

Sign & Sigil: Gift of a Dark Goddess

The Origins of Human Magic

From the collected journals of **Sybeth Roane**
(transcribed by **Douglas Seacat**) • Art by **Chippy,**
Brian Snoddy, Florian Stitz, and **Matt Wilson**

Read the disputed and controversial opinions of famed occultist Sybeth Roane as she delves into the history of human magic in the Iron Kingdoms. Conspiracies of silence have long obscured these facts. Outsiders are rarely made privy to the dark secrets inextricably bound to the origins of sorcery and wizardry. Some believe a lingering taint is attached to all human magic rooted in these origins.

This oil painting titled simply, "The Gift," was painted by the Laesele artist Florian Stitz in the city of Merywyn in 297 AR. He produced a number of religious-themed paintings, but this particular work caused a stir for its "overly sympathetic" depiction of Thamar. Stitz's reputation suffered accordingly, and he died penniless.

There have been many attempts by historians to sanitize one of the most crucial events in the history of wattern Immoren. The arrogant blowhards at the Fraternal Order of Wizardry are guilty of endorsing such revisionism. In their fawning adoration of Ascendant Corben the wizards of this group and the Order of Illumination prefer to ignore the immeasurable impact of the goddess Thamar and those who have followed her, most notably Seions Ekris, Nivara, and Stacia.

Thamar's philosophies are not easy for the uninitiated to comprehend. Those who misapprehend her nature cannot fathom that this goddess helped preserve our civilization at its bleakest hour. The lengthy and difficult rebellion against the Orgoth would have been impossible without the aid of Thamar and those who obeyed her instructions, most particularly those privy to the first awakening of magic as bestowed by Thamar's Gift. All our modern industry and

mechanika rest upon the shoulders of those early practitioners and the divine patron whose help they accepted. The inheritors of that legacy seek to bury the past, which I will not allow.

The Order of Illumination boasts it is their purpose to shine light into darkness. Let that be my function. I will pull back the veil of lies. Accordingly, I have included here a select few of countless relevant texts, the work of innumerable dedicated scholars. There is far more to be learned, but hopefully this will serve to spark renewed interest in this neglected topic.

Before we examine the Gift itself, I think it is important to look much further back in history and to understand the factors which may have helped give rise to this transformation of human potential.

—S.R.

Occultism before the Gift

Does human magic really begin with the Gift of Sorcery? In this era it is tempting to mark a clean dividing line between “when there was sorcery” and “when there was not” to create a neat and orderly distinction. Those of us who have studied the past know things were not so simple.

Many otherwise reasonable scholars prefer not to examine this subject at all. Exploring this topic inevitably invites censure and accusations of being a closet Thamarite. Let us put such superstitions aside.

Learned alchemists know research into supernatural power and its applications existed long before the first verifiable sorcerer arose in the Ordic city of Tarna in 137 BR. Additionally, the Orgoth were not the first people we saw wielding inexplicable energies without relying on prayer. Without question texts on this matter are full of myths and unverifiable claims. It does seem that there was no natural route to sorcery or its more learned counterpart, the art of wizardry, until after the Gift. Yet legend and history describe several notable individuals who rose to dominate their neighbors not by strength of arms or political scheming but by manifesting inexplicable and unnatural power.

Yet does this mean Thamar's Gift was a lie or some sort of Thamarite propaganda? By no means!

Let us examine the woman herself, before her Dark Ascension. Even those who fear to name the dark goddess admit both the Twins were remarkable scholars and philosophers in their mortal days. After his retirement as a soldier, Morrow wrote one of the most definitive accounts of ancient Calacia, having personally spent time unearthing forgotten relics and deciphering inscribed tablets. Similarly, Thamar plunged into the mysteries of forgotten secrets with unrivaled enthusiasm. Her intellectual achievements have been eclipsed by her rise to godhood, but we should not forget she was a paragon of the occult well before shedding her mortal coil. Her reprehensible moral choices do not diminish her significant achievements as a scholar.

Thamar's travels across Immoren in search of deeper truth are well recorded in the Enkheiridion. She spent time among myriad splinter cults decried as heretics by the Menite faith. Among those pleasure cults, ancestor worshipers, and feasters on the flesh of the dead, she eventually found the clues she sought. The Church of Morrow has discouraged anyone but ordained priests from studying the journals

of Thamar, those black pages writ in silver ink that comprise fully half of their beloved Enkheiridion. Thamar's words are said to be too seductive for weaker minds. As a scholar, I reject this.

