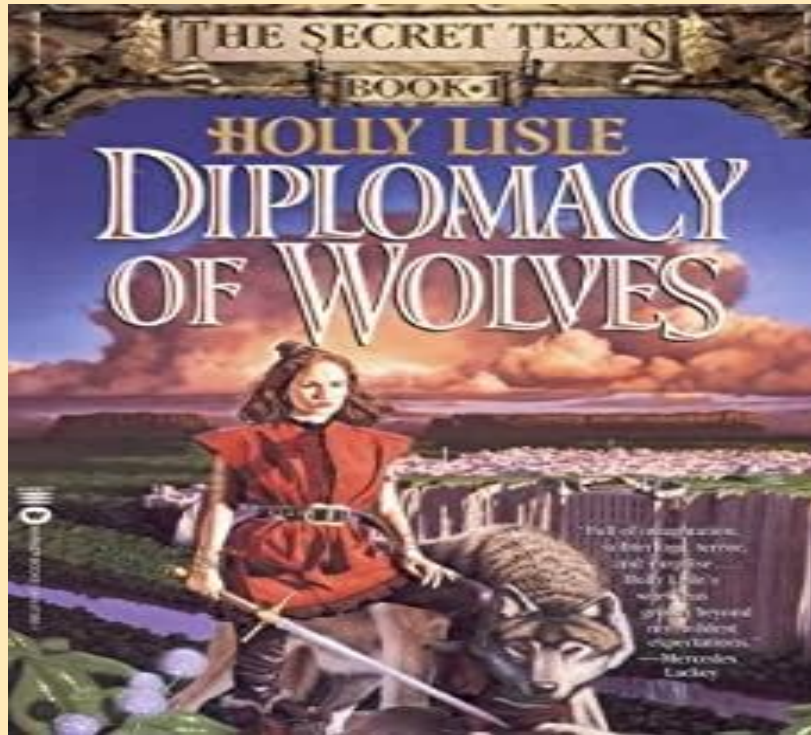


The Secret Texts Trilogy



On the world of Matrin, a thousand years ago, two great factions of mages warred. The Dragons, terrible in their power, who snuffed the lives of men as easily as ants to fuel their earthshaking magics, and the noble Falcons whose god and code forbade them to sacrifice humans or even animals, anything but their own selves. The seas boiled, the land was forever blighted and Scarred, the maps had to be rewritten and in the end, both sides perished.

Since that time, magic has been harshly forbidden, as have all people and things touched by magic. Though, as in many a world, there is one rule for the people and one for the aristocracy, provided nothing is done in broad daylight.

Kait Galweigh, daughter of one of the largest and most powerful noble houses in the world, aspiring diplomat and secret werewolf (sorry, Karnee) is assigned as bodyguard/chaperone to her cousin Tuli for her wedding into the Dokteerak clan, when her enhanced hearing lets her overhear the Dokteeraks plotting with her

family's mortal enemies, the Sabir, to destroy her house utterly. She flees to sound the alarm, only barely escaping and then only with the help of another Karnee she is distressed to learn is the Sabir heir, Ry.

The Galweighs send out their armies and marshall their secret wizards, called Wolves, to strike back and rescue Tuli. However, this was part of the Sabir's plan, to betray the Dokteerak, use their armies to pin down and destroy the Galweigh forces while they struck at their enemy's undefended heart.

