

THE 6 INEFFABLE LESSONS OF THE HIDDEN MOON

A Fragmented Opera and Scholarly Invitation

*Tomorrow is the New Moon.
Tonight, six nobles ride into the greatest city in the world.*

*They seek vengeance, justice, patronage, and destiny.
They seek the ransom or rescue of family.
They seek to stir the dying ashes of love.
But what you seek is not always what you find.*

*They come to Davfanna Aldrena
the city whose walls challenge the sky.
They come to sit in the Senate,
to gamble, to scheme, to plot.
They come to the quarterhouse of the Hidden Moon,
where they will find what they did not seek.
Lessons. Lessons. Lessons.*

*— from the Aria of Bajinoth Steele,
Minoan-C Manuscript Fragment*

Unfortunately, we do not today have a complete transcript of the seminal ven opera *The Six Ineffable Lessons of the Hidden Moon*. What we do have is a number of manuscript fragments, some of them overlapping, many of them contradictory. Other works quote from *Six Lessons* or recount one of the many plot threads that run through the work. Putting these disparate sources together, we have reconstructed most, but not all, of the opera referred to by its contemporaries as “the Apotheosis of All Art.”

This is what is certain: six nobles, one from each unveiled House, come to Davfanna Aldrena for the autumn session of the Senate. Four are barons; two are roadmen. As such, they do not possess their own castles in the capitol, and are assigned rooms at a quarterhouse — the Hidden Moon House of the title. This provides the conceit upon which the entire opera rests. Each noble comes to the Hidden Moon House with a desperate agenda, and their web of interconnections serves to entangle their agendas and spur those agendas forward to their inevitable conclusions.

But what we do not have are those conclusions. We do not know how the opera ends — outside, of course, the assumption of terrible tragedy. The vast majority of the surviving fragments and extratextual references are to the opera’s first movement. While the scheming, scandal, and blood of the other movements are heavily foreshadowed (and lauded in other works), the specifics are lost to history.

Compiled by Josh Roby, Pacific Institute of Prehistory

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Of course, to academics, the absence of recorded history is not so much a liability as a challenge. Many studied minds such as C. J. Fredricksson, Jess Heinig, and Jessica Kauspedas have written extensively as to how *Six Lessons* “must” have ended. While the insights and deductions found in their papers are not unworthy of our attention, they are still, at best, conjecture. *Six Lessons* sits on the outer bound of our discipline, where the art and science of research becomes something more akin to a game.

All this is why I chose to present this edition of *Six Lessons* in the style of the noted ven researcher John Wick. Mister Wick’s credentials are, of course, beyond reproach, even if his methods may seem slightly out of the ordinary. By explicitly presenting *Six Lessons* as a game, it is simultaneously easier to highlight what gaps exist in our research while at the same time inviting the reader — or, in this case, participant — to better and more fully experience the opera at its most basic, visceral level.

And so this is an invitation of sorts — I have packaged up the presentation materials I created for my seminar and am making them available online for other professors and their students. It’s possible, though highly unlikely, that these materials might also fall into the hands of ven enthusiasts outside of academia, although I find that highly unlikely. But whatever your credentials, I do hope you enjoy playing your version of “the Apotheosis of All Art.”

A reader of any familiarity with ven scholarship will quickly see that the protagonists of *Six Lessons* are all broadly-drawn stereotypes of each blooded house. However, as Kauspedas has pointed out, the stereotypes — or as she calls them, archetypes — serve as a springboard for more nuanced characterization and portrayal of House politics of the time period.

For each protagonist, I have begun with their ‘character announcement’ which, it is believed, the actor would declare as they first took the stage. Thereafter I have endeavored to translate the dramatis personae of the opera into the clever game mechanics of Mr. Wick. In the interests of full disclosure, as I planned to use these materials in my upper-division seminar, the students of which might not be familiar with Wick’s work, I attempted to lay out the characters’ mechanics in as clear a format as possible. My apologies to any purists who might take exception to my edits, which were entirely of good intention.

As C. J. Fredricksson points out, thanks to the ambiguity in ven pronouns, we do not even know the genders of most of the principals. While Maura Burghe must be female and Torr Adrente must be male, the others’ identities are

a matter of conjecture. However, it is a significant stretch of the imagination to assume, as Fredricksson argues, that this was an intentional choice on the part of the author and that the parts were played by both men and women. I must reject this conjecture; we simply do not know which of these characters were male and which female. I leave it to your players to decide for your table.

