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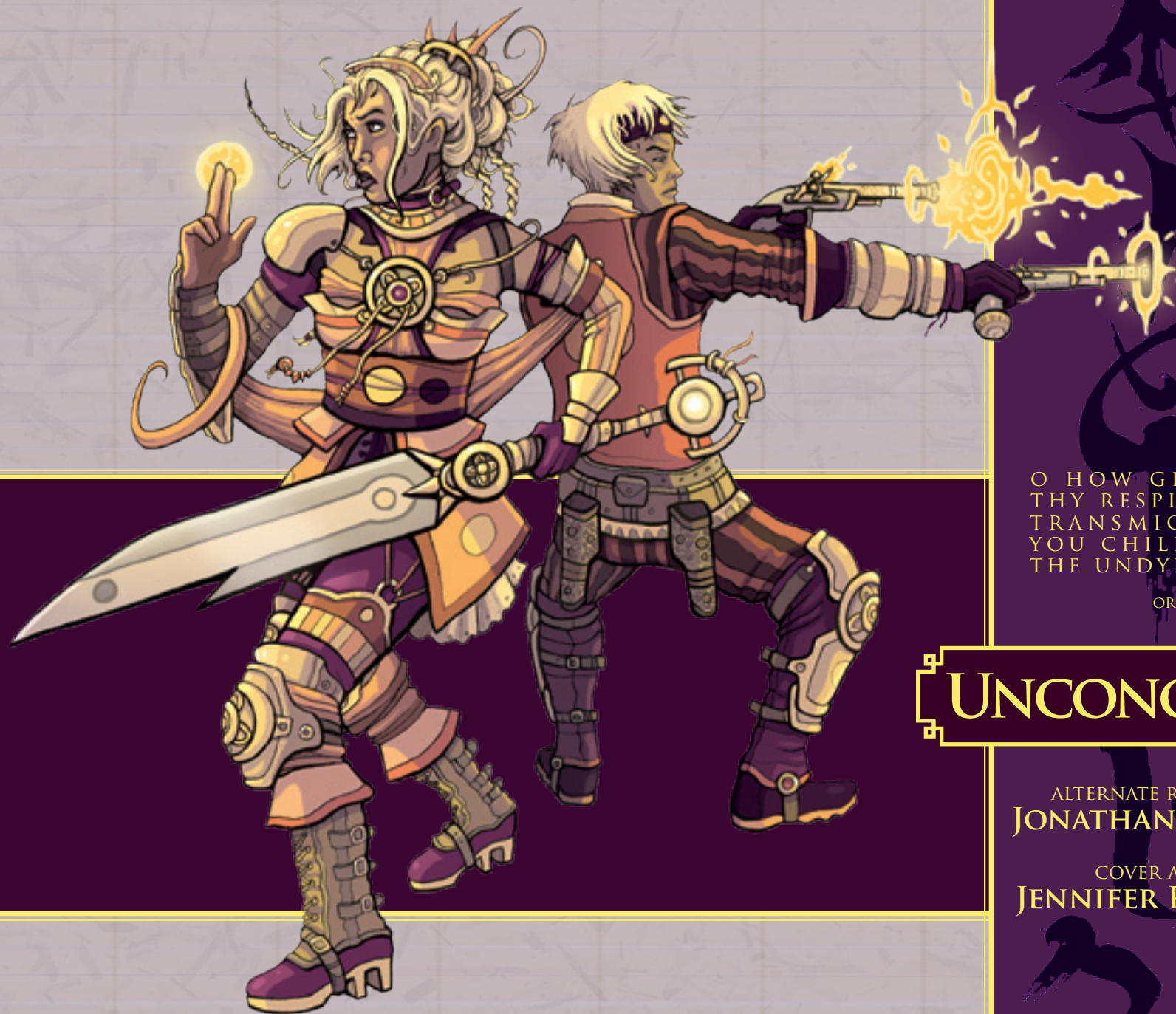
O HOW GLORIOUS
THY RESPLENDANT
TRANSMIGRATION
YOU CHILDREN OF
THE UNDYING SUN,

