlimited supply of gold has settled in the ruins of old Ardan city, rebuilding a city. Many of his men have been through Sarnak and hired many mercenaries.

**Sel Kai:** It is said that the Prince of Selkai is the richest man on Kulthea, his home, is no less than a floating city of the name Eidolon and is the capital of the trading state. 15 Merchant Guild Lords elect the Prince who rules as monarch. A government based on trade, which has worked for thousands of years, and it shows. Every Sel-kai banker or trader is always dealing and dressing with power and wealth. Sarnak is doing its best to impress as more and more now flow to Sarnak instead of the Port of Izar.

## :: o f t h e e s s e n c e ::

The form physical or otherwise that fills the world with its presence, of late malign. Sorcerers like Ventine take shape from the Essence to manipulate; yet the most powerful source of Essence is in its foci, flows or storms. Sometimes welled in pools of energy beyond conception, and other times flowing like a river, and then there are the storms...

By spring of 6052 you reached the gates of Sarnak, looking so bleak and foreboding. From one prison to another it seemed until the gates fell behind revealing a clean and well-kept city, painted gaily and decoratively. The women smiling, at ease with one another, all the while another coup had taken place in the capital of Stroane, Arakin. Summer and you are working in the Directorate Headquarters after numerous attempts at employment to finally find filing in the Ministry of Trade. You begin collecting mistakes and pinpointing lax ability and subtlety push some doors and step ahead of potential rivals for position. Autumn, and you hold position of Secretary to the Secretary Minister of Trade, Cirel Rochon. Fall and a large Arinyark deposit found in the Scorpion Ridge near Jantanen pulls many miners from Sarnak and other nearby towns to flock to it despite the hazardous conditions and Cirel strains under the mounting pressure restraining Mistress Urînæchær's ambitions. The last two seasons preparation to take over Cirel's position are finally put in place under the urging of Mistress Urînæchær who gives the order to take Cirel's position by force.

At the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve of 6052, you looped in one swoop a silk rope around Cirel's neck as she passed under a strut and you dropped holding the rope launching her gasping body into the air. As she convulsed, struggled, the rope was nearly lost thrice, a sudden prickling itch on the back of the neck intense. In a few minutes she was dead and a toppled chair set beside her from which you measured correctly the length and her height in imitation of suicide.

It was just as you walked in the door to your apartment after the meeting with Cirel that the prickling returned with ferocious intensity, dropping you to your knees with such crippling itch. The smell of ozone, building about you, sickening and somewhere a high-pitched whining mixed with a barely audible rumble, your vision wavering, shimmering walls like a heat wave, intensifying.

The next 70 days seemed like a punishment of severe proportions of the like Kulthea has never seen the like of. Later you find out that the storms appear to have occurred across all of Kulthea and no one knows why. Tidal waves shatter through Izar and the coastal towns and do minor structural damage at first to Sarnak, but soon the aftershocks bring waves from within the Bay of Izar cracking the very walls of Sarnak. Trouble brews on the eastern hillsides where portals open and the army is called in with Sorcerers and the Order of the First Leaf to contain dangerous floods of strange creatures and demons. The Navigators, the universal transportation guild and guide service throughout Kulthea suspends all service and temporarily vanish. Sea travel proves impossible, as day after day the winds and water are relentless. South of

Sarnak beyond the vineries, Sarnak watches for eight nights a constant stream of flaming rock from the sky impact the foothills of the Morbek Highlands. Stray rocks of molten liquid strike a few Sarnaki dwellings within the walls but are contained. The perfect alibi is given to you, and the real duties as Security Minister of Trade are only just beginning. Spring 6053 TEI.

## ::the nature of forest::

For the time of keeping within doors a tree was a word, a leaf just a scrawl of ink, a presupposition to something common. It was Mistress Urînæchær who opened the door that was sealing imagination and sensation in the years before Sarnak. Trees, the peace without walls, a forest to the east like dancing through dream. Never had you experienced in all your youth the closeness to such tranquility, such peace the very memories of Mistress Urînæchær faded. But this she tarred as well, stripping away the magic of the flora down to names once again for use in the future. The testing of substances upon live forest animals restlessly shivers in your mind to this day. These lessons extended into all walks of life beyond the forest though, and with each lesson, more and more perverse means were required. What started as a discovery of wonder was soon reduced to animal experimentation and murder with the testing of herbs upon others.

