

The Malazan universe is a complex one. If you are reading this, you probably know it first-hand. Countless characters; complicated and entangled plots that make it almost impossible to elucidate where they are going (even for the characters themselves); multiple races, with different interests and objectives; factions, gods, ancestral gods, gods from other planets...

However, among this chaotic miscellany that grips many readers —and puts off many others— there's one confusing element that reigns above all others. An elusive aspect of the Malazan universe Erikson and Esslemont have publicly stated will never be fully clarified. However, in almost all of their books there's some brushstroke, a clue or a thread to pull from giving us glimpses of a forever incomplete puzzle.

I am talking, of course, about the Warrens and the Holds. About the Deck of Dragons and the Tiles.

That is: the Malazan magic system.

This article contains —obviously— spoilers from *The Book of the Fallen*. And also, Kharkanas' aspects of *worldbuilding*, not plot points, that are revealed in *Forge of Darkness* and *Fall of Light*.

So, what's coming now?

My modest attempt to shed light, to the best of my abilities, on what surrounds the magic of this universe. A shoutout to [Nifrog](#) and [Nolo](#), without their collaboration I could not have launched this project.

It goes without saying that this article is a compilation of information analyzed to extract what little seems to be clear. Far from my intention for this to be a lecture.

And, moreover, it's susceptible to be altered —or even completely dismantled— as Erikson and/or Esslemont update the information in the books they write.

Here we go!

Basic Concepts

Probably, the best way to start is to single out a series of concepts orbiting around the Malazan magic system to establish some common ground. As we advance in the text, all these concepts will be nuanced, expanded or modified:

- Holds: Ancient magic system, led by Errastas. Apparently, nowadays, its use has diminished, being replaced by the Warrens.
- Warrens: Predominant magic system of the present day (at the time of the Malazan Empire), led by K'rul.
- Elder Warrens: Magic system used by the ancestral/founding races and inaccessible to humans.
- Realm: Each of the different planes of existence that make up reality.

Magic according to *The Book of the Fallen and Empire*

From the beginning of both sagas, there's some confusion —clearly intentional— between the concepts of Realm and Warren.

Wizards, priests and "magic-sensitive people" refer to their Warren both when they cast a more or less complex spell and when they open to another plane (Realm) of reality and travel through it. As it couldn't be otherwise, one ends up considering Warrens and Realms to be exactly the same thing.

As we are told, magic was originally chaotic, raw, beastly and overwhelming, almost uncontrollable. One accessed magic through the Holds, managed by the Errant.

At one point, K'rul, with the power of their blood, created the alternative magic system known as the Warrens, a much more refined, manageable and "evolved" system. As a result, the Holds are forgotten in most of the world, except in Lether.

That way, the Warrens become the natural heirs of the Holds as the primary magic system. There's an obvious parallelism between some of the Holds and the Warrens (there are the Ice Hold/Omtose Phellack, Death Hold/Hood's Path, Hold of Darkness/Kurald Galain/Rashan), so such inheritance seems not only a logical conclusion, but a traceable one.

There are also different ways of accessing magic, depending on whether it's done through the Warrens or the Holds:

- Holds require either worshipping a god or blood sacrifices.
- A user of the Warrens, however, can access magic without any of the above. They open their Warren, imbibe its power and cast the spell with no mediation by the gods, nor any sacrifice.

How could the Warren not replace the Holds, right?

They are infinitely more convenient, more controllable, do not require a sacrifice or worshipping a god and, in addition, allow you to travel through them.

Seems like a no-brainer.

Obviously, not everything I have said so far is true. Otherwise, this text would not be necessary. Buckle up everyone, now we really get into the mud.

So far, what we have been told.

From now on, the truth.

The Reality of Magic

Let me repeat a disclaimer from the beginning of this text:

From now on, there are revelations about the *worldbuilding* of Kharkanas. There are no spoilers about the plot, only about the world and its nooks and crannies.

The Origin of Everything

Chaos.

Chaos is the origin of everything that exists in the Malazan universe. If I wanted to adopt a biblical tone, I could say something like:

"At the beginning of everything there was only Chaos. And from it emerged T'iam, the Mother of Dragons".