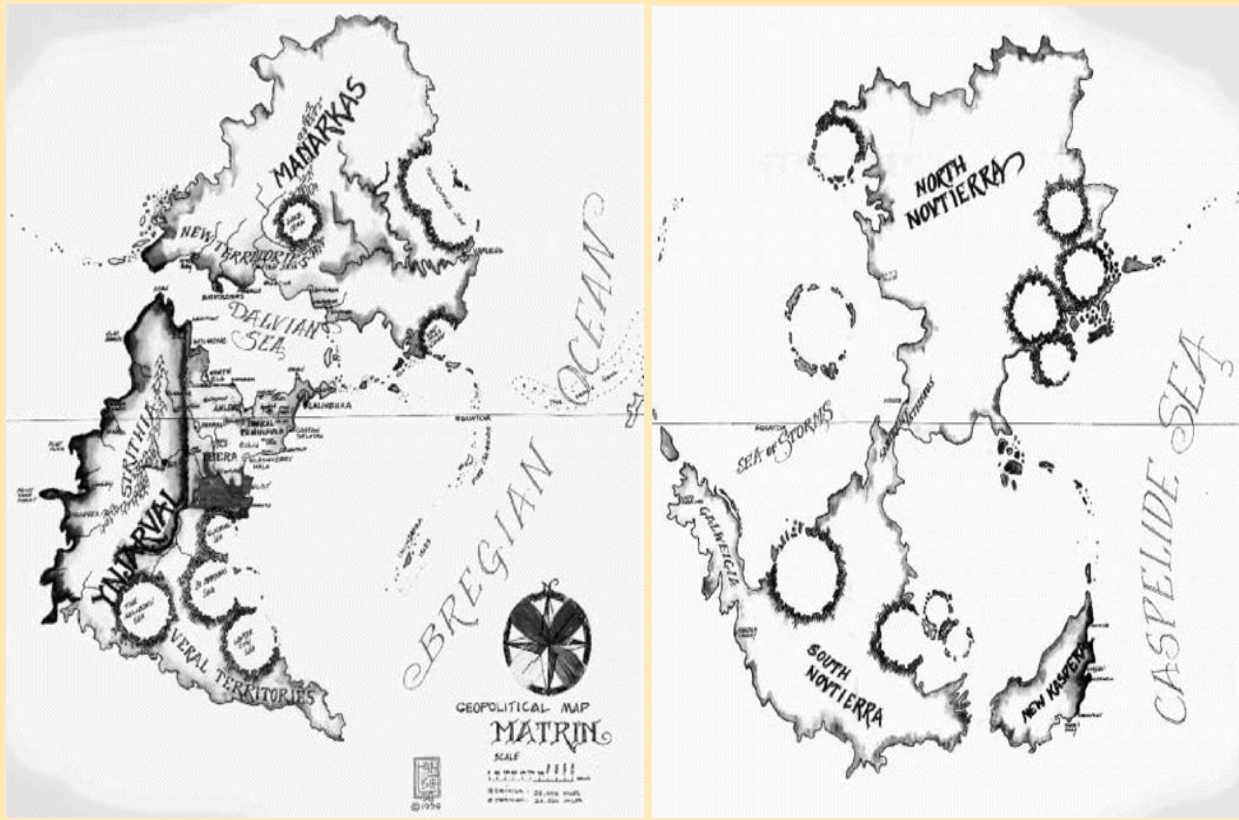
All hostile magic creates a backlash on the caster, *rewah*, which can be partially deflected onto prepared animal or human sacrifices, as the Wolves of both sides struck simultaneously, the *rewah* grew in strength and both families' Wolves were all but destroyed. Besides this, the burst of magic awakened the ancient Mirror of Souls, and one girl, Danya Galweigh, a hostage tortured, raped and used as a sacrifice by the Sabir, is herself mutated (Scarred) into a horrible monster and teleported far far away. Her unborn child is also affected, but in subtler ways.

Thus do the lost Dragons and Falcons prime to return to Matrim, through the Mirror, gateway into the afterlife, and through the rebirth of the Falcon's messianic founding scholar-saint-mage. Well, the Falcons are still around, as a secret society.

Kait flees to a distant cousin's house, but it seems he plans to murder her as the better claimant to rule the family. She is warned off by her grandmother who encourages her to seek the Mirror of Souls, so she contracts with a ship for an expedition to a city of the Ancients, and meets a Falcon, Hasmal, who was foretold to die if he met her but reluctantly teaches her magic as the best path to escaping his destiny. At least until Kait and the Sabir accidentally unleash the Dragons on the world again.

You enter this world one week before the wedding, with **1,000 Curse Points** (cp) to make your way. Remember-

*Men forge swords of steel and fire;
Gods forge swords of flesh and blood and tragedy.*



ORIGIN

Drop-In: You know the drill, you wake up someplace in Matrim, probably in the city of Calimekka on northern Yntarval, with nothing but your Warehouse Key and the clothes on your back. No local memories or entanglements.

Wolf: You grew up in a cadet branch of a noble house, easy enough to disavow if things went wrong, close enough to share all their enemies and problems. Since your gift was discovered, your talents were nurtured for their ability to multiply the assets of your house, and strike discreetly at their enemies. A Wolf sacrifices animals, and occasionally people, to work their craft.

Dragon: You're one of the lords of Matrim. You've been gone a while, and the peasantry has grown predictably uppity in your absence, but you'll soon sort them out. As a Dragon you wield the fearsome necromantic magic of Kybotim, using mass

human sacrifice to create wonders like floating palaces or smoking craters where there used to be duchies.

Falcon: You are part of a secret society that reveres Vodor Imrish, dedicated to the ethical practice of magic and awaiting the coming of the Reborn, Solander, who will lead the world to a new age of peace and enlightenment. Only your own strength, your blood, your flesh, your soul may be sacrificed. You are highly discreet, as it is death to be discovered.