Of course, our understanding of the opera’s antagonists is one of scholarship’s greatest failings. We have only a handful of character notes for each of these, which I have transcribed as potential aspects for each character.

Beyond this, we have no greater insight — it is even uncertain if any of these characters gave the protagonists assistance or hindrance, acting as helpers or adversaries for the six nobles of the Hidden Moon quarterhouse.

Their strengths and weaknesses — what Wick terms their virtues — are an open question. Again, I leave these determinations up to you as Narrator and to your players’ Wisdom risks. As you determine each antagonists’ virtues and aspects, fill them in on the blanks provided.

ABAZAI YVARAI

BLOODED OF THE FOX

I am Abazai Yvarai; my name means "cherry blossoms fall." Some may say that I am a minor noble commanding a single barony, but that is a temporary state of affairs. My brother, Baron Lonor Yvarai, has been kidnapped by Duke Vangalio Mwrr. I have come to Davfanna Aldrena to deliver the ransom. My mother also suggested that, if I could rescue my brother, I could just *keep* the ransom...

DECLARE YOUR NAME

If your name applies, add one die to your pool.

Abazai — "Cherry Blossoms Fall"

ASSERT YOUR VIRTUES

Add the rank of one Virtue to your pool.

2	3	2	5	3	0
STRENGTH	CUNNING	COURAGE	BEAUTY	WISDOM	PROWESS

INVOKE YOUR ASPECTS

Add 3 dice for one appropriate aspect. First use is free; one style thereafter.

- "Why in the world would I carry a sword?"
- Eyes Wide Open
- Court Gossip
- My Reputation Precedes Me

You may also spend one style to tag your opponent's aspect for two dice.

EXPLOIT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Spend 1 Style for +2 dice to protect Contacts & Friends

Gain +3 dice whenever you endanger your Friends

My schoolmate, Wyel Myrr, has knowledge I respect.

My friend Gryndil Thorne helped me through a rough time.

The last time I crossed paths with Halia Thorne, we had words.

CALL YOUR VASSALS

Add their rank to appropriate risks. Invoke Aspects once per game.

Geef, my Valet (Valet-2) [Clever Decorum]

The Boys (Spy Network 2) [Underhanded Well-Financed]

YOU CAN:

- Perform physical feats with Strength
- Find clues and lie with Cunning
- Face danger with Courage
- Persuade and create with Beauty
- Know things with Wisdom
- Fight and find advantages with Prowess



TRADE

- 6 foxwine
- 4 marble (stone)
- 4 herbs
- 6 clothes of rank-3 quality
- ...all of which are for the ransom

VOTES

- 1 of your own
- 3 by proxy from your mother
- Technically, Lonor controls 2 votes...

DEVOTIONS

- Talia Yvarai 1
- Manna Renay 1
- Shah Eshu 1

DOSAJEE STEELE

BLOODED OF THE ELK

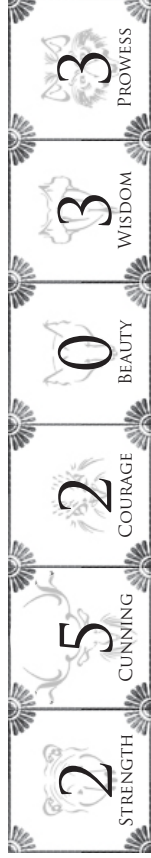
DECLARE YOUR NAME

If your name applies, add one die to your pool.

Dosajee — “in the Suaven I trust.”

ASSERT YOUR VIRTUES

Add the rank of one Virtue to your pool.



INVOKE YOUR ASPECTS

Add 3 dice for one appropriate aspect. First use is free; one style thereafter.

- “You Can Trust Me.”
- Reserved
- Seventh (Overlooked) Son of Seventh (Disregarded) Son
- Always Plan Ahead

You may also spend one style to tag your opponent’s aspect for two dice.

EXPLOIT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Spend 1 Style for +2 dice to protect Contacts & Friends

Gain +3 dice whenever you endanger your Friends

My first lover was Maura Burghe.

I fought side-by-side with my friend Torr Adrente in the Usurper War.

I haven’t see my aunt Chayan Burghe for some time.

REVERE YOUR RELICS

Add their rank to appropriate risks.