From her emerged, as fragments of her very essence, the Eleint. These dragons, the first creatures to populate that which was not Chaos, created what is known as the First Warren, Starvald Demelain.



Eleint, by Delan Dejjic

At this point it's worth clarifying some of the definitions set out above. In particular, I want to distinguish the concepts of Realms and Warrens, although there's still some contextual work to be done before they can be fully defined.

The Realms are, effectively, the different planes of reality.

They are locations with geographical qualities, more or less extensive, more or less populated and with essential magical characteristics. There is, therefore, a Realm of Darkness, a Realm of Light, a Realm of Shadow, and so on. Different Realms for different aspects of nature. Fans of role-playing games or video games will be familiar with this concept. The elemental plane, the astral plane, the demonic plane... It's the same thing, except for the magical elements that constitute the differentiating and unique essence of each Realm in the Malazan universe.

For the exact definition of the Warrens we will have to wait a little while. Suffice it to say that there are two types of paths. There are the *Warrens* and the *Paths*. In both cases, they constitute access to different accumulations of *aspected* magic, although not to the same accumulations. By "aspect" of magic we mean those magical elements that differentiate one Realm from others (Darkness, Light, Shadow, Fire, Ice, etc.).

Every Warren is linked to a Realm, whose "differentiating essences" imbue them with magic, but not all Realms have an associated Warren.

The clearest example of this difference is what is inside Dragnipur, the fearsome sword of Anomander Rake. A physical space independent of the Realms in which the story takes place and which can only be accessed through magic. Such thing is known in other fantasy universes as a *pocket dimension* found inside an object. However, it has no associated Warren, no magic can be invoked from it.

It is therefore a Realm, but not a Warren.

The same is true for the Crippled God's tent. It constitutes his own small Realm, but it has no associated Warren.

Having established this first substantial difference, we can continue.

With the birth of the Eleint, the Realm of Starvald Demelain was born. As time went by, the creation of this Realm derived in the *aspectation of* magic. That is, the magic that emerged from Chaos and generated Starvald Demelain began to distinguish itself in aspects of different essences of nature, each dragon associated with an aspect. These aspects began to flood the Realms, giving each one the distinctive quality that tells them apart and makes them unique.

A graphic way of imagining this event is to liken Starvald Demelain to a huge reservoir. From it a series of imaginary conduits emerge. Through these each aspect of magic is poured to other wells located in the rest of the Realms.

These receiving wells of the aspected magic are the Holds.

Well, we already have the Realms, some of them flooded with magical essence hosting in its interior a "well" full of a particular type of magic. It's important to keep in mind that the Paths do not yet exist, nor do the Elder Warren, only these wells, the Holds.

It is time to talk about them.

[What are the Holds?](#)

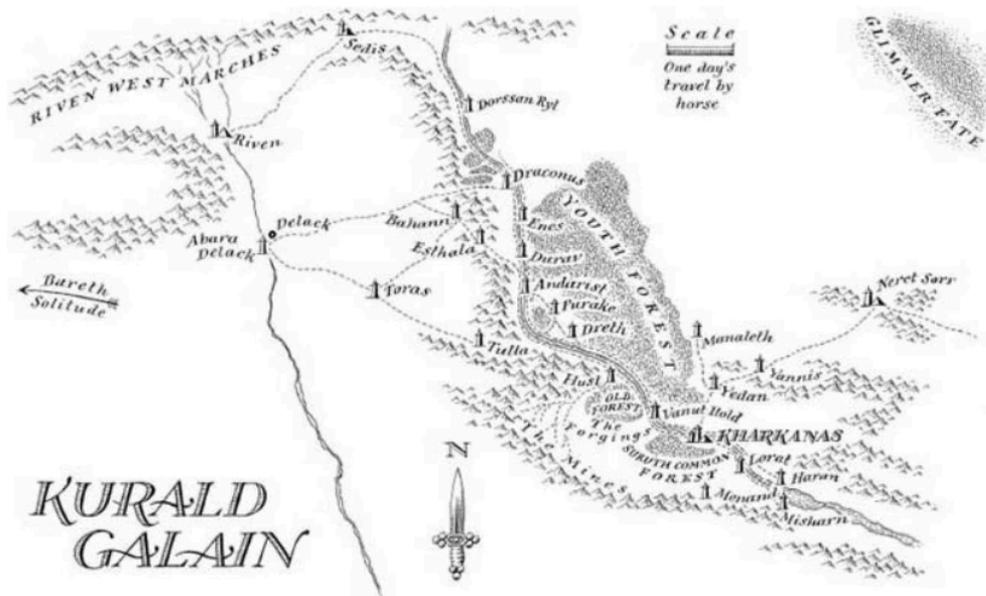
In order to answer this question, we must turn our attention away from the Eleint and focus on the Azathanai. Specifically, on the Azathanai who operate in a very specific realm: Kurald Galain.