Why does the Church of Morrow fear the truth? I disdain superstition, but I will allow that their stance is understandable, if alarmist. Detailed examination of Thamar's journal and Ekris' corresponding notes demonstrate clearly that necromancy and infernalism are the eldest arcane arts, long predating the Gift. This is a truth the Church would prefer to bury. They worry that recognizing this fact would bestow on these black practices some sort of allure.

I find that unlikely. One need not be devout to consider corpse-robbing repellant or to recognize the dangers inherent in other acts classified under the purview of witchcraft. The common man is as protective of his soul as he is of his livelihood. Yet so too we must acknowledge that the natural processes of death and dying impart tremendous latent energies. It is a fact that every human corpse is a wellspring of untapped unnatural power. This is magnified a hundredfold within that ineffable and invisible thing we call the soul. Ah, the imperishable soul! A currency so treasured by the gods and infernals that a single one is worth more to

them than all the riches of Caen. It is from these unpleasant but undeniable truths that necromancy and infernalism originate.

It is no coincidence that Thamar's first ascended scions were Ekris and Delesle, patrons of infernalism and necromancy, respectively. Ekris was not only Thamar's lover in life but also a fellow occultist obsessed with dark lore. He was the man who would eventually pen the most authoritative texts on negotiating with infernals. It is a disputed and hotly contested fact, but I think there can be no doubt that Ekris

possessed a power similar to sorcery sixteen centuries before the Gift. How? Simple: by way of dark pacts with infernals. It is on record that he willingly sacrificed thousands of innocents to these soul gluttons. Similarly, Delesle codified early necromantic rites, animating the dead to send as a plague against the Menite temples. Some believe the dread Witchfire blade was an invention of her fabrication and possibly a tool employed during her own dark ascension. Yet she was no priestess.

Where arose this lore, this power? Were these two individuals simply

remarkable aberrations? The Church of Morrow might have this believed, but any rational mind should find it dubious. The answer is not difficult to unearth, if one examines the journals of Thamar and Ekris in particular. Look back to Morrdh—dark and foreboding Morrdh, a name that still provokes dread, particularly among the sad and downtrodden Morridanes who are the last remnants of that great civilization. This kingdom was no myth to frighten swampie children. Morrdh was real, and so was the power of its lords.



This was the first of what promised to be an interesting series of pamphlets distributed in Corys by Jorner Hylastro, a magus of the Fraternal Order and a once-respected scholar of the arcane. He wrote a number of insightful research papers into the lives of Thamar and the early scions, examining their connection to current magical theory and practice.

This particular document was part of a clever but ultimately ill-advised attempt by Hylastro to create interest in a soon-to-be published book. Unfortunately it also attracted the interest of the Order of Illumination. The pamphlet and most of Magus Hylastro's other works were immediately banned and many of them confiscated and burned. The magus disappeared not long thereafter. I have no doubt he was the victim of overly enthusiastic witch-hunters.