- Alzo;* From the plant of the same name found in forest growing low in the canopy that produces seeds of which are boiled, crushed and drunk. Effects are increased agility and alertness of mind. Difficult to find, it is also the antidote to the poison Yosis.
- Basira;* Found on the shores of lakes and large freshwater sources, a bud boiled, dried and crushed into a powder that is inhaled. Effects are the ability to perceive the flows of Essænce and related magical enchantments, but have the side effect of making one's eyes glow red. The effect lasts for one hour, hard to find.
- Jiri;* Lichen that grows on stone cliffs close to the sea. The rubbing of the yellow lichen upon one's eyes allows one to see clearly in the dark for one hour, difficult to find.
- Selig;* In forest or trees close or growing on the shore of rivers or lakes, a fungus which when chewed enhances the hearing. Not easy to find.
- Purg;* A difficult flower to find among forests, growing often in shafts of light from breaks in the canopy. The nectar of the flower is best dissolved in warm liquid and drunken. The herb provides relief to concussion, difficult to find.
- Bevolin;* A small scrappy plant found on rocky shores of saltwater bodies. It's leaf, when brewed with hot liquid provides and antidote for the poison Ghida, hard to find.
- Eshetu;* Found mostly on the sweeping lands of Vornia, and other long grass plains. The eshetu grass grows only near decomposing organic material, and near barrows. The grass is prepared as poultice and cures one from the poison Kadah, hard to find.
- Ikkal;* A crystal found only at lakes, incredibly rare that collect in small deposits on shore. Sieved attempts to find the Ikkal are not uncommon. It is a fragile crystal and dissolves in boiling liquid which if drunk proves antidote for any poison drunk within the hour.

- Nega;* A common weed whose leaf is found on most grassland open to the sky, brewed as drink, this herb greatly sustains the onset of poison for a period of a day.
- Tevy;* A large leafed plant that grows solitary along seashores and on soft cliff. Its rubbery leaf must be boiled, dried then crushed into a fine powder that is then added to liquid. It is commonly known as the cure for the disease Hurothgaar, but also serves as antidote to the poison Vyurk.
- Arrine;* A freshwater flower growing only in still areas, its stem when rubbed around broken or fractured bone helps recovery.
- Cicala;* Found in the long plains of Vornia, this grass when prepared as poultice has an incredible effect to torn or pulled muscle.
- Inexes;* This vine's leaf when prepared as poultice coagulates rapidly over any bleeding wound, a difficult herb to find.
- Nayeeh;* Also known as Eissa's Breath, is a rare flower growing in cultivated land. When placed in a dying person's mouth that individual is given extended life, if only short.
- Suman;* A lesser-known herb to most due to its rare nature, found in forests only for the first three days of spring. Growing on the berry producing bush of the same name, it is the rare golden berry among the red that when eaten can sustain life for half a cycle of Orhan.
- Taline;* Another berry, but not hard to find if one spends time scrounging at the very undergrowth of the canopy. A small vine that grows low to the ground but over space producing a sticky elongated black berry which is used crushed for poultice and never eaten. It repairs ruptures of veins and can stem severe internal bleeding for a short while.
- Ansilius;* Mistress Urînæchær made you grow this vile creeper you discovered quite by accident in the forest, although it seems she intended for you to discover it and inhale its poison for yourself... such a glorious collection of many-petaled blossoms among the shiny, dark leaves. You stopped yourself from inhaling the cup too deeply. Mistress Urînæchær showed you how to grow it without fear of inhalation in your room, every day watching it sneak closer and closer to your bed until one side of the room was a mass of white flower-cups peering. Mistress Urînæchær decided then it was time for harvest and with special masks each was flower was carefully severed. Revenge was sweet, though it seems they had the last laugh, Mistress Urînæchær showing you how to prepare the pollen, carry it, and... use it. First on the animals, but then on public, leaving them inhuman and depraved lasting eight weeks at a time.
- Spinewood;* Low-growing shrubs, which often collect in packs near fresh running water. Camouflaged behind twigs and leaves are the short downy hairs that are extremely sharp and easily piercing skin, causing extensive, burning rash and muscle spasms. Mistress Urînæchær also showed you their use on the eyes, blinding poor feral cats, two even dying once accidentally inhaling the hairs.
- Salorsia;* Delicate pink flowers that sprinkle the dense, blue leaves of this prolific ground-covering shrub around the perimeter of forests in the shade of

trees. Deer graze on it all seasons except early spring, which as Mistress Urînæchær showed you are when the budding flowers carry pollen most vile. One inhalation causes severe internal choking, the body shutting down with little reason for cause except the pink pollen.