If you have read *The Book of the Fallen* and/or *Empire*, Kurald Galain is the name of the Elder Warren of the Tiste Andii. The Elder Warren of Darkness.

However, if you have read *Kharkanas*, Kurald Galain has another meaning for you. It is the realm of the Tiste. The nuance is important, it's not the "Realm" (i.e., the Plane), but the "realm": the socio-political territory inhabited by the Tiste.

It is also important to keep in mind that the Tiste have not yet split into Andii, Liosan and Edur. They are all Tiste, plain and simple.

The following images contain the maps included in the *Forge of Darkness*:



Map of Kurald Galain

THEL AKAI, JAGHUT, TISTE REALMS



Realms adjacent to the Tiste Realm

These images reveal that the Thel Akai, the Jaghut, the Dog Runners (ancestors of the Imass), the Jheck and the Tiste all lived in the same Realm (this time yes, the Plane; they lived in adjacent, bordering realms, located in the same Realm).

This might not go beyond a mere anecdotal and surprising event, but it becomes relevant when the **Azathanai** begin to act upon these races.

Practically nothing is known about the Azathanai. There are, however, some interesting aspects of interest that concern magic:

- They can adopt any shape and appearance they please.
- The Azathanai master magic and travel between Realms. At this point no other race or type of creature has access to other Realms except the one they inhabit.

- Many Azathanai settle in a Realm that contains a **Hold** and end up ruling it. This would be the case, for example, of Mael.
- In Kurald Galain and its surroundings there's a convergence of Azathanai. It is unknown if it also occurs in other Realms —since the action takes place in this one— but the important thing is that there are many Azathanai that inhabit these territories.

With that settled, we can move on.

As I mentioned before, the Holds are not *exactly* a magic system prior to the Warrens, although they do have a solid component as a predecessor.

In the previous section, we talked about the *aspectation* of magic. How that magic that was born from Chaos was divided into different *aspects* through Starvald Demelain. However, at this point in magical development, this aspected magic is not yet available for creatures to use, nor for many of the Azathanai.

All Azathanai are capable of using magic, and do so at this time. However, the ones who master it are those who have settled in a Realm and control the corresponding Hold. The rest of the Azathanai, as well as the creatures (the Tiste, Jaghut, Dog Runners, etc.) of the Realm in which Kharkanas takes place, can use magic, pure, chaotic, raw, irrational and unrefined. It is a magic tainted by Chaos and who uses it for a long time does not remain unscathed. The Azathanai, however, can channel this power without being affected by it.

This, together with all the above, generates a position of preeminence between them and the rest of the races. These races that populated the realm of Kurald Galain and the adjacent territories obtained access to this raw and wild magic through sacrifices and worship to certain Azathanai.

Worship plays a fundamental role in the magical and divine system of the Malazan universe.

Worship gives power.

Through the worship of an idea or a being, power is gathered around it and a new ascended god, aspected or not, can be created around that worshipped idea.

There is, however, one important aspect related to the magic of the Holds that anyone who has read *The Book of the Fallen* will surely remember. They may not have realized its importance, though.

There are not many occasions when we see Holds' magic in action, but it's easy to remember when it happens: the massive attack by the Letherii wizards on the Edur villages in *Midnight Tides*, the attack by the Edur fleet on the Malazan fleet of the Fourteenth Army in *Bonehunter*, and the attack led by the Letherii wizards on the Malazan troops in *Reaper's Gale*. There are probably more, but these are, most likely, the easiest to remember.