The Sword of Shara Thayl (Relic-3)

I am Dosajee Steele; my name means “in the Suaven I trust.” I am a roadman in the service of my father, Count Haroon Steele. I am also a devotee of the suaven Shara Thayl, a minor suaven venerated by my family and few others. I have received a vision from Shara Thayl telling me to take on the black as a vashna, a Roadman of the Senate. In order to do that, however, I need the sponsorship of a Duke. But Shara has laid the way for me: Duchess Chayan Burghe is my aunt.

YOU CAN:

- Perform physical feats with Strength
- Find clues and lie with Cunning
- Face danger with Courage
- Persuade and create with Beauty
- Know things with Wisdom
- Fight and find advantages with Prowess



TRADE

4 actions

VOTES

4 by proxy from my father, who ordered me to abstain in all but the most greivous affairs

DEVOTIONS

Shara Thayl 3

BLESSINGS

Spend 1 Style to activate effect. Use once per Season.

The Vow (swear mutual promise; break promise, lose all style)

Moving the Pawn (give a ven a free aspect of a specific task)

No Secret is Safe from Me (see opponent’s wagers)

GRYNDIL THORNE

BLOODED OF THE FALCON

DECLARE YOUR NAME

If your name applies, add one die to your pool.

Gryndil — “illuminating the darkness”

ASSERT YOUR VIRTUES

Add the rank of one Virtue to your pool.



INVOKE YOUR ASPECTS

Add 3 dice for one appropriate aspect. First use is free; one style thereafter.

“Technically, it’s not supposed to work like this...”

Alive in the Open Air

The Roadman is Everyone’s Man

Untrusting

You may also spend one style to tag your opponent’s aspect for two dice.

EXPLOIT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Spend 1 Style for +2 dice to protect Contacts & Friends

Gain +3 dice whenever you endanger your Friends

I escorted Torr Adrente through his father’s lands.

I convinced my friend Abazai Yvarai not to kill Honor Yvarai.

I convinced Honor Yvarai not to kill my friend Abazai Yvarai.

My mother is Countess Isla Thorne.

I am Gryndil Thorne; my name means “illuminating the darkness.” I am a roadman with no liege, nominally serving the House of the Falcon. In my travels, I stumbled across a Secret Army raised by Duchess Chayan Burghe. I have evidence of the army’s existence, which could destroy the Duchess. However, that evidence is sorcerous and illegal. Not to mention, the Duchess is very powerful. Do I implicate her, blackmail her, sell her secrets?

YOU CAN:

Perform physical feats with Strength

Find clues and lie with Cunning

Face danger with Courage

Persuade and create with Beauty

Know things with Wisdom

Fight and find advantages with Prowess



TRADE

1 action

VOTES

none

DEVOTIONS

Ashalim Avendi 2

The Sinjin 1

ARTIFACT

Spend an Injury of Blood to activate; carries DOOM.

The Five-Sided Mirror (can see where any of its florets are left; one overlooks the army)

BLESSING

Spend 1 Style to activate effect. Use once per season.

The Cloak Deceivuous (masquerade as a faceless figure until dawn or until you lie)

MAURA BURGHE BLOODED OF THE BEAR

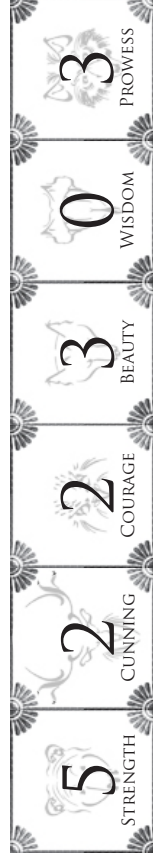
DECLARE YOUR NAME

If your name applies, add one die to your pool.

Maura — “the red widow”

ASSERT YOUR VIRTUES

Add the rank of one Virtue to your pool.



INVOKE YOUR ASPECTS

Add 3 dice for one appropriate aspect. First use is free; one style thereafter.

- “Do You Know Who My Father Is?”
- Not in Charge, Not my Fault.
- Impetuous
- Heartbroken: Duke Vangalio Mwrr

You may also spend one style to tag your opponent’s aspect for two dice.

EXPLOIT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Spend 1 Style for +2 dice to protect Contacts & Friends

Gain +3 dice whenever you endanger your Friends

I was Dosajee Steele’s first lover.

My friend Wyel Mwrr is our rather boring neighbor.

My husband insisted I visit with the virtuous Torr Adrente.

I had a Romance with Duke Vangalio Mwrr.

CALL YOUR VASSALS

Add their rank to appropriate risks. Invoke Aspects once per game.