OR

UNCONQUERED

ALTERNATE RULESET BY
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Unconquered

Unconquered is a fanbook and alternative ruleset for Exalted, a roleplaying game The purpose of the *Anathema Rules* is to use the rich setting and character information in the *Exalted* roleplaying game, but play by a completely different set of rules. These rules are intended to facilitate a syle of play that I've been calling *structured freeform*. This isn't meant to be a fancy label, just a description. The rules provide concrete guidelines for structuring play, but the players are expected to to dectermine "what happens" without relying on dice or comparing numbers. I'm hardly an expert on freeform, but certain aspects of this approach excite me.

Freeform roleplaying relies on a shared understanding of what play is supposed to be like, instead of lengthy written rules. This shared understanding grows deeper over the course of play. Many freeform techniques can be formalized into written rules, making play less freeform but also structures it in interesting ways. I really enjoy designing in a freeform-influenced style and the *Anathema Rules* reflect this interest.

The complex rules of *Exalted* are definitely part of the game's appeal, but the level of density and depth is not for everyone. Since there's no One Right Way to play, this project is an attempt to make *Exalted* work for people who may not be as excited by the "crunch" or who may love crunch but don't necessarily want it all the time.

With the second edition of *Exalted*, additions such as Motivations, Intimacies, Social Combat, and expanded Experience guidelines brought in new ideas. Attempts were made to better support elements of play that didn't involve combat. The *Anathema Rules* focuses extensively on the newer non-combat mechanics, while ignoring most of the combat-related guidelines.

The games that have most influenced the *Anathema Rules* – besides, of course *Exalted* – include *Fudge* (Steffen O'Sullivan), *Nobilis* (Rebecca Sean Borgstrom), *My Life with Master* (Paul Czege), *Dogs in the Vineyard* (Vincent Baker), *The Shadow of Yesterday* (Clinton R. Nixon), *Polaris* (Ben Lehman), *Primetime Adventures* (Matt Wilson), *Scarlet Wake* (Ben O'Neil), and *1001 Nights* (Meguey Baker). As far as I know, all of these are creator-owned games. Most of them were written by game designers who frequent *The Forge* (indie-rpgs.com), a website that promotes creator ownership and self-publishing. If you aren't familiar with every single one of these games, you're missing out on something. They are terrific.

CHARACTERS

I'm gonna walk through character traits to explain how to create characters and how character infromation is invoked during play. When preparing to use the *Anathema Rules*, the players should always make characters as a group, in real-time. Doing this in person is best, but online chat clients help when that's not an option. Each player should focus on developing a single character (these rules do not require a Storyteller), but throwing concepts and trait ideas back and forth is super awesome.

ESSENCE

One of the most basic measurements of an *Exalted* character is their Essence, which indicates their level of supernatural power. In this version of the rules, starting Essence is determined as follows:

0: *Mortals*
1: *Mortal Heroes*
2: *Terrestrial Exalted*
3: *Celestial Exalted*

Unless you have a special kind of story in mind, you don't want to play mortals or even mortal heroes, you want to play the Exalted. In stories about the Exalted, mortals and mortal heroes are often little more than scenery, and no player should be stuck playing scenery. These instructions focus on creating characers who are already members of the newly reborn Solar Exalted (Essence 3). Make adjustments as needed.

BUT IN WHAT ORDER?

There are no hard and fast rules about what order you choose your character's traits. Do whatever seems to work for you. Additionally, your names and concepts may change over the course of character creation. A good plan is to write down ideas for concepts and names before beginning character creation and then, once you've finished, change them to reflect who the character actually ended up becoming.