All of them have one thing in common: **the magic used does not pertain to any particular aspect.**

Wizards do not wield the power of the Ice Hold or the Holds of Death and Darkness. They simply hurl upon their enemies a coarse and foul, but unaspecting power. For what governs that magic, that is, the magic of the Holds, is not the aspected magic derived from Starvald Demelain, but Chaos.

It is not Chaos magic ("Chaos Warren") but raw magic tainted with Chaos.

It has been mentioned that worship of a particular god gives power. And from *Midnight Tides* onwards the ancestral God of the sea (Mael) uses a clearly aspected

magic: the magic of the sea. He has power over the sea. And this is because Mael has access to the Hold of the Realm in which he rules: Denaeth Rusen.

The Tiste, however, were not able to wield Darkness until Mother Dark assumed control of the Realm associated with it. In the same way, the Jaghut at the beginning did not use Omtose Phellack, but that magic far from the aspects, uniform and without distinction.

Access to these Realms will be discussed later.

If we recall what has been established in the section The Origin of Everything, **what had given each Realm an aspected quality were the Holds that emerged from Starvald Demelain** (although the name Holds does not yet apply to these "wells" of magic. The use of this term will be justified later in the text).

That is to say, in the existence prior to the Warren, the cores of magic that feed the Realms are the Holds, although those wells are only usable by the Azathanai that rules the Realm in which that Hold is based and probably, by the creatures that inhabit that Realm, if any.

Here comes a point of personal speculation.

I think they are called Holds precisely because of the Tiste realm of Kurald Galain. Below the government of the city of Kharkanas there are a series of noble houses that receive the name of *Hold*. Among others we can find the *Purake Hold* and the *Hust Hold* (just to mention a couple of them that surely suggest things to you). In these *Holds* we find titles such as "Patriarch", "First Son", "Lord", "Captain", etc.

Do they remind you of anything?

Indeed, to the roles that mortals and ascendants play in the Deck of Dragons and in the Tiles. We will talk about this later.

It is worth insisting: what are the Holds?

The wells of magic that were created in the Realms and that flowed from Starvald Demelain.

Wizards wielding the Holds in the times of the Malazan Empire, therefore, are not using the Holds *per se*: they employ the magic system that does not pass through the Warren, but drinks directly from chaotic magic.

In other words, **the users of the Holds do not use the actual Holds**; they use raw magic.

Who uses the Holds and when?

- The Azathanai who rule the aspected Hold of a Realm.
- The ancestral races, originally, did not make use of Holds, but of raw magic without aspecting.
- The ancestral races will use in the future (taking as "present" the beginning of the Kharkanas trilogy) the Hold aspected through the Elder Warren, which we are going to discuss about next.

Subsequently, with the emergence of the Tiles, the Holds will take on a second meaning, but this, as already mentioned, will be developed later on.

[The Birth of the Paths and the Elder Warren](#)

This situation in which races inferior to the Azathanai had to worship them in order to use magic placed this mysterious race in a position of preeminence. To all intents and purposes, they were gods in the eyes of others.

However, one day, Draconus granted Mother Dark (she doesn't have that name yet, but she has to be referred to in some way) access to the Realm of Darkness.

Going into how this was done would count as spoilers about the plot, so allow me to avoid this topic.

From that moment on, a door was opened in Kurald Galain. The gate to Darkness (the door that at the end of Toll the Hounds is revealed to be inside Dragnipur). This is a very important moment in the history of the Malazan universe, since this door is the **first gate between Realms**.

If you remember, when talking about the Azathanai, one of the characteristics I emphasized was that they could travel between Realms. From this moment on, the Tiste can travel to the Realm of Darkness.

This was the first door, but not the only one. Sometime later others were opened, for example Omtose Phellack. As a curious fact, these gates are not named after the Realm they go to, but after the place where they open.

That is to say, the Realm of Darkness is not called "Kurald Galain", but Realm of Eternal Night, just as the Realm of Ice is not called "Omtose Phellack". Kurald Galain is, as already mentioned, the realm of the Tiste. Omtose Phellack, on the other hand, is an abandoned city of the Jaghut.

This moment of the opening of the gates (which has not yet ended in the Kharkanas saga), provoked an intense debate among the magic-giving Azathanai. What was going to happen to them, who required worship to survive (think of the gods who are gradually forgotten until they die) if the lower races could access magic without worshipping them?