Ganna (Maid-3) [Clever Saucy Incurrigible]

I am Maura Burghe; my name means “the red widow.” I am pregnant with Duke Vangalio Mwrr’s child. My husband, Baron Kyocera, is deep into the fall to Solace. He can’t possibly have been the father, but he can certainly seek Revenge if he finds out. Vangalio has recognized his bastards before; perhaps he will do so for me. Of course, I am also Heartbroken from the affair that he broke off with no warning. Can I refrain from killing him long enough to obtain his protection for me and my child?

YOU CAN:

Perform physical feats with Strength

Find clues and lie with Cunning

Face danger with Courage

Persuade and create with Beauty

Know things with Wisdom

Fight and find advantages with Prowess



TRADE

3 wine

2 spices

3 pair rank-3 boots

VOTES

2 by proxy from my husband Kyocera

DEVOTIONS

Talia Yvarai 1

Manna Renay 1

Margh Bowen 1

TORR ADRENTE

BLOODED OF THE WOLF

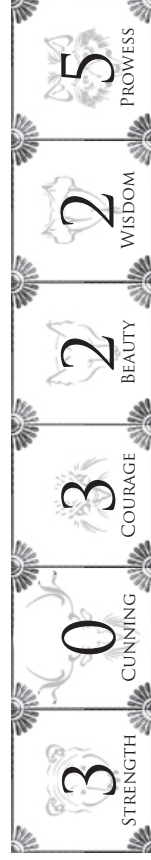
DECLARE YOUR NAME

If your name applies, add one die to your pool.

Torr — “iron does not bend”

ASSERT YOUR VIRTUES

Add the rank of one Virtue to your pool.



INVOKE YOUR ASPECTS

Add 3 dice for one appropriate aspect. First use is free; one style thereafter.

- “I Hate the City.”
- Youth Spent in Swordsman School
- Honorable
- My Wife is My Soul

You may also spend one style to tag your opponent’s aspect for two dice.

EXPLOIT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Spend 1 Style for +2 dice to protect Contacts & Friends

Gain +3 dice whenever you endanger your Friends

I patrolled my father’s roads with Gryndil Thorne.

I carried my friend Dosajee Steele through the war.

Maura Burghe is married to my uncle... unfortunately.

My uncle Kyocera asked me to watch after his wife.

CALL YOUR VASSALS

Add their rank to appropriate risks. Invoke Aspects once per game.

The Iron Garrison (Personal Guard-2) [Vigilant Loyal]

I am Baron Torr Adrente; my name means “iron does not bend.” I am seeking revenge against the Baron Lonor Yvarai, who has done what Foxes do and slept with my wife. My liege, the Countess Isla, has given me a sealed letter to be read to the Senate, giving her permission for the Revenge. Through no fault of my own (of course), the seal has come loose. I can’t present it to the Senate like this — they’ll think I read it!

YOU CAN:

Perform physical feats with Strength

Find clues and lie with Cunning

Face danger with Courage

Persuade and create with Beauty

Know things with Wisdom

Fight and find advantages with Prowess



TRADE

2 metals

1 lumber

1 action

VOTES

1 of your own

6 by proxy from your father

2 by proxy from your brother

DEVOTIONS

Falven Dyr 1

Ashalim Avendi 1

Var Banin 1

ARTIFACT

Carries DOOM.

Bloodsword (adds two dice to any swordplay)

WYEL MYRR

BLOODED OF THE SERPENT

I am Wyel Mwrr; my name means "I pledge." A minor noble of a single barony, I found an underground ruin in my lands. I can't possibly explore it, and now that it's opened, orks are pouring out. I left my Master of the Road to delay the orks and have come to Davfanna Aldrena for help — and I need significant help, the help of a duke or duchess. But who can I trust enough to ask... and what promises can I extract from them by asking?

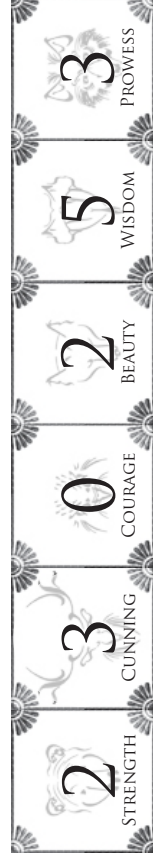
DECLARE YOUR NAME

If your name applies, add one die to your pool.

Maura — "the red widow"

ASSERT YOUR VIRTUES

Add the rank of one Virtue to your pool.



INVOKE YOUR ASPECTS

Add 3 dice for one appropriate aspect. First use is free; one style thereafter.

