



The Weaver

Goddess of perspicacity and imagination

Nothing is impossible



The priest took his young student into the tent where he showed her two large vases; one empty, the other filled with coarse sand. He produced a pair of fine wooden sticks such as the Kamakurans use for eating and deftly picked one of the largest grains of sand from the vase and placed it the second vase.

"It seems impossible to move the sand with just these simple sticks, but nothing is impossible. She teaches us that we can solve any problem. With great practice you can learn to use these sticks as well as any Kamakuran, but can you move the sand from one vase to the other without moving the vases? Can you do it with just these sticks? I will return at the end of the day and see what you have learned."

The young avian tried to use the sticks to pick up a grain of sand as her master had instructed, but her hands were unsteady and she could not manage it. So she tried with a stick in each hand, but this was worse. Then she remembered that there was an old Kamakuran trader who had come to the camp a month ago from Raddock Bay. She went to find the old man and asked him if he would teach her the use of the sticks. He readily agreed to show her how to use the sticks and within an hour she had the technique mastered. Feeling pleased with herself she returned to the tent and tried again.

This time she was able to move a grain of sand to the second vase. With an hour gone, she set to work as quickly as she could before her master returned. At first her skill improved and she could work faster and faster without dropping the sand. As time passed though, her hand seemed to become heavier and heavier and the grains sand seemed to grow smaller and smaller. When her priest returned the vase was still half full and she was downcast.

Her priest looked at the vase and nodded to himself.

"You have worked very hard to accomplish so much with the sticks."

His student beamed with happiness for her teacher was stinting with his praise and though she knew the task had been impossible she was pleased to have done so well.

"Which is a pity, because you have wasted your day, when you could have been playing with the other children."

"But I found the Kamakuran trader and got him to teach me how to use the sticks. Without that I could never have moved so much sand," protested the girl, feeling indignant having worked so hard.

"Nonsense." said her priest and he led her out of the tent and towards the centre of the camp where the men were cooking. He went over to one of the main fires and leaning over he used the ladle to taste the fine *dopyaza* they were cooking. He congratulated the men on the tasty dish before leading his student back to the tent with the two vases.

Once there he produced the spoon he had purloined from the cooking pot, scooped a large amount of sand and dropped it into the second vase.

"What did you learn today?" he asked his forlorn student.

The girl thought hard to work out which of the many teachings she had memorized was relevant to the lesson.

"That hard work is useless. Imagination solves problems."

The priest rapped his student on the beak with the spoon. "And?" he demanded.

She thought hard for a minute and then smiled. "Just because you do it that way, just because I'm told to do it that way, doesn't mean that I have to do it that way. I should create my own solutions."

"Good." The spoon gave her beak another playful tap. "And?" he insisted.

The girl thought hard but none of the other teachings seemed right for this lesson, so eventually she shrugged her feathers and shook her head.

The teacher's hand darted out and snatched the sticks from his student's limp grasp. She jumped as he snapped both sticks in two with his hands.

"Kamakurans are idiots. Sticks are a stupid thing to eat your food with, when there is a perfectly good spoon to be had."

Beliefs

"There is no problem that cannot be solved; there are only problems that have not yet been solved."

"The imagination is sacred; those who use it to enrich themselves are ungrateful children. True devotees of the Weaver use Her gifts to make the world more beautiful."

"Because it has always been this way, does that mean it always has to be that way? Tradition exists so that men and women can exist without resort to thought or imagination."

"Does it seem likely that the first solution you find to your problems will be the best one? How would the craftsman perfect his art, if he never sought better ways to work his tools? As one of Her followers, we must seek simple, elegant, imaginative solutions to problems that are already solved. Not for the sake of change, but for the sake of improving ourselves in everything we do."

"Of course it has always been this way! People have always gone hungry. People have always lived in fear of robbery and assault. The very best reason there is to change things is that they have always been this way."

"I admit no allegiance but to Her, I acknowledge no laws but Hers."

"Have you ever watched a dog chase his own tail? All furious and busy he is, chasing the tantalizing thing. But how foolish? Will he ever catch his tail? Maybe, maybe not. If he does catch it, you can be sure when he bites it that it is not what he expected. People are sometimes like the dog chasing his tail. They chase and strive to attain something, always just outside their reach. They spend years struggling to grasp that which, for a moment's thought, has driven them insane. Stand and look at the thing you desire. Study it carefully. Decide if it is a thing worth pursuing at all, or if, when you finally catch it, it will prove simply to be something that was yours all along."

"Every problem has a solution. If you look for it, then it does not matter how wise, how learned or how industrious you are, you will never find it. But if you possess self-belief and imagination in sufficient depth then you will be able to create the solution."

"Hard work is its own reward. If that is the reward you are looking for then by all means work yourself into a grave. If, however, you wish to accomplish something, use ingenuity in its place."

"She gives every living being the ability to change the world in which they find themselves. Teach people to embrace that truth and they will not need you to change the world for them."