Simplifying the situation a lot and for the sake of avoiding spoilers, two sides were created at that time (which did not necessarily imply the adherence of all Azathanai to one or the other; after all, they are a race that likes to intrigue, as we well know):

- One led by Errastas, which seeks a return to the old status quo.
- One led by K'rul, who believes all races should be able to use magic.

At this point it is necessary to make another argumentative leap that involves spoilers.

So far it has all been much more detailed, but to do so here, revealing aspects of the plot would be necessary. It is preferable, believe me, that at this point we do not go down that road, but rather we jump to the end in one step.

Which road am I talking about?

Of course, finally, the creation of the *Path*.

The gates that had been opened towards other Realms were linked to certain races. Some Tiste became "soaked" in Darkness; the Jaghut, in Ice. Thus began the association between the ancestral races and their Elder Warren as we know it in "the present" of the Malazan universe. For, yes, these gates are the ones that open the first Paths, the Elder Warren.

There were inferior races that did not have access to these gates, that could not use magic in any way.

K'rul created the Paths for them.

The creation of the Paths involved an “agreement” with the Eleint (for they, with their magical aspect, were to participate in the creation of this system of access to the Realms).

K'rul was able to access the dragons of Starvald Demelain when the Gate to Darkness was opened; let us remember that power calls to power. When the Gate opened, the Eleint appeared in the sky of Kurald Galain.

We have already repeatedly mentioned that the Azathanai had very particular abilities.

K'rul possessed a special affinity for magic. This affinity allowed them, through their blood, to create the system known as the Paths, the magic system used by humans.

The main difficulty K'rul encountered was that the lesser races would not be able to withstand the charge of chaos the magic contained, so granting them access to it but not being able to use it in a safe manner made no sense. The solution was the creation of something similar to what already existed.

K'rul created a whole other set of Realms. Each one of them linked to an aspect of magic. For this they resorted to that "agreement" I mentioned with the Eleint.

If we recall, at the beginning of the text we talked about each Eleint being linked to a particular aspect of magic. K'rul links each of these to a Realm and gives the Realm the name of the dragon they links it to.

Are the Paths, therefore, these Realms?

No.

The Paths are the access to these Realms, aspected through the corresponding Eleint and duly purified of the chaos that soaks the Holds.

However, with time, the Path and the Realm end up being called by the same name, just as it happens with the Elder Warrens. In the case of the *Warrens*, they end up being called the Realm with the name of their access (their Gate) and are thus called *Warren*, when the equivalent of these burrows would be the wells, the Holds, instead of the Elder Warren. However, the unfamiliarity among the creatures of the Malazan universe is almost as profound as among its readers, so the terms get mixed up, confused and twisted.

This new situation obviously further fuels the conflict between K'rul and Errastas, who, longing for that moment when only they would grant access to magic, tries to take over K'rul's system of Paths.

Having foreseen this, K'rul leaves each Eleint as Guardian of the Realm that bears its name. Not to rule it, but to prevent **other Azathanai** from controlling it. It is a system created for the lower races and they must rule it themselves.

K'rul achieves, with this, a democratization of magic.

Thus, we can now update the initial definition of each element of the magic system:

- Realm: Its definition does not change. Each one of the different planes of existence that make up reality. Those already existing and those created by K'rul.
- Holds: Each of the wells of aspected magic residing within some Realms.
- Elder Warren: Access to the use of the aspected magic of the Holds, usable only by the ancestral races, which are linked to them through the Gates (Kurald Galain, Omtose Phellack, etc). It is still a Chaos tainted magic, so it is wilder and more powerful than the Paths.

- Paths: Access to the use of magic created by K'rul for the lesser races. They do not connect to the original Realms where the Holds reside, but to other new but equally aspected Realms created by the Azathanai. They are cleansed of all Chaos so their use is more controlled and cleaner, but less powerful. They do not meet a direct correspondence with the aspects of the original Realms. For example, both Thyr (Light) and Serc (Air) draw from the Light Hold (accessed through Kurald Thyrlan).

As a summary, therefore, we can say that **the Holds are not an equivalent but older magic system to the Warren**, as the users of the Holds do not employ aspect magic.

The only ones who actually employ the magic system of the Holds are the Azathanai who rule each Realm containing a Hold.

