

shAKhàn

*Fantasy Role-Playing On the World of
Telostic*

Book "G":
The Watchers



By
Marcus and Karen Shields

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23. The Khùl-Algrenàthi'i

The Khùl-Algrenàthi'i (kool-ahlgrenAHthee-ee)¹ or "They Who Watch the Many Planes", are extremely old. Their presence in Ushù'l – and, it appears, most of the rest of Telostic – dates back far beyond the start of recorded history, as it is commonly accepted by modern scholars.

The Watchers are a group of nearly immortal, semi-divine sapient beings, most (but apparently not all) possessing an *Aablùshyé* (aw-ah BLOOsh yay) or "Pendant² of Ruling in Glory Over Reality", supposedly, some sort of extremely powerful magical or technological artifact.

Though written evidence of this is, of course, now lost, the Watchers were present on Telostic even prior to the great Cataclysm. Indeed, they have **always** been with several of the sapient races (most importantly humanity and the *Bènlì*) even prior to the start of interstellar travel, continuously observing, sometimes serving, forever working in the shadows to assist the mortal species in their slow progress towards greatness and full understanding of the cosmos. At different times, the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i have been incorrectly identified by the lesser races as "vampires", "super-heroes", "messiahs", "mutants", "demons", "angels", "immortal knights", even "gods", and have other such terms applied to them – resulting, usually, in persecution by the unlettered, which is one reason why the Watchers instinctively remain out of the mainstream of sapient culture – but none of these labels accurately describe their characteristics, powers or motives.

The legends of northern Ushù'l state that the Watchers "keep forever the Balance of Prophecy, lest the Gods and those who oppose Them should again war against each other within the Common Sphere (?)". What, or who, these beings are "watching", is unclear from the available sources, but perhaps the label reflects a dim memory of the long-standing, background relationship of the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i to the sapient races. It is interesting that legends of the Watchers stand apart from conventional religious teaching, in that it hints at beings who are able to exercise a degree of control over (or, at least, familiarity with) the Gods Themselves. One would think that such teachings would be ruthlessly suppressed, yet they are in fact part of the basic metaphysical curriculum in most of Telostic's modern Temples.

Admittedly, this may be due to teachings on the part of some Temples – notably, that of wise *Virya Nia* of modern Ushù'l – that at least some of the Watchers are in fact demigods or Demons in the conventional sense of those terms, but even taking this into account the commonly accepted legends of the Watchers are quite unusual. If this is true, the Watchers are undoubtedly a very specialised sub-type of divinity, because their characteristics, habits and powers – while formidable enough, that much is certain – are unlike those of most of the Gods and Demons.

For example, the Watchers have in the past been prone to travel in mortal societies and intervene in sapient affairs relatively frequently, especially when large numbers of living creatures are in peril. The Watchers are also much more "accessible" than are the true Gods and Demons; in many moral and, to a lesser extent, intellectual, respects they resemble ordinary mortal creatures more than they do the greater divine entities. Yet they appear to be a different, distinct species compared to humankind, or, at the very least, a highly mutated variant of the more common mortal races.

23.1. General Features of the Watchers

According to historical and eschatological tradition, at least on Telostic, there are two known types of Watchers: the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh (kool-ahlgrenAHthee-ee ah-TAI-ell-hh) or "Great Watchers" and the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh (kool-ahlgrenAHthee-ee ss-RELL-keh) or "Lesser Watchers".

The difference between these groups is difficult to determine, although it has been said that the former title refers to Watchers "to that greater race born" while the latter describes characters originally from one of the mundane mortal species who have somehow "ascended" to the powers of them who discourse with the Gods Themselves". It does seem that the Watchers of the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh have greater powers than do those of the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh, but there are dramatic individual exceptions to this principle and there may be other, more subtle differences involved.