Recent Timeline

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| 3500 BR Morrdh forms from territories seized from the Molgur. | 64 BR Kerwin publishes Synthesis, inventing mechanika. | |
| 1900 BR Ascension of the Twins, Morrow and Thamar. | 63 BR Orgoth destroy Arcanist's Academe, allegedly killing Kerwin. | 243 AR Khadoran patriots break from Fraternal Order to form Greylords Covenant. |
| 1780 BR Ascension of Scion Ekris, patron of infernalists, diviners, tyrants. | 25 BR The Order of the Golden Crucible founded by survivors of the Circle of the Oath. | 283 AR Fraternal Order astronomer discovers goddess Cyriss. |
| 1610 BR Ascension of Scion Delesle, patron of necromancy. | 25 AR Ascension of Scion Nivara, patron of Thamarite wizards and sorcerers. | 579 AR Inquisition instituted by Vinter Raelthorne IV. |
| 1500 BR Disintegration of the kingdom of Morrdh. | 32 AR Battle of the Hundred Wizards temporarily frees Tordor from the Orgoth. | 583 AR "Edicts Against Unlawful Sorcery and Witchcraft" instituted by Vinter IV. |
| 600 BR Orgoth invasion of Immoren begins. | 102 AR Ascension of Corben, patron of alchemy, astronomy, and Morrowan wizardry. | 584 AR Over 250 people executed for unlawful sorcery in Cygnar and Llael. |
| 150 BR Date assigned to the "Gift of Sorcery" by Thamar. | 111 AR Fraternal Order of Wizardry founded. | 591 AR Witchfire blade recovered from ruins in Cryx by Dexter Sirac and Kell Bailoch. |
| 137 BR First recorded discovery of a human sorcerer in Tarna. | 201 AR Western Immoren liberated from the Orgoth by armies including colossals. | 593 AR Corvis Witchcraft Trial convicts and beheads 5 women. |
| 96 BR Sebastian Kerwin publishes Dissertations on Thaumaturgical Formulation. | 233 AR Order of Illumination founded after a schism within the Fraternal Order. | |
| 81 BR Kerwin institutes the Arcanist's Academe in secret. | | |
| 67 BR Kerwin founds the Circle of the Oath. | | |

It is worth remembering that the Kingdom of Morraht lasted for two thousand years before collapsing mysteriously around 1,500 B.R. The Twins ascended four centuries before this fall. Morraht was at that time still a factor in regional politics, although it had faded to a shadow of its former glory.

Modern historians dismiss most tales about ancient Morraðh as apocryphal. While it is true such legends become distorted, there is enough to lend credence to the powers of its leaders. Certainly Morraðh established unusual alliances and leveraged terror to seize lands from its neighbors even when its armies seemed inadequate. Old sagas suggest the lords of Morraðh might have even arranged a pact with a dragon. Whatever the source, it appears certain the Lords of Morraðh had access to unusual and powerful allies. Infernalism seems not only possible but also the most logical explanation.

In any other age, Ekris would have been a giant, an emperor, or a god in his own right. Only Thamar's majesty was powerful enough to put such a man in her shadow. Ekris followed the path of Thamar's dark ascension for over a century, piecing together the clues of her path. She left him this challenge, letting him know he could join her only if he proved worthy. She kept many secrets from him to see if he could unearth them.

For decades Ekris buried himself in esoteric tomes and rites. Yet the secrets of ascension eluded him until he accepted a simpler truth. His route to ascension would be the same as Tamar's: the key was the sacred language called Telgesh, an invention of Tamar's. This was no mere alphabet, no simple set of scrawled symbols to stand for the mundane facts of man's daily life. Such is the purpose of our alphabets, our numbers. No, Telgesh was something else. It was the evolution of something primal and ancient, letters branded in fire into the bones and sinews of Caen.

Ekris' journals describe a place deep in the ruined subterranean halls of palaces forgotten by the citizens of Morrdh. There primers were buried containing symbols bestowed on the lords of Morrdh by unnatural patrons. The fathers of Morrdh paid a great price to acquire these symbols. They sought an everlasting legacy and begged it of spirits who tempted them with the promise of limitless power. These men gathered at

a deep well called Gidon's Pit, likely the very same site where millennia later the Temple Garroth would be constructed. There they emptied an ocean of innocent blood into the howling depths to quell a hunger beyond this world. Entire townships were razed in order to sacrifice their citizens to the horrors lurking in the pit. We now call those beings infernals, as if categorizing them makes them more comprehensible.

Gidon's Pit is no more, for which we can be thankful, but it may have represented a breach in the walls between Caen and some infernal realm far beyond. Whatever rested at its bottom did not drink only blood. With every massive sucking intake of breath from that fetid maw those entities inhaled the essence of souls until they were glutted.

The monsters in Gidon's Pit repaid those men who offered them sacrifices by imparting the knowledge of a handful of symbols and the instructions for their use. These were imparted to the fathers of Morrdh as we might throw coins to a beggar. They were true symbols, arcane glyphs through which reality itself can be bent. Armed with these glyphs a man can reach into the fabric of Caen as if it were clay. This is a power akin to the gods', although mortals lack the strength of will and insight to do more than push and prod clumsily, like a child in the mud.

Jack Quenier 1909pp. Chat, was 1908pp. How long did Chat live? :

Source?? What formula?