PERKS

The Prudence of Jumpers (-100 cp, free Drop-In) You have a sense for rules, always having an instinct before you act if what you plan is illegal or frowned upon here, and a rough sense for how severely it might be punished.

Not From Around Here (-200 cp, discount Drop-In) People tend to forgive your little oddities of dress or mannerism. You will never offend people without deliberately setting out to do so.

Traveling in Circles (-400 cp, discount Drop-In) Wizard's Circles are one of the most dangerous things in the world, areas where tormented souls were trapped as power sources, where magic runs wild and physics are barely a suggestion, populated by shifting monstrosities. You cross them all the time, though. You are the undisputed master of surviving any extreme environment where anything and everything wants to kill you.

Nope! (-600 cp, discount Drop-In) Your life, your soul and your blood are yours. You cannot be harvested for energy like some chicken, have your powers stripped away, or made the karmic scapegoat of others. Nor even be unmade by some reality-warping archmage or god, not unless they're willing to roll up their sleeves and kill you themselves the hard way.

The Diplomacy of Wolves (-100 cp, free Wolf) As even a minor part of a noble house, it's important to present well, guard your honor and that of your house and so on. For a secret mage, discretion is all the more important. You blend well in noble or any other society.

I'm Rubber, You're Glue (-200 cp, discount Wolf) *Rewah*, the destructive backlash that follows any magical attack, is the primary reason the Wolves haven't long-since cursed all their rivals to die in agony, lest worse befall them. But as Danya demonstrates, there are ways to direct *rewah*, making it land on someone else. Indeed, many Wolves keep coops of chickens for precisely this purpose.

You are an expert at making the karmic laws of this universe work in your favor, shielding you and landing hard on your foes. In a broader sense, you're also very very good at minimizing weaknesses and wriggling out of the personal, financial, legal or karmic consequences of your actions.

Properly Paranoid (-400 cp, discount Wolf) You have a positive sixth sense for when your allies are planning to betray you and with each setback a running mental tally of which of your enemies is clever or bold enough to arrange it. When knives swing from the shadows, you will be able to trace the hands that wielded them and the tongue that gave the orders, eventually.

The Art of Diplomacy (-600 cp, discount Wolf) According to the Sabir patriarch, diplomacy is the art of inviting your mortal enemies into your home, plying them with fine food and wine and then convincing them to slit their own throats, willing all their goods to you and stepping outside so as to avoid making a mess, and have the fools march off to do the deed utterly convinced they've gotten the best of you. Like him, you aren't *quite* that good, people won't leave you their possessions without more inducement than a conversation. Still, you're pretty close.

The Vengeance of Dragons (-100 cp, free Dragon) Yours is not a hot anger that makes people sloppy, then burns out. Your wrath is the cold kind that makes you

sharp and then never dies. A thousand years from now, you may take vengeance on the descendants of those who once wronged you.

Kybotim (-200 cp, discount Dragon) Kybotim, the dread magic of Dragons, involved mass human sacrifice. With a few hundred deaths, they could destroy a city. With a few thousand, conjure one from nothing, gleaming and perfect and otherworldly. It's not great at small-scale things. But it would truly be a tiresome chore to bleed people out on some altar, one by one. With a quick chant, you can steal the lives and souls of massive crowds of people, provided they are not protected by magic or gods, to massively enhance your spellcasting. If you want to be extra efficient, you can turn some of that energy to harvesting their blood and flesh as well. And if that alone makes you an army-killer, well, there's a reason people fear Dragons a thousand years after they all disappeared.

Human Resources (-400 cp, discount Dragon) A downside of Kybotim is it tends to be... wasteful. Entire human souls and lifeforce, that a Wolf or Falcon could work wonders with, are routinely lost to inefficiencies and rounding errors then thousands are being tossed around in a brute force approach to magic. You don't have this problem, as any waste is automatically saved for later, and you are far more efficient, able to get more bang for your sacrifice.

Grand Scale (-600 cp, discount Dragon) The Dragons had a million problems, but thinking too small was never one. It is trivially easy for you to weave spells that encompass entire cities and regions, and to adapt spells for such, if you can only find enough raw power for it. Even your little spells, unless you wish precision, can strike down squads or platoons of men.

The Courage of Falcons (-100 cp, free Falcon) It takes nerves of steel to form a benign secret society in a world as ruthlessly self-interested as post-Wizard War Matrim. You do not ever freeze or hesitate from fear.

Live Once (-200 cp, discount Falcon) The Falcon philosophy of making the most of life while you have it. At least once make love. Drink once, dance once, fight once,

and, if only once in your life, get up before dawn and watch the sun rise over the sea. You know how to live life to the fullest, no regrets, so if you died tomorrow you could be content.