CASTE & WHAT FOLLOWS

The Solar Exalted are divided into five Castes, based on their social roles during the legendary First Age. Castes help determine characters' initial traits and give the players a general idea of what the characters roles were during the First Age.

- *Dawn* (warrior-strategists)
- *Zenith* (priest-kings)
- *Twilight* (wizard-scholars)
- *Night* (ninja-tricksters)
- *Eclipse* (traveler-ambassadors)

During the initial step of character creation, the group will map out how your characters became who they are now. You will do this by deciding on a number of "character concepts" and names for each character. These concepts and names describe the characters at each stage of their lives.

Concepts

Concepts come in four different varieties and are tied to a character's Essence. Starting Celestial Exalted (including Solars) begin play with three concepts, one for each level of Essence: their *Heroic Concept*, *Exaltation Concept*, and *First Age Concept*. When a Celestial Exalted gains Essence during play, they gain a *Legend Concept*, one for each level of Essence after 3.

Terrestrial Exalted begin play at Essence 2 and have no *First Age Concept* (not having been around then). They gain their first *Legend Concept* once they reach Essence 3.

- *Heroic Concept*: This is a description of how your character distinguished themselves from the seething sea of faceless individuals. It should give all the players a sense of what their life was like before Exaltation. Your heroic concept should contain a contradiction of some variety, something that drips with yummy story potential. Examples include:

  - Spoiled Daughter of a Venerable House
  - Enslaved Gladiator Working Towards Freedom
  - Bandit Preying on the Corrupt Aristocracy
  - Arranged Bride Living Among Foreign Peoples
  - Newly Appointed Priest of an Impoverished Village
  - Scholar Persucuted for Heretical Ideas
  - Reluctant Subject of a Renowned Prophecy
  - Honest Son Inherits a Criminal Organization
  - Opera Star Famous for Cross-Gender Roles
  - Borderlands Horse-Thief Moves to the Capitol

  Since Exalts will be inevitably driven towards violence, just by their very nature, choosing a history of violence (as a soldier, wandering swordsman, assassin, etc.) may provide fewer story hooks and a less well-rounded character in the long run. All Solars have crazy badass kungfu ridiculousness to throw down with, thanks to being reincarnated master-killers. You don't need to justify their martial badassitude. So consider picking a concept that's a bit more unique.

- *Exaltation Concept*: This is a description your character's Exaltation. We know that the character experienced a spiritual and emotional inner journey, but Exaltation is triggered by an extreme situation involving high stress levels. In the midst of a crisis, your character received the powers of a demigod, and these godlike abilities influenced the outcome of the crisis. Each player should come up with a general idea of what crisis triggered their characer's Exaltation. Crisis examples include:

  - Their Merchant Caravan is Ambushed!
  - Their Ship is Caught in the Very Jaws of Death!
  - Their Wicked Uncle Pushes Them Off a Cliff!
  - A Barbarian Horde Advances on Their City!
  - Their Home Region is Being Ravaged by Floods!
  - A Demon Lord Wants to Slay Their Entire Family!
  - They Are Rushed By an Angry Mob of Lepers!
  - A Great Beast is Trying to Eat Them!
  - Their Village is Starving Amidst a Harsh Winter!
  - A Raging Tempest Threatens Their Pirate Fleet!

  After character creation but before play begins, each player will frams and then take on the role of their character during a scene that describes the Exaltation. After the scene is over, the player turns

their crisis into their *Exaltation Concept*, based on how the scene played out. Concept examples include:

- *Protected a Merchant Caravan from Ambush*
- *Steered a Ship Through the Very Jaws of Death*
- *Survived Being Pushed Off the Side of a Mountain*
- *Talked Down an Advancing Barbarian Horde*
- *Saved the Entire Region from Raging Floods*
- *Won the Undying Love of a Demon Lord*
- *Spontaneously Healed an Angry Mob of Lepers*
- *Lived Three Days in the Belly of a Great Beast*
- *Produced a Full Harvest in the Depths of Winter*
- *Subdued the Raging Tempest with a Song*

A better description of how to run Exaltation scenes follows the character creation instructions. For now, all you need is a crisis.