The Lords of Morrdh had access to only a scant few of these symbols, yet by their use they established a dynasty lasting hundreds of generations. Several old sagas describe how rune-laden and empty-eyed warriors of Morrdh walked to battle tirelessly, neither eating nor breathing. Applied to fresh corpses, these runes denied death and turned enemy into ally.

The sixth canto of the Narren Sojourn in the black pages of the Enkheirion mentions the great inferno Thamar ignited in the pits of Korshivas, a ruin whose precise location has never been found. There she left nothing but ash and silence. Some have mistaken this tale as a message of Thamar's ultimate humanity. They think Thamar saw something so horrible in those depths that even she felt compelled to obliterate it utterly. It is used as an abject lesson regarding the depths of depravity to which Morrdh had fallen. But careful reading of Ekris' notes shows another possibility. I believe Thamar had found forgotten glyphs in Korshivas and destroyed all record of them so she alone would possess their power.

The Lords of Morrdh were secretive and paranoid of their rivals. They did not willingly pass what they had learned to their heirs. Five centuries before Thamar's visit, Korshivas was abandoned and all citizens of Morrdh were prohibited from entering its grounds on pain of death. The Lords of Morrdh had forgotten the legacy of their ancestors, and it might have remained buried if Thamar had not ventured there. This was the seed from which Telgesch was born.

Ekris implies his mistress discovered more than necromantic runes in Korshivas. There she found the full name and summoning rites for an infernal sometimes called Teldoquorin, or "He Who Sounds the Trumpet at the Gates of Woe," referred to in some texts simply as "the Sounder at the Gates." Ekris' journal insists that Thamar never summoned the Sounder, but Ekris dared what she would not. His communication with this infernal was the keystone of his negotiations for extended longevity and power. I believe it was the Sounder who accepted the offering of the first fathers of Morrdh and who would later consume thousands more sent by Ekris in his private bartering. In negotiation with such creatures, Ekris surpassed his mistress, and by this work he unraveled at last the process leading to his own ascension, making him First Scion.

Thamar did not complete Telgesch in her mortal days, which is why the alphabet appears incomplete. Her work continued in Urcaen, where Scion Ekris eventually joined her. Telgesch provided the seed for an arcane system later perfected and eventually translated into a form we mortals could comprehend, then passed down to help foment the early rebellion against the Orgoth. This was Thamar's Gift. The arcane alphabet employed so casually by wizards and warcasters today is derived ultimately of the blood debt of Morrdh and those sacrificed by Ekris. We who praise the First Scion know this truth.

This is an excerpt from the most intelligible section of Sargon Bainnigh's otherwise tedious book First Scion: Lord of the Chosen. Bainnigh's fawning obsequies with Scion Ekris biases much of his research. Sargon created a stir in Ceryl's arcane society in the late 400s by claiming to be a wizard of formidable power. He proved to be more air than substance. He was slain in an embarrassingly short wizard's duel with an unremarkable Fraternal Order magus. Whatever his talents, Sargon owned several priceless ancient manuscripts by Ekris and his immediate followers. None of these texts was found after his death, and their disposition is unknown.



If Thamar and the eldest scions were constructing a system of magic to bestow on mankind, they took their time delivering it. I vehemently disagree with the simplistic analysis of men like Sargon Bainwright. Seventeen centuries passed between the Dark Ascension and the Gift of Thamar! Even for gods, that is a long time. During this intervening period magic as we know it remained unknown. Whatever occult advances Thamar made she kept to herself until long after the Orgoth had conquered western Immoren. Surely she could not have held such a power, or she would provided it to us earlier. That she had personal power is undisputed, as her apotheosis is a matter of historical record. But I do not think she yet had the means to help humanity—not without external help.

A common question arises when examining the Orgoth Occupation: Why did the gods stay silent so long? What occupied Menoth and Morrow while people were enslaved and subjected to barbarism? I cannot answer. Despite the kind words of priests it may be that our happiness is irrelevant to the gods so long as we continue to breed and feed our essence to the War of Souls. Is a happy soul more valuable than a miserable one? I expect the opposite is true.