- "You're mistaken. I happen to know..."
- Does Not Suffer Fools
- Insistent
- Self-Sufficient

You may also spend one style to tag your opponent's aspect for two dice.

EXPLOIT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Spend 1 Style for +2 dice to protect Contacts & Friends

Gain +3 dice whenever you endanger your Friends

My schoolmate, Abazai Yvarai, did not study very much.

My neighbor and friend Maura Burghe is something of a slut.

This makes her husband, Kycocera Adrente, a fool.

YOU CAN:

Perform physical feats with Strength

Find clues and lie with Cunning

Face danger with Courage

Persuade and create with Beauty

Know things with Wisdom

Fight and find advantages with Prowess



TRADE

3 herbs

2 metals

2 poisons

1 action

VOTES

1 of your own

RITUALS

Spend 1 Herbs and an Injury of Blood to activate effect.

The Eye (identify sorcery and artifacts)

The Oath (bind ven to common purpose)

The Curse (curse ven: always or never do one specific thing)

DEVOTIONS

Tyane Bran 2

Wyel Valar 1

BLESSING

Spend 1 Style to activate effect. Use once per season.

Serpent's Glare (use Wisdom to intimidate)

Get Style Points by:

1. Make Life Hard On Yourself
2. Play Up Another PC or NPC
3. Convert 2 wagers to 1 Style

Spend Style Points to:

1. Establish/veto simple facts
2. Invoke your aspects (+3 dice)
3. Tag others' aspects (+2 dice)
4. Compel others' aspects
5. Create scene aspects (2 style)
6. At Narrator's Offer



DOSAJEE STEELE
DEVOTEE ROADMAN

Get Style Points by:

1. Make Life Hard On Yourself
2. Play Up Another PC or NPC
3. Convert 2 wagers to 1 Style

Spend Style Points to:

1. Establish/veto simple facts
2. Invoke your aspects (+3 dice)
3. Tag others' aspects (+2 dice)
4. Compel others' aspects
5. Create scene aspects (2 style)
6. At Narrator's Offer



MAURA BURGHE
TROPHY WIFE

Get Style Points by:

1. Make Life Hard On Yourself
2. Play Up Another PC or NPC
3. Convert 2 wagers to 1 Style

Spend Style Points to:

1. Establish/veto simple facts
2. Invoke your aspects (+3 dice)
3. Tag others' aspects (+2 dice)
4. Compel others' aspects
5. Create scene aspects (2 style)
6. At Narrator's Offer



ABAZAI YVARAI
RANSOMING BARON

Get Style Points by:

1. Make Life Hard On Yourself
2. Play Up Another PC or NPC
3. Convert 2 wagers to 1 Style

Spend Style Points to:

1. Establish/veto simple facts
2. Invoke your aspects (+3 dice)
3. Tag others' aspects (+2 dice)
4. Compel others' aspects
5. Create scene aspects (2 style)
6. At Narrator's Offer



GRYNDIL THORNE
WANDERING ROADMAN

Get Style Points by:

1. Make Life Hard On Yourself
2. Play Up Another PC or NPC
3. Convert 2 wagers to 1 Style

Spend Style Points to:

1. Establish/veto simple facts
2. Invoke your aspects (+3 dice)
3. Tag others' aspects (+2 dice)
4. Compel others' aspects
5. Create scene aspects (2 style)
6. At Narrator's Offer



TORR ADRENTE
SEEKING REVENGE

Get Style Points by:

1. Make Life Hard On Yourself
2. Play Up Another PC or NPC
3. Convert 2 wagers to 1 Style

Spend Style Points to:

1. Establish/veto simple facts
2. Invoke your aspects (+3 dice)
3. Tag others' aspects (+2 dice)
4. Compel others' aspects
5. Create scene aspects (2 style)
6. At Narrator's Offer