- *First Age Concept*: During the process of Exaltation, each newly reborn Solar (or other Celestial Exalt) receives a supernational vision. This vision includes a glimpse of the time before their reincarnation, during the primordial First Age. The strongest memory, the one that sticks in their mind, is inevitably of some great crime of vanity and arrogance they committed. These crimes are what let to the revolt against the Solars and the Great Curse. Solars did many terrible things, so the most memorable are the most personal, not some mindless buchery. For example, a Solar might have:

  - *Met the Venerable Master on the Road & Slew Him*
  - *Freed a Demon from Her Eternal Imprisonment*
  - *Jealously Executed Every Other Woman in the City*
  - *Plunged the World into Darkness for a Month*

- *Sold My Allegiance for Balor's Faerie Gold*
- *Painted a Masrerpiece with His Children's Blood*
- *Brought the Whole Building Down Around Us*
- *Led an Ill-Fated Expedition into the Underworld*
- *Stole Their Hearts and Kept Them For My Own*
- *And That Was the Last Time We Ever Spoke*

Your character's chief crime is collectively chosen by your fellow players. A Caste provides the general idea (warrior-strategist, priest-king, wizard-scholar, ninja-trickster, or traveler-ambassador) of what they might have been doing back then, but the specifics of the crime are up for grabs. Characters can either embrace their historical identities or run from them. Imagine the story potential in having once been someone you despise! Still, players should not write out characers' past lives at this point. The First Age is a mystery that will be more fully uncovered during the course of play. Having a tantalizing hint of what occured is enough.

- *Legend Concept*: During play, you gain Essence. When you gain Essence, stop right then and write down who your character has become, either who the world knows them to be or how they personally concieve of themselves.

Names

Your character's names, aside from being what people call them, are also expressions of their concepts. Additionally, each name includes a number of capitalized words equal to the Essence level associated with the concept. That may sound confusing, but it's really pretty simple.

- Mortals don't have names, as far as this game is concerned. They may have names among their fellow mortals, but the Exalted simply know them as *that musician*, *the beautiful dancer*, *the master craftsman of Chiaroscuro*, *the beastman chieftan*, or *hey you!*

- **Heroic Name:** Mortal heroes are known by their birth name, since their deeds are impressive enough to gain the notice of rhe Exalted. A birth name is a single, capitalized word. In picking a name for your character, find one that is 1) easily pronounced by the other players and 2) a real word from a real language (though not necessarily a name). Made up fantasy names may seem like a good idea, but they're not. Trust me. This example uses the names *Aeryn* and *Lukka*.

- **Exalted Kenning:** The Terrestrial and Celestial Exalted gain a kenning, a nickname related to their epic deeds or extrodinary attributes. This kenning is made up of two capitalized words and any number of lesser words. When combined with their birth name, the kenning becomes the name by which the Dragon-Blooded or Celestial Exalt is usually known, such as *Aeryn the Corsair Marquessa* or *Lukka Astride-the-Tempest*.

- **First Age Kenning:** The Celestial Exalted gain an additional kenning gained during their Exaltation. This kenning contains three capitalized words (do you see the pattern yet?) and describes who they were during the First Age. Typically, this kenning is closely connected to their initial Memory (described later) and can be appended to their birth name or both of their previous names. For example, a characetr could be called *Aeryn the Corsair Marquessa, Dancer Upon the Threshold* or *Lukka of the Seven Winter Gambit*.

Whenever your character gains a level of Essence, your character will also gain an additional name, a kenning based on their recent deeds.

Virtues & Limit

Each character interprets the four core Virtues (*Compassion*, *Conviction*, *Temperence*, and *Valor*; but not *Deference*) in an individual way. This demonstrates their morals and general personality. For example, Compassion might be interpreted as *Never Abandon Those in Need* or as Treat My Enemies With Honor.