The Elder Warren is the closest thing to that use of the Holds, as it connects directly to those Realms and thus to the Hold. The Elder Warren drinks directly from the Holds and one who uses magic through an Elder Warren is using the same magic used by the Azathanai who rules the Realm, so conceptually they are very similar, though different.

The Elder Warren is the path; the Hold, the destination.

The Paths, finally, connect to every magical aspect, cleansed of Chaos, though they do not access the Hold, but a different core of power, a different Realm.

This implies that a Rashan user does not travel through Kurald Galain, but through the Realm of Rashan, which is also a Realm of Darkness. This magic system is based on the natural affinity that humans may have for one or another aspect of magic.

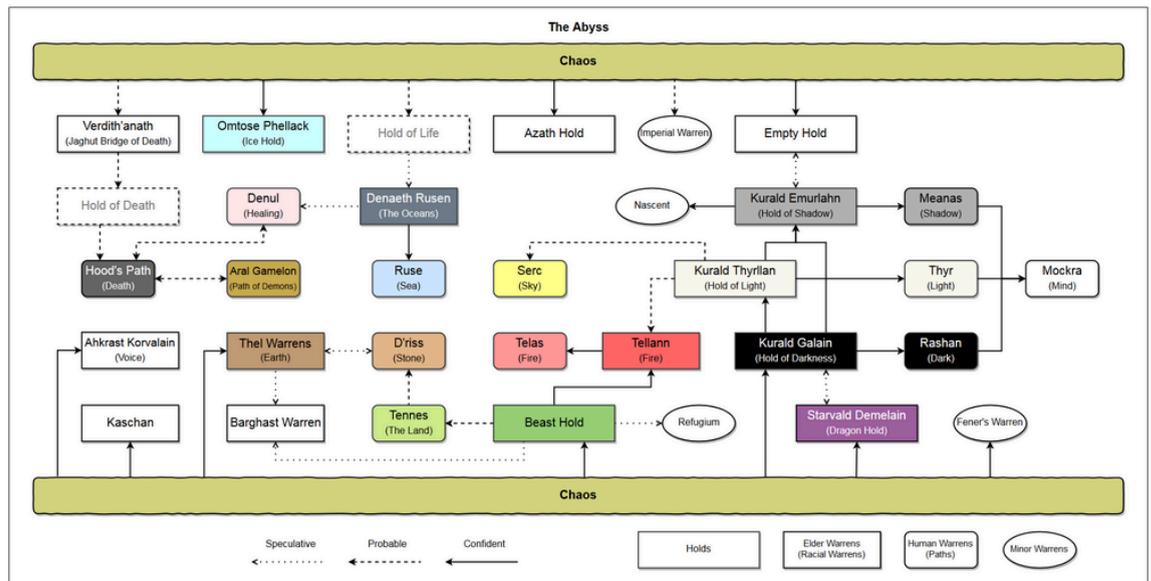


Diagram of the Warren and Holds

What is the Deck of Dragons?

What about the Tiles?

What about the "independent" Warren such as Fener Warren?

What about the Warren used by Dryjhna in Raraku? What about the *High Paths* (High Denul, High Thyr, etc.)?

What did Icarium do, by the Hood's balls, at the end of *The Book of the Fallen* and whose results are already visible at the end of the saga and in *Unwilling God*?

Which Realm is the one in which the story of the novels takes place?

Read on and I will finish developing these points, albeit much more briefly.

A little bit of everything to finish

More about the Paths

At some point in all of the above, it has been mentioned that worship gives power. There is, moreover, a maxim that occurs in the Malazan universe and that

explains, among other things, the recurring convergences in the saga: power calls to power.

This is the explanation for the Fener's Warren.

Fener is a First Hero (one of the first Ascended to gods among the minor races). He becomes the god of war, which grants him great power, given the number of worshippers who congregate under him.

This worship creates a small niche of power that didn't previously exist: a magical space, with something we could call a "small Hold" (although it is not a Hold as such), which allows the god's worshippers use of the power he grants them. A power far from the aspects born of Starvald Demelain and independent of K'rul's system. It's magic that borders on Chaos itself.

The Dryjhna/Whirlwind Warren has a much simpler explanation, as does the Nascent.