It is said that the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh – particularly the females of that group – possess yellow- or amber-coloured eyes (the shading of these can be modified to a degree at will, to make the Watcher less conspicuous in a crowd) and sharpened (but retractable) incisor or canine teeth, similar to those found with the Vampires of ancient Terran legends, whereas this characteristic is apparently lacking in most of the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh. Also, the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh seem to travel in groups more frequently than do their more powerful compatriots; perhaps the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh simply do not need the assistance of others, or maybe they are just "loners" by nature.



The Storied Watcher, mighty Karéin-Mayréij, in battle

It should be noted that these groups do not form a class structure of any sort; while the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh are the more powerful of the two, there is complete equality between members of both and they frequently co-operate.

An important feature of all Watchers is that they can disguise and/or transmute themselves so as to appear like an ordinary citizen of whatever society they choose to move in. In this context, one should be aware that most of the Watchers, when they have been seen in true guise, have appeared as a member of either the human race, the *Bènlì* or one of the "familiar" near-humanoid species. However at least in the case of the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh, they are known to have a few unique characteristics, for example a significantly different arrangement of the internal organs and much different blood chemistry, that may identify them as a completely different race altogether, or perhaps they are simply "mutated" from humanity or the *Bènlì* species – ? None of this is known for sure, but in any event, there are no recorded instances of Watchers having appeared as an *Agàk*, *Chàngalà*, *Enhù'ùv* or other unusual species.

An unusually large proportion of the Watchers are female (particularly, apparently, female humans), and when in non-transmuted form their eyes have either a blue or amber glow; this becomes a brilliant, twirling, shining light a split-second before a Watcher is about to fire his or her most powerful weapon (see below)... which is all the warning anyone foolish enough to antagonize one of these powerful beings usually gets before being blasted into oblivion. It should be noted that this characteristic is very difficult to tell apart from similar attributes possessed by certain other unusual nonhuman species – the *Chàngalà*, for example – so *Shakhàn* players should not be allowed to detect it without prior experience and considerable ingenuity.



A significant difference between the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* and other super-normal beings is that there are no examples, throughout recorded history, of them ever having been worshipped by mortals, as has frequently been the case for the true Gods, Demons. Whether this is by happenstance or design is not clear, but it certainly seems to be the case that the Watchers have not encouraged the establishment of religions devoted to themselves. Conversely, except where absolutely required by local tradition, no Watcher has ever been observed voluntarily participating in conventional religious activities (except as part of an assumed identity or disguise). This may reflect doctrinal factors known only to the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* themselves, or may be related to more subtle psychic and/or mystic issues, or may have to do with some other, unknown factor.

On a more mundane level, most of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* partake of the everyday activities of the societies they inhabit, interacting freely with the beings that populate each civilisation. That is, they eat, drink, sleep, marry and occasionally have children; in other words, they do everything that a normal mortal citizen would do. However, except where doing so is clearly necessary, they much prefer to keep their special status a closely guarded secret, revealing it only to their most trusted friends and lovers. This reticence is partly instinctive, the result of thousands of years of persecution by ignorant mortals, but it is also because the role of the Watchers is to fit in to humanoid society – not to re-make it in their own image. There have been several dramatic violations of this rule throughout history, but it remains one of the most honoured traditions of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* and is still observed faithfully by most Watchers.

In terms of overall goals and orientation, the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* are an enigma. Most of their historically documented actions would be considered as being more aligned with the forces of "good" rather than those of "evil", but there are a few notable exceptions to this – for example, the dreaded *Ròdon* is sometimes described as a "renegade Watcher" – and it appears that their grand objectives concern issues far beyond the understanding, and therefore the moral guidelines, of the various mortal races.

In fact, though this is completely unknown to the mortals of modern Telostic, the credo and life-purpose of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* requires them, where possible, to assist the mortal species from all threats *except* those caused by the foolishness, brutality or venality of the lesser races themselves: "Ever thus is the price of free will, to rescue one who would then destroy himself," is the phrase coined centuries ago by a now-unknown Watcher, to describe the sadness the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* often feel after seeing their efforts undone by human stupidity. Yet they persist, as they have done for eons.