Morrow the Prophet was likely the first to predict that the Orgoth would not vanish without divine intervention. Morrow is known for his foresight, and no doubt he peered into the future and observed the extinction of all the faiths of Immoren should events continue as they were. Open war had erupted between the Orgoth and the Church of Morrow, a war the priests were doomed to lose. They had little power, and the citizenry was disarmed and accustomed to meek obedience. The Morrowan, Thamarite, and even Menite religions were likely doomed to become merely footnotes in history.

Likely Morrow pondered long and hard on this puzzle, perhaps wiling away a century or two as the situation on Immoren worsened. Morrow knew humanity required some more versatile tool, a weapon of the mind. He needed to plant a seed that could grow of its own accord into a versatile arsenal. The people of Immoren needed a new way of waging war.

If you will indulge a slight flight of fancy, let us imagine Morrow brooding miserably in Vrcaen during the height of the Orgoth Occupation. To his far reaching eye, all the threads of future possibility presaged the inevitable destruction of his religion, crushed under the heavy heel of Orgoth boots. So he turned at last, unhappily, to his sister. He knew she was the cleverer of the pair, even from childhood. She had ever been capable of the unexpected.

"Sister," he pleaded, "please tell me . . . What weapon can we deliver to our afflicted followers so they may evade annihilation? Your religion is as much at risk as mine."

After some thought Thamar answered, "I do have an idea. But you will not like it."

I picture Morrow waving dismissively, not wanting to poison his tranquility with whatever devious thoughts slithered in his sister's mind. "No details! Consider your plan in all its particulars. I will look to the future and see if putting it into action will bring the change we so desperately require."

Once more Morrow peered ahead along those same strands of fate, yet adding Thamar's plans into his precognitive equation. He saw what he had not dared to hope. There was a chance for the survival of the people of western Immoren, with the Orgoth driven out and destroyed. It would not happen quickly or easily, but it was victory. "Yes!" He commanded to his sister, "Put your plan in motion, without delay!"

Considering the importance of contracts and agreements, particularly among the gods, Thamar would have made sure to formalize this endorsement. "Do I have your unconditional support on this matter? May I serve as proxy in your role as guardian of humanity for Immoren, as granted to you by Menoth? Will you commit to my plan with the full scope of your authority?"

Morrow may have hesitated, knowing this was his last chance to maintain his principles. But in the end he acquiesced. "Yes. Do as you must." With those words he sealed an agreement and entered into a bargain he might later come to regret.

Some members of our faith believe Thamar tricked Morrow, deceiving him utterly. I do not credit it. I prefer to think Morrow knew he had no choice. I believe the Twins are equally culpable for whatever taint they passed to us. Morrow is no god of absolute good. He is a god of compromise and facilitation. He preaches one must walk the path that brings the least harm. Thamar opened the gate to that path, and in walking it Morrow stained his divine soul.

Sadly, we do not know the details of Thamar's plan. Or rather, we know only the mortal half of the equation. What few surviving texts we have uncovered of the Circle of the Oath suggest that freedom from the Orgoth came at a price to future generations. Little remains to clarify the nature of that debt.

Some might ask "Why involve Morrow in the first place?"

In sealing their compact, the Twins aligned into a conspiracy to defy their Creator. That they did so to preserve faith itself is of no consequence to Menoth or his blindly zealous followers. The reward for our unique gift in this case is to endure being hunted. When caught we are reped to a stake and lit a fire, not for our own temerity or choices, but for the sins of our ancestors and the defiance of two once-mortal gods.

A partial rebuttal to Sargon's last points, the next text is part of a correspondence I exchanged with an esteemed colleague. He will have to remain anonymous for his own safety; his life would be made uncomfortable were his peers to discover his Thamarite inclinations.

The first immediate beneficiaries of the Gift were the initial generations of sorcerers, born by the hundreds after 137 BR. Like tadpoles killed by hungry fish, most of them were extinguished before they could accomplish much. Soon thereafter arose the Circle of the Oath. This group is now extinct, but its work and organization left a lasting legacy on the orders that would follow. So began the long and painful process of rebellion that would eventually end Orgoth tyranny.

A sorceress named Helena Vashera published the following pamphlet in Coryl in 604 AR. I should acknowledge that my resurrecting the text may provoke retaliations. I am ready for that. Sadly, the author proved less prepared. Months after the pamphlet's publication, her body was discovered in the water by the city's piers.