WYEL MWRR
SORCERER IN NEED

DUKE VANGALIO MWRR

Maurá's Ex-Lover • Honor's Kidnapper



4 _____ Solace-tall and lean

3 _____ Collects wives — his own and others

3 _____ Carries no sword

2 _____ _____

2 _____ _____

0 _____ _____

Notes _____

DUCHESS CHAYAN BURGHE

Gryndil's Culpriť • Dosajee's Aunt • Wyel's Rival



4 _____ Big, Bold, Beautiful

3 _____ Ambitious

3 _____ Host of competent vassals

2 _____ _____

2 _____ _____

0 _____ _____

Notes _____

COUNTESS ISLA THORNE

Gryndil's Mother • Torr's Liege



4 _____ A Political Falcon

3 _____ Honest and Genuine Noble

3 _____ Wears her Travel Scars Proudly

2 _____ _____

2 _____ _____

0 _____ _____

Notes: _____

Notes _____



BARON LONOR YVARAI

Abazai's Brother • Torr's Enemy



- 4 _____ Notorious Womanizer
 - 3 _____ Prat, Fool, Nitwit... at least, in public...
 - 3 _____ Carries a Sword as Fashion Accessory
 - 2 _____ _____
 - 2 _____ _____
 - 0 _____ _____
- Notes _____

HALIA THORNE

Wye's Master of the Road



- 4 _____ Rough and Tumble
 - 3 _____ Grey Eyes, Red Hair
 - 3 _____ Wears a Yellow Scarf
 - 2 _____ _____
 - 2 _____ _____
 - 0 _____ _____
- Notes _____

BARON KYOCERA ADRENTTE

Maura's Husband • Dosajee's Rival • Torr's Uncle



- 4 _____ Trailing Altruia (Solace)
 - 3 _____ Hoarse, Whispy Voice (Solace)
 - 3 _____ High Priest of Taken Steele
 - 2 _____ _____
 - 2 _____ _____
 - 0 _____ _____
- Notes _____

BAJINOTH STEELE

Duke Vangalio's Advisor



- 4 _____ Solace-Silver Hair
 - 3 _____ Known Sorcerer
 - 3 _____ Wide, Staring Eyes
 - 2 _____ _____
 - 2 _____ _____
 - 0 _____ _____
- Notes _____

DEVELOPMENTS

As noted above, while the first movement of the opera is the most established, researchers have unearthed fragments of the later movements. Additionally, later sources have made oblique references to plot developments from which we can deduce the most basic outlines. However, not all of these accounts are consistent with each other, leaving us with multiple possibilities as to what occurs in the middle of the opera. However, I would be remiss in my scholarship if I did not include these fragments.

First, I have listed the character notes for each protagonist that seems to have been their stumbling blocks or their downfalls. In Mr. Wick's terminology, these are their aspects' compels. I found it useful to have them in all in one place.

I have also included potential plot threads culled from various sources as suggestions to the Narrator. It is quite possible that your players will take the rope they have already been given and hang themselves quite handily; however, if they require some prompting in how tragic ven opera should be, these suggestions may be employed. No single suggestion below relies on any other suggestion being used, but some suggestions will amplify each other's effects. Please do not, as the Narrator, feel obliged to include every single suggestion (or any). These are merely here for your convenience and as history's faint echoes, barely audible to the academics of today.

ABAZAI YVARAI

- ☛ Why Would I Carry a Sword
- ☛ My Reputation Precedes Me

Bajinoth Steele, Duke Vangalio's seneschal, approaches Abazai and suggests that if Lonor was to die, Abazai could keep the ransom *and* claim the brother's lands. It just has to look like an accident, and not the fault of the Duke...

DOSAJEE STEELE

- ☛ Seventh (Overlooked) Son
- ☛ Reserved

A high priest of Talten Steele (in some sources, Baron Kyocera Adrente), crosses paths with Dosajee and immediately falls into a stupor. He makes quite a scene, screaming that "that ven" cannot be allowed into the Senate hall or else dire portents will befall all ven everywhere.

Alternately, Chayan asks Dosajee to get his hands on a particularly troubling mirror at his quarterhouse.

GRYNDIL THORNE

- ☛ Roadman is Everyone's Man
- ☛ Untrusting

Gryndil's mother, Countess Isla Thorne, approaches the roadman with a request: keep the Duchess Chayan's secret, for the good of all ven civilization. No, she doesn't say why — just trust Mother.

MAURA BURGHE

- ☛ Impetuous
- ☛ Heartbroken:Vangalio

Maura's husband, who she ostensibly left back at home, is in fact in the capitol. By this point, Maura's pregnancy is beginning to show. If he sees her, there will be hell to pay.

Alternately, Halia Thorne appears in Davfanna Aldrena and asks Maura to introduce her to Chayan Burghe. Most irregular...

TORR ADRENTE

- ☛ Honorable
- ☛ My Wife is My Soul

The letter is read before it reaches the Senate, and the reader finds that Countess Isla calls Torr a fool and a child and withholds her permission. Now Torr has a choice: (a) call off the revenge, (b) be embarrassed before the whole Senate, or (c) forge a new letter...