Virtues serve to frame individual scenes. Each space on your character's Undying Bell Chakram is connected to a specific Caste (and their related Excellencies) and their chief Virtue. A piece representing your character is placed on your Caste's space when play begins. You frame scenes around either (1) the Virtue you are currently on or (2) a Virtue that you are moving to. Acting on your current Virtue allows you to stay on that space. Acting on the next Virtue (following the arrows) moves you to it.

Going against one of your Virtues gains you a point of Limit, but it also enables you to move backwards around the Chakram, from sunset to sunrise. Going against your Flawed Virtue gains you 3 points of Limit. Every Solar -- except Eclipses -- gains a point of Limit from demonstrating Deference, which is unnatural for Solars. When you hit 10 Limit, you experience Limit Break, a crisis of Virtue, and descend into the darkness of your Flaw.

It is the GM's job to frame scenes in which characters can demonstrate: 1) their Virtues, 2) their Motivations, or 3) their struggles in choosing between Virtues and Motivations. The GM should vary between these three different types of scenes and choose different characters to focus on each time. In a scene in which the GM is not directly addressing one of your Virtues or Motivations, see if you can address it anyway, making the scene multifaceted and more interesting, but not hogging the spotlight at another character's expense. This earns you experience, gets your character closer to their goals, and is also considered being a good player.

Flaw

You can pick a Flaw from the book if you like, but, under these rules, Flaws are not specifically tied to Virtues.

When you reach Limit Break, your Flaw takes over for at least the remainder of the current scene. You cannot continue around the Undying Bell Chakram to a new Virtue or until you demonstrate your Flaw to the satisfaction of the other players. Treat every new scene as a scene in which your Flaw (instead of a Virtue) dominates until this is resolved.

In order to crawl your way out of your Flaw-induced binge of sin, you must reinterpret one of your Virtues in a radically different way in order to restructure your values and carry on. Once you have satisfactorily demonstrated your Flaw, pick one of the Virtues that has been causing you to gain the Limit (by breaking it) and reinterpret it. For example, your Compassion might change from *Never Abandon Those In Need* might become *Sometimes People Want to Be Left Alone*.

Motivations

These are exactly as normally described, the main purposes that drive your characer. Unlike the advice given in the core rulebook, Motivations don't have to be especially mythic. They also include what, in other games, might be called 'relationship traits': you love someone, you hate someone, or you're in a hierarchical relationship with them of some variety. In any case, Motivations are what gets you out of bed in the morning, whether it's *Killing the Elemental Dragons*, *Obeying My Mother*, or *Seducing Prince Hakka*.

You should start with at least one Motivation but no more than two. Starting Motivations should place your character directly and unavoidably in the path of one or more of the other characters, for good or ill. Other Motivations can be spontaneously created during play.

In general, Motivations serve to frame the overall campaign (long-term Motivations) as well as particular sessions (short-term Motivations). Motivations develop over the course of play, either single sessions,

multiple sessions, or the entire campaign. They inevitably transform into new Motivations, but at different rates based on whether characters are able to make real progress on them or not.

At the end of a scene in which a character has attempted to address one of their Motivations, their player should record a summery of what they were able to accomplish. If they were completely frustrated in their attempt, that's important too and deserves to be written down. These are called Accomplishments.

It is obviously easier to work on *Obeying Mom* than *Killing the Elemental Dragons*. However, depending on the circumstances, the former might end up causing more pain and anguish (and, ultimately, growth) than the later. This game does not pass judgement on your Motivations. However, it does recommend that you try to maintain a variety of Motivations, from daily responsibilities to impossible moon dreams. This fits better with the rules and may even, we dare to suggest, lead to a more complex and fascinating character. But it may not.