The True Founding of the Circle of the Oath

The deeply ingrained antipathy between wizards and sorcerers is understandable given the example of several brutal inquisitions in recent memory. It could be argued it was a matter of survival for wizards to distance themselves from those who were being hunted and killed on fabricated charges of witchcraft. I can understand this, but I feel no sympathy for the countless wizards who joined groups like Vinter Raelthorne's Inquisition and participated in the murder of countless men and women who should have been their peers.

An examination of the history of inquisitions is not my purpose, as fascinating as that might be. But I think it is imperative to understand the connection between all humans who practice the arcane arts. It matters not whether that talent was bestowed at birth or arose from tedious study.

One of the primary justifications made by the established wizard orders to distance themselves from sorcery has historical roots. The first recorded mention of sorcerers presaging the rise of a new generation of such individuals was noted in Tarna in 137 BR. After this date there was an explosion of children born with sorcerous potential across western Immoren. This has prompted us to date the Gift of Thamar to just before this time period, with 150 BR as the arbitrary point of inception. Sadly we have few records about the young and likely terrified children born as sorcerers during this time. They likely had no inkling of the source of their power or how to put it to use. Many were killed by their own parents, drowned in tubs, lashed to death, thrown into wells, and other cruelties. Others were snatched by the Orgoth and either killed or enslaved.

The Fraternal Order makes a point of the fact that the first advances of their art date from Sebastian Kerwin's efforts beginning in 96 BR, 41 years and two

generations later. Clearly, they argue, their own art has only a tangential connection to this "Gift of Sorcery" imparted as "a plague by Thamar on humanity." They insist their more analytical process was an invention of Sebastian Kerwin, perhaps after having witnessed the raw, tainted, and untamed energies of sorcerers firsthand.

This is utter rubbish, part of a systematic campaign of lies and deception. The birth of sorcerers was likely a side effect of the true divine intervention of Thamar. Even when sorcerers were appearing all over Immoren they were relatively few among the total number of births. Sorcerous abilities were an aberration, like albinism or keen hearing. This was simply the outward sign of an invisible change that happened to every human born after 150 BR.

The Fraternal Order of Wizardry has taken pains to acquire or destroy every copy of an obscure paper by Sebastian Kerwin titled *Arcana Progenesis*. This was written in 97 BR and predates his more widely circulated *Dissertations on Thaumaturgical Formulation* published one year later. In this rare document Kerwin theorized that some agency, possibly divine, had unlocked a fundamental change in humanity which gave rise to sorcery and "which allowed mankind to access hitherto untapped potential." He went on to say: "By this power man can now manifest will as tangible energy, evoking force, prompting transmutation, and allowing other as-yet-undiscovered manipulations of reality." He believed strongly in the systematic analysis, categorization, teaching and improvement of these processes, but none of his works suggests he studied sorcerers to arrive at these ideas.

Arcana Progenesis has the following intriguing introduction, penned perhaps as a letter to its original intended recipient: "I have recently made

the acquaintance of several helpful colleagues, whose names I must withhold for their own safety. I was reluctant to indulge them, as I had heard rumors of their disreputable religious beliefs. After putting my preconceptions behind me I have found them to be not only reasonable but also profoundly insightful. I believe their aims are the same as ours. They seek to destroy the Orgoth. Together we can lay the groundwork so future generations can bring this to fruition. It will require trouble and toil, but we academics should not forget our responsibilities. Our minds are an asset we can employ against our oppressors. We cannot turn away any friends who share this goal nor embrace ignorance from a fear of what we may find in the darkness." Later in the text he mentions "...remarkable runes which have no power if written by an undisciplined mind but which spring to blazing life in conjunction with certain specific mental contortions." His phrasing in these texts gives the impression he was surprised to discover these runes, as if they were provided to him by an external source rather than being his own inventions.

These lines have been dismissed as immaterial, but this and other evidence from the period strongly suggests that Thamarite septs were involved in the founding of the Circle of the Oath in Ceryl in 67 AR. Accounts maintained by the Shroud confirm this, although such sources are ignored by the Morrowan establishment. Sebastian Kerwin was their most brilliant and leading voice, but he did not arrive at these ideas in a vacuum.