In neither case are they Paths as such. Both are known to be fragments of the fractured Realm of Shadow. Dryjhna simply employs the power that resides in the fragment she has found and over which she has proclaimed herself mistress.

The users of the "High Paths" (this name is not real, but a convenient way to refer to them) are magicians more powerful than others. They can channel more power than other magic users and, in some cases, they can even glimpse forms of superior magic. That is, they are magic users who develop such an affinity for the magical aspect they employ that they are able to glimpse the Realm from which that aspect originates. A Thyr user employs the aspect essence of that Warren. A High Thyr user does the same, but accumulates more power. A particularly powerful user of High Thyr gets a glimpse of what lies beyond: Kurald Thyrlan, even if he's unable to access it.

In principle, that should be the limit for any Warren user. Their natural affinity with the aspected essence links them to the Realms created by K'rul, not to the original Realms aspected by the Holds that came from Starvald Demelain. However, we have a case that contradicts this fact. Silk, mage of the city of Li Heng employs (at great cost in terms of exhaustion) Kurald Thyrlan in *The Return of the Crimson Guard* and in *Dancer's Lament*, despite not being a Tiste Liosan. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that a particularly powerful mage can gain access to the Holds through an Elder Warren despite not having crossed through the corresponding gate, although this is certainly not common.

Any reader of the saga would have noticed that in the Malazan world there are individuals and cultures that use magic without worshipping any god or connecting with any Warren: the Wickans, the Shamane and the Alchemists of Darujhistan, among others. This suggests —although it's also purely conjectural— that the Malazan world is about the Realm of Burn itself and that the magic they use is the same essence that is in the world, that is why they do not need to connect with any Warren/Path, but use *ambient magic*.

In *The Book of the Fallen*, at one point, someone travels through the Warren of D'riss, (Stone Warren) and his journey does not lead him to any other astral Plane, but through the ground of the world, through the earth and the rock he steps on, which could be another indication of the above.

Wu

Wu is the unofficial name of the world in which Malazan stories take place.

It is a name even Erikson himself has used on occasion, in an amused tone.

Now, we know little about this world. In what Realm is it located? There is no confirmation about it, however, and what follows is personal speculation *once again*. I think it could be not only the same Realm to which Kurald Galain belongs, the original Tiste Realm prior to the opening of the gate to Darkness, but the same world.

First of all, all the races found in the Kharkanas trilogy as inhabitants of that world are also found in Wu, which could already be an indication that it's the same territory. On the other hand, if we go back and look at the Forge of Darkness maps above, we can identify territories whose name's practically the same as in the world of Wu: the Teblor Plain and the Jhag Odhan.

In both cases the name's a little different on the maps (Thel Akai Plain and Jaghut Odhan), but this may be a simple matter of the passage of time. The Teblor are the descendants of the Thel Akai, with the ancestral blood diluted by interbreeding and the passage of time. The same's true of the Jhag with respect to the Jaghut. More races inhabit the world, so once mixed and over time, the original names may have been modified somewhat.

Against this theory is the fact that Twilight, Yedan Derryg and the Shake must open a portal in order to travel to Kharkanas to defend the Shore. Kharkanas shared a world with the Jhag Odhan and the Teblor Plain, so it could be said that they are distinct worlds. However, we know that Kurald Galain (the Gate) was extirpated from Kharkanas and protected in Dragnipur because Chaos was pursuing it (in fact, that battle against Chaos is seen in first person in Toll the Hounds). It's not unreasonable to think that, as a product of that original battle against Chaos, of that protection of Kurald Galain, the world was fractured, separating Kharkanas from the rest of the territories. In fact, this fracture could also be the explanation for the different continents, since in the trilogy Kharkanas is a single uninterrupted territory.

In any case, this remains a personal theory, you can take it as your own or discard it.

Icarium

Who hasn't finished *The Crippled God* and been left wondering what the hell Icarium had done at the end of its plot?

Icarium creates a new system of Warrens, that seems clear. A new access to magic. At the moment it's unknown if it involves associated new Realms or not, only that it allows a third way to access magic.