If a character ever completes, abandons, or wants to alter their Motivation, another Motivation needs to be created to replace the previous one. This need not happen immediately, since it might take a few scenes for the character to figure out what to do next.

Once a Motivation has been replaced, its associated Accomplishments are converted into Experience -- 1 XP for each. Note that this XP is not gained until the Motivation has been replaced, even if it has been completed or is no longer valid.

Memories

These are your recollections of your past lives. They start out cloudy and become much more focused and specific as play develops. So a mysterious guilt from past disobediance might turn into a complex story of betrayal involving specific historical people. Memories develop as players pursue them.

Memories are important for understanding and learning how to use Wonders, the lost relics of the First Age. Wonders only allow their secrets to be unlocked by those that understand their history or who were inimately connected to them in a past life.

Intimacies

These are your recollections of your past lives. They start out cloudy and become much more focused and specific as play develops. So a mysterious guilt from past disobediance might turn into a complex story of betrayal involving specific historical people. Memories develop as players pursue them.

Memories are important for understanding and learning how to use Wonders, the lost relics of the First Age. Wonders only allow their secrets to be unlocked by those that understand their history or who were inimately connected to them in a past life.

Excellencies

These take the place of Charms, basically describing the cool things you can do. Some of them are bound to be combat-related, but none specifically have to be. In this version of the game, you can fight swords with rhetoric or dancing pretty easily. Excellencies start out with a rating that can increase over

time as you develop your abilities. Like your Name, this rating is measured by the number of capitalized words in the title. For example, you might start off with (1) Sail, which later develops into (2) Unerring Navigation, (3) Expediant Migratory Pattern, (4) Sky-Spanning Solar Harness, and (5) How Perfect the Celestial Chart Memory.

You might notice that, as they develop, they also become more specific and imbued with a unique type of color, as you develop your own style and way of handling things. They also do not develop linearly, like (1) Melee, (2) Stabbing Things, (3) Stabbing Things Better, (4) Stabbing Things More Better, etc. Each new level centers on a different aspect of the level before it, becoming more powerful but also shifting focus. This serves to broaden the overall range of your abilities while narrowing specific instances of them, if that makes any sense.

When creating a character, you start with your five Caste Abilities and Favored Abilities (Solars get 5) as level one Excellencies. If you are starting play as a mortal hero and going to run the Exaltation, you get 3 points to spend on developing your starting Excellences, though none can be above level 2. If you are starting as a Solar Exalt, you get 8 points (3 + 5 more) and none can be above level 3. Feel free to draw inspiration from the Charms listed in the main rulebook (you may have to shorten or lengthen their names), but you can easily make up your own.

Excellences can be used during any scene, but they are most often invoked in conflicts, a special type of scene.

Anima

The rest of these are story- or character-sized pacing/structuring mechanics. Anima structures individual conflicts. Players define a range of Anima effects for their character (originally based on their Caste, but these can change over time). When a character uses Excellencies above level one, their Anima advances a level. Once the character reaches their last Anima level, they have exhausted themselves (run out of Essence, in the original rules) and cannot invoke more. Characters gain new Anima levels (and the effects that go with them) as they grow in power, which is a new thing. This means more powerful characters can use a lot more Excellencies before feeling the burn.

After a conflict, the Anima levels of the participants also determine the scope of the consequences. No Anima indicates a minor consequence, while Anima 5 means the situation of the entire region was likely changed as a result.

Wonders

ESSENCE

CASTE

NAME & CONCEPT

LIMIT

FLAW

& DEFERENCE

TEMPERENCE

CONVICTION

COMPASSION

VALOR

ANIMA

0
1
2
3
4
5

MOTIVATIONS

MEMORIES

WONDERS

INTIMACIES

EXPERIENCE

CASTE EXCELLENCIES & FAVORED EXCELLENCIES

COMPASSION

DEFERENCE

CONVICTION

VALOR

TEMPERANCE

UNDYING BELL CHAKRAM