Thamarites insist that the fundamental precepts of Kerwin's theories were derived from direction provided by Thamarites gifted by divine visions passed to them by Scion Ekris. This is clearly described in the banned text *The Ekris Prophecies*. Kerwin has been elevated almost to the level of an ascendant in the folklore of the modern wizard orders, and they have buried all evidence that he openly conspired with Thamarite priests, learned the rites of both necromancy and infernalism, and advocated any and all measures necessary to lay the foundation for the Rebellion to come.

Both the Fraternal Order and the Order of Illumination decry these claims as slander, which I take as confirmation of truths these groups fear to expose. Unfortunately, proving these statements is difficult. Most journals penned by Kerwin's own hand are now under lock and key deep within the archives of the Fraternal Order Stronghold. Those who would give rise to Khador's Greylords Covenant stole similar works and have kept them hidden and protected. Why take such measures if the books did not paint a portrait of Sebastian Kerwin that these wizard orders do not wish to be made public?

Even more telling is a comparison of the accolades heaped upon Sebastian Kerwin to the utter disregard shown for the work of other equally prominent individuals. Take as the foremost example Nivara, now Scion Nivara. She is a woman whose existence the wizard orders have never acknowledged despite the crucial role she played in the development of wizardry. Nivara ascended in 25 AR after spending her life training dozens of prominent wizards and encouraging them to use their powers against the Orgoth.

Documents found by Professor Melorr Krane at a recent archaeological dig near Orven suggest that Nivara's foremost disciples played a key role in the Rebellion. These men and women went on to become the foremost leaders at the Battle of the Hundred Wizards in 32 AR, which temporarily freed Tordor from its occupation. Arcane texts from this period show clearly that Nivara invented many of the common evocation rituals still in use by battle wizards today. She took the idea of wizards as weapons against the Orgoth literally and did much to demonstrate the offensive power they could wield in war. Nivara's association with Thamar is one reason scholars have ignored her historical role, but I think in doing so they are denying an essential element in the evolution of their art.

The lack of conclusive knowledge regarding the Circle of the Oath is a frustrating hole in occult lore. We do not even know precisely what "Oath" they swore to uphold, although it is generally believed to have pertained to fighting against the Orgoth with all the power at their disposal. Still, some suggest—without much evidence—some sort of infernal pact or conspiracy.

None of this answers the central question of what Thamar did to arrange for humans to access the arcade. What arrangements did she make, and with whom? What debt is owed them?

I offer the next document with a caution that it may be nonsense. Individuals claiming to see visions of Uraeen are nothing new, and few are credible. This text is one such account, made by a former

member of the Order of the Golden Crucible who fled to Ord in 523 AR after allegedly poisoning his family. He is believed to have exposed himself to a variety of damaging alchemical mixtures that worsened his mental instability and died by swallowing his own tongue months after writing this letter. Some Thamarite scholars believe it describes a vision bestowed by Seion Lukas, patron of the deranged.

In a dream, I saw it, the shifting shadows parted and I walked the ashen plain of Uruaen. I witnessed a throng of the Chosen, bowing before their mistress. Ah, the surpassing splendor of the dark goddess! She was beautiful beyond words. Darkness swirled around her like gossamer veils. Lightning rent the maddened red sky which boiled and seethed. I was like a bird or an insect, a witness to far greater beings, ignored for my own insignificance. I followed as Thamar left the others, accompanied only by two of her most pious servants. At her right a man in flowing robes gilt in gold and whose hands dripped blood that never dried, arms drenched to the elbows in gore. To her left a lean woman whose body was tightly wrapped in long strips of leather and whose smile contained a thirst for violence. Jagged blades and instruments of pain adorned her body like jewelry. These three ascended a towering stairway suspended inexplicably above a yawning chasm. Below was nothing but rolling smoke and the light of impossible stars. I was drawn after them like a wisp of vapor. The stairs terminated into mist.

The stairs terminated into emptiness, but we appeared suddenly within a strange stone chamber filled with a cold blue radiance, with no doors or windows and where the walls did not stand perpendicular to the floor. Three inexplicable and inhuman entities waited there. Their slender and smooth-skinned bodies repulsed me, and their black empty eyes compounded my terror: I knew I should not be witness to this but I could not avert my gaze. One of these long-fingered creatures extended a tube at a distance of a few feet from me, and I saw that it

One of these long-fingered creatures extended a tube set with sigils toward the bloody-handed man, whose staining touch did not mar its polished surface. From this he pulled forth a vellum scroll writ thick with serpentine lettering. Those letters I have never seen before or since. I watched the goddess cut her palm and sign this document in divine blood. I felt more than heard some thrumming vibration like the knelling of a gong. I awoke gasping for breath back in my squalid room. For three days blood seeped from my eyes and beneath my fingernails as punishment for what I had seen.