The Church

The Weaver is the least organized of any of the religions of the Known World; something in the nature of the faith seems to predispose it to a dislike for authority. Moreover, devotees of the Weaver are often demagogic individuals, driven to change the laws of the lands in which they live; but the faith itself gives no teaching on what changes they should make. There is

no common vision of what the faithful should strive for. What they do have in common is a belief in self-empowerment; most of Her devotees are possessed of enormous self-confidence, a belief that they can accomplish anything if they can just solve the minor problem of finding a way to achieve it. They try to spread this heady sense of self-belief to everyone they talk to.

Most devout followers regard those lands where worship of the Weaver is most organized to be the least orthodox. In Amun-Sa, they call Her the Builder and She is considered to be male. Amun-Sa is a very hidebound society, ruled by ancient laws and traditions which are anathema to most Weaver worshippers. The Amusars who worship the Builder play a significant role in the government of the land, and they encourage architects, builders and craftsmen to channel their creative leanings into productive work that is valued by the whole of Amun-Sa. Many Weaver devotees view the Amusars as entirely heretical; some even refuse to acknowledge that the Builder has anything in common with the Weaver at all.

Weaver worship is strongest in Rukh, where imagination and ingenuity are prized above all other traits. Rukhi tales and legends are filled with accounts of daring adventurers who defy caliphs and satraps, risking imprisonment and death for a caliph's daughter, or to oppose some evil vizier. A good storyteller always crafts the tale to bring it to a heroic and triumphant outcome, even when the story must end tragically.

The faith is equally popular in the Free Islands, where folk make a virtue of doing as they please. Likewise in Malathia, where the ability to live each day as it comes and survive and prosper by relying on your luck is considered an attractive trait. This has led to a considerable opposition to the faith of the Weaver in Fidelia and Flambard. Technically the worship of all five Gods is upheld by the laws of the Hierophant, but in recent times some bishops and cardinals of the faith have openly referred to 'the pirate faith' when talking about Weaver worship outside of Fidelia.

The most radical change in recent years has been in Freiboden, where the Church of the Weaver was highly active during the revolution. While the Free Merchants who led the rebellion and provided money and weapons to finance it were almost all part of the Church of the Merchant, the speakers who stood on street corners risking arrest and death to publicly denounce the Majeste and his corrupt regime were members of the Church of the Weaver. The faith took root amongst some of the learned teachers at the universities who were drawn to the doctrine of challenging daily boundaries, but it really blossomed amongst the young men and women who were studying there. It was these devotees that manned the barricades in the early days and it was they who went from town to town urging the people to rise up and overthrow the nobility who oppressed them.

Leading figures in the revolution are now part of the People's Council which governs the Freiboden League, the most notable of whom is Cardinale Jacquilene Beart; a passionate and persuasive woman, she is famed for her sermons denouncing the corrupt rule of the Majeste as well as several which have drawn the ire of powerful leaders in neighbouring lands.

The violent and confrontational demands for change are fiercely resisted in stratified lands such as Alkyon, Maya, Fidelia and Flambard. Here the Church of the Weaver operates in small discrete cells that have little contact with each other and convert followers by word of mouth rather than by tradition

or ceremony. The often illegal status of these groups merely adds to the passion and excitement some members feel by being part of the Church. Many of Her followers in these lands consist of the disaffected youth and underclass of society. There are many tiny shrines to the Weaver in Terino and some claim that every slave in Maya is a follower of the Weaver in their heart. Whatever constitutes the 'established order' in most nations tends to view the Weaver priesthood with extreme suspicion.

The vast temple of the Marble Eye in Makhand is the centre of worship for the Weaver and many people make pilgrimages to the site from across the world. The walls of the temple are carved with a thousand tales of heroic adventurers, cunning merchants who made their fortunes, lovers who stole across the deserts to be wed at the temple. Those who travel here spend much of their time talking with the priests of the temple and some receive an audience with the legendary Almandra the Veiled Warrior.

Almandra's nature is disputed, some say he is a man with a voice that lifts the heart, and others claim to have been bedded by the most beautiful woman with plumage that shone like gold in the sun. Some whisper that Almandra is a desert djinn, a servant of the Gods in Rukh, while those who will respect no authority but the Weaver claim that Almandra is the Satrap of Rukh who manipulates the Church for the good of his nation

and not the faith. Some even believe that Almandra does not really exist, that the priest is just a creation of the clergy of the Marble Eye to inspire the faithful.

Whatever the truth, those who make the pilgrimage often leave inspired with new fervour and, on occasion, new wealth and influence. As the fame of the Marble Eye has spread, so has its influence, until it has become the centre of the Church. So when tales issued forth from the Marble Eye telling of the glory and wonders of the New World, urging devotees to seek out this new land and carry Her beliefs there, it was little surprise that followers of the faith in many different lands began to enquire of the price of a voyage to the New World from ships' captains.

Almandra's purpose in urging this exodus is not clear, but the rumour is that the priests and devotees see an opportunity to ensure that the traditions and laws of the Known World remain on that side of the Maelstrom. Far from the stifling authority of kings and queens, filled with the boldest and most adventurous people, they may seek to make the New World a paradise fit for the Lover. If they can only agree on what form that paradise should take.