Since there's been neither confirmation nor development of any kind yet on this new magic system, allow me to speculate a bit again. The Holds gave raw and wild access to magic, but with superior power to the *Paths*. These opened up the use of magic to a greater number of users, but at the cost of less overall power in each mage, by cleansing the taint of Chaos. Nevertheless, the supreme mages, the superior users of Warren magic, attain levels of power on par with the Holds or the Elder Warren.

As seen in *Unwilling God* (and these are not relevant spoilers, don't worry if you haven't read it yet), there is currently an overwhelming proliferation of mages. The new Malazan Legions are full with very low-level mages, and sprinkled with some of very high power in an unexplainable way. My theory is that the Warrens of Icarium blends the best of both pre-existing magic systems:

- It further democratizes magic. When the number of magicians is very high, magic is no longer a gift only a few possess.
- Most users are of a lower power than other magic systems.
- There appear to be disproportionately powerful wizards, along with magic that seems to be more difficult to control than that of the Warrens.

The above suggests broad access to the Warren (as in K'rul's) along with potentially more powerful and chaotic magic (as in the Holds). Finally, the ghosts through which we follow the development of Icarium's plot once it has powered its ancestral machine would play a role similar to that of the Eleint in K'rul's system: a "natural" element to link each Warren to.

Once again, I must emphasize that this is purely conjectural.

The Deck, the Houses, the Tiles, the Holds and the Runts

To finish this text, I couldn't fail to mention the divinatory elements found throughout the saga. In most of the world the Dragon Deck is used associated to the Houses. In Lether, the Tiles are used, associated with the Holds. Finally, as a result of the system of Warrens of Icarium, in Unwilling God, the Runt are used, which become more accurate than the Deck of Dragons.

The Deck, the Tiles and the Runt are simple to explain. They're methods used by mortals to guess what's happening with the Ascendants. It's not a complete picture, and it's always biased. But it is, in essence, a kind of "tarot" associated with the power structures imposed on the various magical systems.

If the Warrens are an expression of the aspected power of nature, the Houses constitute those power structures. The same applies to the Holds and the Tiles, and this is where I pick up the thread that got hung up when talking about the Holds. I suggested earlier a parallel with the Houses of the Deck. The time has come to develop it.

The Houses, although they adopt the name of many of the aspects associated with the Warren, are not linked in a direct relationship. That is to say, there's not a House (at least mentioned) for each aspect/Hold/Warren. The Houses are the "metaphysical" materialization of the human interpretation of what's going on in the

world and with the Ascendants. At the beginning of the saga, all the Houses are well demarcated. The High House of Shadow has roles assumed by creatures associated with Shadow. The same is true of Darkness, for example. However, as *The Book of the Fallen* progresses, a new House emerges: the High House of War. And this House shatters everything that was believed about the Houses up to that point. It arises because the world is heading for the great war against the Forkrul Assail (in a situation similar to that explained for Fener's Warren: power calls to power), which will either destroy it or save it. However, the roles adopted by the different participants of the House are associated with different Warrens. In the House of War we find the Crippled God as Deathslayer (also associated with the House of Chains and Chaos), the ascended Bridgeburners as Guardians (when they are also the new Guardians of the House of Death), Togg and Fanderay as Lords (when they also belong to the Beast Hold). As can be seen, there's no unidirectional relationship between the Houses and the Warren/Holds, as they are nothing more than the manifestation of the interpretation of what happens between the gods.

The system of Tiles is an equivalent in which the Holds (here enters the second meaning I announced previously) are equivalent to the Houses and are structured with titles, hence also the parallelism that I drew with the Tiste *Hold*. Similarly, some Holds (understood as "wells" of magic) have a Hold (understood as equivalent to a House) associated with them. This is the case of the Ice Hold or the Dragon Hold, although many others do not, such as the Empty Hold, the Azath, the Beast Hold or the Fulcra (the equivalent of the unaligned Ascendants of the Deck). This is where we can appreciate the double meaning of the Holds.

Regarding the Runt, there's not enough information. It's only known that new Houses have started to appear in the Deck that were not known and for which there's no

explanation, so the system is starting to be not so stable. It's understood that the Runt will eventually replace the Deck, but only time will tell.

And that's all. I hope I haven't bored you too much and that I have been able to shed some light on such an unclear subject as the magic of the Malazan universe.

Without further ado, I bid you farewell.

Thank you very much for having made it this far.

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