23.2. Psycho-Music

When the true, greater forms of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* are revealed (particularly, as is frequently the case, in a conflict or other critical situation), or more rarely when they choose to use their powers without changing form, the event is accompanied by several unusual phenomena. The air becomes thick and heavy, pregnant with anticipation; and a psychological effect similar to stirring, exciting music (as would be played as the background track of a movie on 21st-Century Earth) is apparent to every living being in the vicinity. In most cases the sounds of this "psycho-music" cannot actually be *heard*, but seem to emanate from all around, producing an awe-inducing effect that causes many mortals to instinctively realise that they are in the presence of a much greater power; when the psycho-music from more than one *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* is playing, the effect is overwhelming indeed. While not a "charm" in the true sense of the word, it does usually ensure that a Watcher gets cooperation (or, at least, non-opposition) from the vast majority of mortal sapient beings with which he, she or it interacts.

A *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*'s psycho-music usually begins almost imperceptibly and reaches a crescendo as the Watcher uses his or her greatest power(s). The psycho-music of many of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh* is frequently evident when the Watcher in question begins to exercise his or her powers of airborne or spaceborne flight, especially if the purpose of the journey is important. This is also true when a Watcher uses his or her powers to rescue sapient beings who are in mortal danger, but in the latter case, those to be rescued usually perceive the psycho-music shortly prior to the actual appearance of the Watcher, a factor which is usually very useful for maintaining hope and morale.

23.3. A m à'i'sh

The Watchers are said to derive supernatural power from a force called *Amà'i'sh* (ah-MAI-ee EESHh), loosely translatable as "the Power" or "the Strength" (the language to which this term originally belonged is now lost). While *Amà'i'sh* bears some superficial resemblance to the magical energy that powers the incantations of the *Anratschèldor-haii*, it is clear that it is actually a completely different type of power. *Amà'i'sh* allows a Watcher – especially, an elder one – to exercise enormous transportation, mental, physical and elemental abilities, akin to those normally attributed to the Gods Themselves.

One such tale describes Karéin-Mayréij, by many accounts one of the most senior of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh*, as "lifting the great city of Arédalu (now lost, but it may have been somewhere in what is now *Hà'alàam*) in its entirety with nought but the force of her mind, carrying it thus high in the sky, thrice times a thousand *Ochràn* (evidently some kind of ancient measure of length, perhaps akin to a kilometre or more); all to save it from the onslaught of the Demon from the Fire-Pit³".

Amà'i'sh seems not to work at all for certain other otherwise common types of "magical" effects. For example, in all of recorded history there is no evidence of *Amà'i'sh* ever having successfully conjured anything of material substance "out of thin air" (a relatively common action of conventional magic) or of it having polymorphed a living or animate being into something unlike the latter's original form. Nor has there ever been an instance of it having been used to counter the effects of purely magical afflictions such as a curse or involuntary teleportation (although, the Watchers themselves seem to be partially immune to these types of attacks, perhaps due more to their high intelligence, "sixth sense" danger warning ability and speed than to any innate magical invulnerability).

Amà'i'sh also has very limited powers in terms of inter-planar travel, although interestingly (and unlike many other magical abilities) it seems to retain most of its potency on almost all the planes of the multiverse, assuming that the Watcher in question has somehow been transported to a different dimension, plane or planet by some other agency. (There are a few cases where one of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* has been involuntarily deposited hence by a magical trap or other similar attack, and although his or her greatest powers – other than those absolutely necessary for preserving the Watcher's life and bodily integrity – are sometimes not immediately available in the new environment, they invariably return after a variable time, particularly where the Watcher is subjected to a life-threatening or very stressful event.)⁴

Another facet of this is, unlike conventional magic, *Amà'i'sh* is completely unaffected by the various agencies, for example a "magic-poor" geographical area, that negate or reduce the efficiency of supernatural powers. This aspect of the powers of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* is not widely known, even among the more experienced elders of the Temples and of the *Anratschèldor-haii*; it has come as an unpleasant surprise to many magic-users throughout history to discover, to their dismay, that a Watcher can happily use *Amà'i'sh* even in an area where an elder wizard or priest would be as helpless as a child.