Alternately, Bajinoth Steele may approach Torr if Abazai flinches at his proposal. Or he may contact them both.

WYEL MWRR

- ☛ Does Not Suffer Fools
- ☛ Insistent
- ☛ Self-Sufficient

Halia Thorne, Wyel's Master of the Road who found the underground ruin, appears in Davfanna Aldrena, against orders. She has abandoned Wyel's service in all but name and plans to sell the ruin's location to the Duchess Chayan Burghe. She asks Maura, the only other Bear she knows, to make introductions.

THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD MOVEMENTS

While there is hardly any consensus, more than one source suggests that *Six Lessons* had three major movements. This is somewhat short for an opera, especially an opera as highly praised as this one. It is possible that there were also minor movements between the three major movements, or that there were four or even five major movements. By no means should the Narrator feel constrained to the three movements outlined below; there is absolutely no historical certainty that the opera proceeded in exactly this fashion.

The first and most certain movement takes place at the Hidden Moon quarterhouse as the six nobles arrive in Davfanna Aldrena. The order that the nobles arrive in is given differently in different sources; I suggest the Narrator ask the players who arrives in what order and play it by ear from there. While at the quarterhouse, the protagonists' network of previous relationships allow them to portray their agendas and begin to seek out alliances for the sometimes dirty work they plan on doing in the city.

The first movement ends when a herald from the castle of Chayan Burghe arrives at the Hidden Moon quarterhouse, announcing a gala party that the Duchess is throwing that night for Duke Vangalio Mwrr, to commemorate his newly-written opera. Not all of the protagonists may choose to attend, and there is some evidence that four or fewer go to the party. Nevertheless, you need not fear whether your players all head to the party or split up, with some pursuing darker deeds while nearly every ven in the city is distracted. Neither possibility should pose any great difficulty.

The third movement is the least supported by surviving documentation; this is the opening Senate session the next day. It is uncommon for operas to portray actual Senate proceedings; a half-century previous, it was considered scandalous to show the sacred Senate on the profane stage. However, at the time of the opera's writing, these attitudes were changing, and it may have been that the unblinking consideration of the Senate as a venue for drama was what won the opera its lasting

reputation. Whether or not your game gets to the Senate should not concern you, however: merely the reminder that the sun will rise and the Senate will meet should spur the protagonists forward.

As mentioned above, there very well may be additional movements, minor and major, of which we no longer have record. Olivia Kauspedas is very correct that it would be in keeping with ven opera's conventions that the story found its conclusion at the Hidden Moon quarterhouse where all the plots began. However, absolutely no record of any such movement has been found, and no mention of such a movement occurs in lasting documentation. As with the Senate movement, was this the break with convention that set *Six Lessons* apart, or is our vision backwards over such stretches of time simply too weak and faint to see what was?

OF QUARTERHOUSES AND PROXIES

Six Lessons takes place during a curious time of ven politics, when quarterhouses and proxies dominated the Senate landscape. Because not every player will be acquainted with these oddities of history, I will present them, in brief, here.

Approximately thirty years prior, in the wake of an alleged conspiracy hatched by the Blooded of the Elk, the Senate voted to prevent the Earls from hosting the lower nobility of their own House. This had been the way of things for all of living memory: each blooded House would see to its members' needs, often resulting in the members of each House socializing exclusively with their own. Such a gathering the day before the Senate allowed the Earls considerable influence over the votes of the barons and counts of their House. Evidently, the possibility of the Elks acting as one coordinated political body was dangerous enough for the other houses to abdicate their ability to do the same.

However, this created a problem. Few counts and no barons maintained castles within Davfanna Aldrena, and in order for the Senate to function, all of these nobles required housing in the city. The Senate bestowed the Dukes' Council with stewardship over any unclaimed property within the city and charged it with finding space for the lower nobility. Thus began the phenomenon of the quarterhouse. The Senate maintained a number of manor houses and castles within the city and assigned incoming nobles rooms within them. The Dukes

(and the Dukes' staffs) monitored each other to prevent too many members of a single House from staying in the same quarterhouse. The stereotypical if not usual result was that each castle would host one noble of each house.

Of minor but amusing linguistic concern is the term itself, which I have rendered as "quarterhouses" to preserve its double meaning. The nobles who stayed in the quarterhouses maintained that the name was derived from the fact that they were only used four times annually, once per quarter. However, the upper nobility had a less complimentary etymology: the Senate's manors and castles were where the barons were quartered, as if they were common soldiers.