I do not put much credit in this account, but certainly it is descriptive. There are many indirect references and hints that infernals belonging to a faction called the Nonokrien Order were the ultimate source of Thamar's Gift. Certainly all infernalists with whom I have corresponded confirm these entities are superlative in the arcane arts, manifesting abilities mortal wizards have never duplicated. Many theories have been postulated as to what Thamar might have offered them in exchange, but nothing is known for certain. One likely theory is that the Orgoth were also backed by infernals, perhaps representing some warring faction opposed to the Nonokrien Order. Some believe Thamar offered a great harvest of future human souls, a reaping that will require slaughter on an unparalleled scale. Others say they were offered a portion of

Thamar's domain in Uraen, from which they could join the War of Souls directly.

Analysis of passages from Oath documents indicates that the debt for Thamar's alleged negotiations was deferred by at least seven centuries, although the exact number is disputed. Did this countdown begin when Thamar negotiated the Gift? If so, that time came and went fifty years ago without our notice. If this deadline dates from the founding of the Circle of the Oath, we can expect horrible consequences as early as 633 AD. We know too little to say with any certainty. Personally I believe we have yet to pay this debt, and those who will collect upon it will be coming all too soon.



Introducing Sybeth Roane

Sybeth Roane is an infamous figure among the occult community of western Immoren, her name known in Ceryl, Caspia, Leryn, and even Korsk. She was once discreet about her Thamarite beliefs but in recent years has become bolder in flaunting her religion. She has made her fame as an occult scholar whose acumen on arcane matters is indisputable. Her peers are uncomfortable offering her praises due to her scandalous religious beliefs.

She has managed to evade persecution by turning the law against itself, exploiting the fact that there are no explicit laws against the worship of Morrow's dark sister. The theory has always been that these individuals will eventually invite their own destruction. Technically one cannot be arrested in Cygnar, Ord, Llael, or even Khador solely for worshipping Thamar. Illicit deeds done in that goddess' name are another matter.

Sybeth Roane has been scrupulous never to implicate herself in any actual crimes, although she has skirted close to the line on numerous occasions, particularly for endorsing prohibited or banned books.

She advocates that knowledge must be made available to all and that learning and education should not be infringed by arbitrary restrictions.

This becomes a stickier topic when applied to arcane lore, which includes several practices that are, in fact, illegal. This includes necromancy and infernalism. Sybeth claims only a theoretical grasp of these forbidden practices and maintains she does not indulge in them personally. Despite this she is closely watched by the Order of Illumination. These zealous Morrowan witch-hunters are adept at finding justifications to destroy notorious Thamarites. As yet, Sybeth Roane has survived their scrutiny. She has the friendship and support of people in surprisingly high places, as her presence is enjoyed by university intelligentsia and noble dilettantes in most major Ordic and Cygnaran cities. She is a frequent visitor to Ceryl and Five Fingers, where she has many contacts among occult and Thamarite communities.

Sybeth has proven to be a formidable wizard in her own right, quite capable

of using magic to defend herself. The Church of Morrow deems her subversive and dangerous but has been unwilling to devote resources to dealing with her, perhaps fearing what such a pursuit might do to their reputation. Instead their own scholars and theologians wage a more civilized war of words with Sybeth, engaging in printed counterarguments among the scholarly circles of major cities.

Whatever her ultimate agenda, Sybeth represents the more seductive face of Thamarite worship, subtly working to convert arcanists to her faith by applying reason and logical persuasion. She is quick to ignore or gloss over the many violent acts, including ritual murders, performed by some people in Thamar's name. She argues that such elements are simply unenlightened examples of her faith. She prefers to focus on Thamar's message of mental freedom and empowerment. She enjoys criticizing those who would persecute members of her faith for inadequate cause and takes particular delight in unearthing hypocrisy in both the Church of Morrow and the mainstream orders of wizardry.