Deep Well (-400 cp, discount Falcon) Falcons arguably use the weakest magic, if also the most subtle. All but undetectable by others. You gain this ability to conceal magic, but more than that, by using only your own personal power and resources, you develop an internal store of energy. Your magic, chi or what have you is five times stronger, and will continue to grow slowly, but exponentially, with time and use.

Soul Power (-600 cp, discount Falcon) In extremity, a Falcon can work true miracles by offering their soul to their benevolent god Vodor Imrish, pledging to serve Him for a certain span of years in the afterlife before reincarnating. The danger is that each time you place yourself in Imrish's debt there's a growing chance he will become impatient and collect immediately, ending your life then and there. You don't have to worry so much about that, because claiming a Jumper's soul is so very difficult. However, this means you can only invoke this power once per Jump.



ITEMS

Extra-Ordinary Blade (-200 cp, free Drop-In) You have a knife, of good steel but otherwise remarkable only in how... unremarkable it is. No one at any time will find it suspicious or threatening that you have a knife, any more than that you have hands. Even when searching you for weapons people will pass it over. You may import any melee weapon to gain this quality.

Lesser Mirror (-400 cp, discount Drop-In) A magic ring containing the soul of an ancient and powerful Dragon, whom you can compel to advise you, teach you or even perform lesser feats of magic on your behalf.

Airble (-200 cp, discount Wolf) An airship that can match the swiftest sailing vessels for speed and transport forty men.

Noble House (-400 cp, discount Wolf) You are the head of a noble house. Not a great one, like the Sabir and Galweighs who struggle for hegemony over an entire continent, but you've a decent sized city-state to your name.

Wizard Circle (-200 cp, free Dragon) For those squeamish about mass slaughter, or just looking for a leg up on their rivals, this area a dozen miles across contains ten thousand simulated, cruelty-free souls for you to use as batteries, and being indisputably yours can be tapped at any distance. Refills once a year.

Mirror of Souls (-400 cp, discount Dragon) A shimmering small sun hovering in the middle of an elaborate tripod-supported ring. This is a gateway to the afterlife, from which any deceased person may be called, if willing, and bound to a body or item.

Falcon Mark (-200 cp, free Falcon) A hidden mark, somewhere random but discreet on your body- canon examples include the sole of the foot and inside elbow. Those who bear the mark can sense the presence of each other, albeit in a very vague sense that doesn't tell them much more than that there is another within a couple of miles. To prevent forgery, when two marks are brought within a foot of each other, electricity arcs between them. After this Jump, you can create similar marks of your own for any secret or overt society.

Oracle (-400 cp, discount Falcon) A hand mirror in which is bound an “all-knowing” spirit. It doesn’t actually know everything, but it knows an awful lot about the history and politics of this and future worlds, and can see the most probable future. Tends to be sarcastic, mocking and snippy, but means you no harm.



DRAWBACKS

Scarred (Variable) You have been mutated, Scarred, by magic and turned into an inhuman thing. Nowhere in civilized society is this sort of thing acceptable. Your own family would execute you to expunge the shame if they knew. How many points this is depends on how bad. If it’s something minor, like having two talons on your hand, +200 cp. If a baggy hooded robe could conceal your Scarring, +400 cp. If your appearance is obviously inhuman no matter what disguise +600 cp.

- **Karnee** (Variable) So the bad news is you have an obviously inhuman form. The good news is you can pass most of the time and only sometimes transform into a monster. In this case, your Scarred nature will net you +100 cp if you

control your transformation completely, +300 cp if it comes in time of high emotion and/or a predictable interval like nightly, and +500 cp if you have no ability to control or predict when you transform.

Dragon Dreams (+200 cp) A Dragon has a grip on your mind, and will whisper in your ear, and send you dreams. They may try and help you only to set you up for a later betrayal, or they may just try and distract you or deny you rest. If you are yourself a Dragon, it is a rival doing this to you.

Brave New World (+300 cp) Instead of Calimekka, you start on Noviterra, two uninhabited continents on the far side of the world, much of them blasted wasteland full of wild magic, extreme weather and vengeful spirits. Good luck.

Artifacts of Ancient Wonder (+400 cp) Your Warehouse is barred, your various items denied you.

Forbidden Magic (+600 cp) Your out-of-Jump powers have no place here, and so you shall not wield them for the duration of your stay.

THE END

You've survived ten years, now a choice awaits.

Go Home: There is nothing more dreary than an empty house. Go, and fill yours with laughter.

Remain: The sunrise in Calimekka is really quite the sight to see. Ten years just isn't enough.

Move On: You have Lived Once here, now it is time to explore the universe some more.

Jump written by Aehriman, with special thanks to Itmauve and Zentari