This disdain for the lower nobility was one of many reasons for the system of votes-by-proxy that came into vogue around the same time. Many nobles found reasons not to attend Senate: matters to deal with at home, studies and gambits that required attention, avoiding the perceived shame of staying in a quarterhouse, or simple disinterest in Senate politics. These nobles would bestow their votes onto others, handing over carefully-worded letters that empowered the bearer to vote in the noble's name. Barons often sent their single votes off to the Senate, and occasionally a lowly baron or even a roadman would arrive in the city bearing the votes of ten nobles.

More rarely, greater nobles would bestow their wealth of votes on their vassals. This did allow estab-

lished nobles to spend more time managing their lands, and was often used as a means of introducing young nobles to politics in a moderately controlled fashion. A Marquis' son, newly claiming status as a Baron, might normally be ignored in the Senate, but not if he wielded his father's votes as well as his own — at least for this session. Votes-by-proxy also allowed Senators an increased flexibility to trade votes as political favors, and it was not uncommon for one Senator's votes to be split on both sides of an issue — because half of his votes had been bought by one side and the second half bought by the other.

Sadly, these curious artifacts of history were short-lived. The Fox-Wolf alliance twenty years later saw the quarterhouses skewed out of their original purpose and the votes-by-proxy abused to a horrific extent. The Senate quickly struck down these practices before another strategic alliance could amass even more power and elect a new emperor.

FEWER THAN SIX PLAYERS

My “Mysteries of Shanri” seminar is attended by five dedicated students and one whose idea of academic rigor is buying, but not necessarily reading, the assigned texts, and whose attendance is spotty at best. I mention this only to illustrate that, when you sit down to play through your version of *Six Lessons*, you may come up short on players. Therefore, you may need to remove some of the protagonists from play.

There is actually historical basis for doing this. For instance, some records of *Six Lessons* maintain that Chayan Burghe and Vangalio Mwrr constitute lessons of their own, and make no mention of Wyel Mwrr or Maura Burghe.

I recommend the following sets of protagonists according to the availability of players. It is quite possible that other combinations are just as viable; I leave this as an exercise for the reader.

Six Players: Use all six protagonists.

Five Players: Use Wyel Mwrr as an NPC; drop Halia Thorne entirely.

Four Players: Use Maura Burghe as an NPC; drop Dosajee Steele and Halia Thorne.

Three Players #1: Feature as PCs Abazai Yvarai, Gryndil Thorne, and Torr Adrente; use Maura and Wyel as NPCs. Drop Dosajee, Halia, and Kyocera entirely.

Three Players #2: Feature as PCs Maura Burghe, Dosajee Steele, and Torr Adrente; drop Wyel, Abazai, Gryndil, Isla, and Halia.

Two Players #1: Feature Abazai Yvarai and Torr Adrente as PCs. Use as NPCs Maura and Wyel. Drop Dosajee, Gryndil, Isla, and Halia.

Two Players #2: Feature as PCs Maura Burghe and Torr Adrente; use as NPCs Abazai and Dosajee. Drop Wyel, Chayan, Halia, Isla, and Gryndil.

Two Players #3: Feature Gryndil Thorne and Dosajee Steele as PCs. Use Abazai, Torr, and Maura as NPCs. Make Chayan and Vangalio married.

ABOUT PROFESSOR ROBY

It isn't really research, per se, but I've been known to dabble in writing fiction as well. The same sorts of things that I enjoy in the stories of the ven I often find dominating my writing. Swordplay, romance, sorcery, intrigue: these are my mainstays, and chances are if you're reading this, you share my fancy for the idiom.

If you've found any enjoyment in *Six Lessons*, do me a favor and visit my website rooksbridge.com, (you can just click on the URL) where you'll find some fiction I think you'll enjoy. The Rooksbridge stories are available as PDF downloads, as mp3 audiobooks, and as print books. What's more, the first story, *Dirty Work*, is free for the taking.

I've also written some roleplaying games, but they're about as far from the ven as you're likely to get: steam-powered spaceships and moose-riding freedom fighters. In any case, they're available at kallistipress.com.

If you hold your own *Six Lessons* seminar, I'd love to hear about it. I blog at kallistipress.com, and can be reached via email through the address profroby@kallistipress.com.

Thanks for reading me drone about myself, and I hope you enjoy *Six Lessons*!

— Josh Roby
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