- Ghida:* This rare and hard to extract poison is from a spider of the same name. Extracted manually through a technique of dissection, the small poison glands are removed and the blue venom stored. It instantly places one injected/ingested with it into coma.
- Kadah:* A rare clam is the Kadah, which might not attract a diner's palate has an extract from the flesh of the shellfish of beige colour that fuses the joints of the one poisoned over a painful period of ten days.
- Vyurk:* Vyurk resembles the Tevy plant save for thin blood-red filaments through its broad leaf and that it blooms a sickly and rotten flower in appearance whose sallow pollen, if inhaled, causes death through sneezing.
- Yosis:* The Yosis plant is found deep in forest near stagnant pools of water. The plant oozes a pale green sap that is highly acrid when collecting, and then turns inert and darker in colour. The poison causes blindness in its victim from anything of a day to longer than a week.
- Gort;* A stringy purple leaf when dried, you've never seen the plant, only the dried leaf that is crushed easily to be inhaled. Mildly addictive, it is a euphoric substance that is imported by the wealthy, commonly referred to as 'sniff'. Mostly imported from Tai-Emer.
- Zapic;* At 80 gold per leaf, this large frond is a valued substance when crushed. Rumours abound of side effects from this rare plant that inhibits motor-control.

## :: o f t i m e a n d m o n e y ::

The importance of coin in Emer depends upon what nation you live in. In lesser developed civilizations a coin is worth its weight in metal, whilst in successful trading countries that mint their own the metal is less of concern than the value of money as a means beyond barter to transfer goods. Silver is the most common currency in Emer and most countries mint their own, gold is rare unless in the hands of nobles and lords. As a rule of thumb exchange rates are as values;

10 tin pieces = worth 1 copper  
 10 copper pieces = worth one bronze  
 10 bronze pieces = worth one silver  
 10 silver pieces = worth one gold

Transfer of minted coins between realms is of negligible cost due to trade.

While large mechanical clocks exist in the major cities, the telling of time is by means of the sun. Twenty-five hours mark the Kulthean day divided into five (known as Quintars) divisions commonly known as predawn, morning, midday, evening, and night these relating to the five realms (fire, water, earth, air, essence) with each dualistic in nature. While there is a science to this, it is less known beyond the major cities.

Five months/seasons mark the Kulthean year based on the cycle of the Great Moon, each seventy days long, beginning the year with the Winter solstice; Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Fall. Seventy days is a cumbersome way to track time to most people and a second calendar based on Varin, the second moon organizes most lives;

Moon-day – Varin is full (market day)

Fire-day

Water-day

Earth-day

Air-day – Holy day in most civilizations

Dark-day – Varin is new (bad luck)

Star-day

Cloud-day – Bad luck

Sun-day

Wind-day – Holy day in most civilizations

Loresmasters pay no heed to the cycle of Varin when recording time and use Orhan exclusively for recording the year. Dates are recorded as "TE (third era/ire) 6052, Orhan 3 (the month), day 32", and is even briefly used as 6052•3•32.

## :: s t a t i s t i c s ::

*Race:* Ta-lairi (known to most as half-elf, you know not your father, whether he was elf or Ta-lairi - it makes all the difference, whether you are immortal or mortal).

*Appearance:* You are tall and athletic, with a pale skin and closely cropped, short white hair. Your eyes are a deep and striking violet.

*Strength:* Poor Strength (D20)

*Agility:* Natural Athlete (D8)

*Health:* Good Health (D12)

*Knowledge:* Poor Knowledge of the World (D20)

*Perception:* Impressive powers of Perception (D10)

*Luck:* Good Luck (D10)

### Skills

*Melee:* Amateur Fighter (D20)

*Missile:* Skilled Archer (D10)

*Climbing:* Good Climber (D12)

*Riding:* Fair Horseman (D12)

*Disarm Traps:* Proficient Trap Disarmer (D10)

*Stalking & Hiding:* Competent in Subterfuge (D12)

*Acrobatics:* Natural Acrobat (D8)

*Contortions:* Decent Contortionist (D12)

*Diplomacy:* Mediocre Diplomat (D12)

*Linguistics:* Amateur Linguist (D12)

*Lip Reading:* Talented Lip Reader (D10)

*Mathematics:* Struggles with Numbers (D30)

*Rope Mastery:* Good Use of Rope (D12)

*Trap Building:* Talented Trapist (D10)

*Tumbling:* Practiced Tumbler (D10)

*Acting:* Good Actor (D12)

*Botany:* Skilled Botanist (D10)

### Possessions

#### Clothes

Fold-up Short-bow + quiver of 20 specially designed arrows with interchangeable arrowheads for cutting, embedding, looping rope/wire, flaming

Small marble mortar & pestle

2 doses of Basira

3 doses of Jiri

4 doses of Nega

4 doses of Ansilius

2 doses of Spinewood

1 dose of Vyurk

Detailed & personal map of Sarnak interior

Small wax press (of which are sent to Bentara to be moulded to avoid suspicion)  
disguised as a wax seal kit

Tailored black full suit with hood (made from a silken matte fibre), replete with  
many pockets for hiding items

Toolkit of picks and needles made by elves in Námar-Tol, subtlety and delicately  
engraved in twisting vines on both the silver composite and the hardwood  
elements (kept in partitions sewn into the suit

Flat Stiletto