Some of the *Amà'i'sh* that a Watcher uses is undoubtedly provided by the Pendant that he or she possesses, but even without his or her Pendant the Watcher is still capable of drawing upon *Amà'i'sh*; in this respect, it appears that the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh* are more dependent on this "focus" of supernatural energy than the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh*, many of whom have never been seen possessing, or using, a Pendant. This is not completely a handicap, as the use of a Pendant allows nearly instantaneous access to most or all of a Watcher's greater powers, whereas without one, the Watcher must evidently wait and concentrate for at least a few seconds (or more time, depending on the powers to be exercised) to summon the fullness of his or her reserve of *Amà'i'sh*. This interval, sometimes accompanied by "bolts of eldritch lightning" being evident on the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*'s body (a good warning sign for potential enemies to find a nearby exit) – is needed to "draw the power from the deepest well within", as one source puts it. It should be noted, however, that virtually all of the defensive abilities that a Watcher would need to protect himself or herself from ordinary mortals are always enabled by instinct, so the chances of (say) murdering or incapacitating one of these formidable beings while he or she is not fully "charged up" would be almost nil.

Amà'i'sh seems to come to Watchers incrementally over time (as does the magical energy used by the *Anratschèldor-haii*), but unlike the *mana* used by true "magic-users", it can be replenished very rapidly if the Watcher can come into contact with a strong source of some types of mundane energy, for example a large fire, electricity or even bright sunlight. Direct contact with (or close physical proximity to) such a real-world energy source does not seem to harm an experienced Watcher; in fact, it has been described as being "akin to the joy felt by lovers as they couple" (e.g., an erotic experience), but a wounded or neophyte Watcher sometimes experiences severe pain in regenerating his or her powers in this manner, even though the strength thus gained can eventually allow him, her or it to exercise great powers of healing and recuperation.



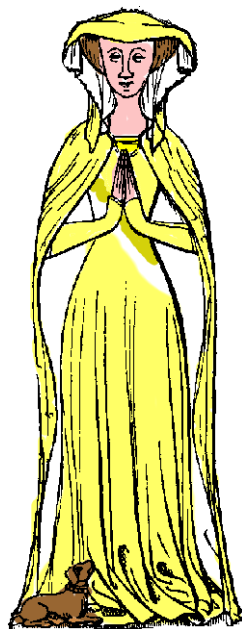


It is said of mighty Karéin-Mayréij, the "Storied Watcher", that one of her favorite means of relaxation was/is to remove all her garments and go "swimming" in the molten rock found in volcanoes, sometimes waving back to her amazed co-travelers and puckishly inviting them to join her; her body was boiling hot for many hours after such indulgences, as was immediately evident to anyone who saw the grass withering and catching fire under the soles of her bare feet. Apparently this practice is not unknown to some other senior members of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh* – great Màrfak is also mentioned in this context – and it is sometimes used to distinguish those belonging to this sub-group of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* from those of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*.

One side-aspect of this concerns metaphysical theoretics; the most popular concept regarding the actual source of *Amà'ish* is that, like the *mana* of the *Anratschêldor-haii*, it is "drawn" from one or more parallel dimensions; when a *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* thus regenerates *Amà'ish* via real-world energy sources or via music (see below), the theory continues, each real-world energy-unit (in other words, a joule, erg or other similar unit on Earth) allows the Watcher to tap into a variable, usually far larger, number of *Amà'ish* energy-units. In this way, exposure of a Watcher to even a relatively small real-world energy source – even bright sunlight or the chemical energy in a sugary foodstuff – can provide him or her with far more power than would intuitively be expected. This factor has proved the undoing of many unwitting opponents over the years.

Another environmental circumstance that affects *Amà'ish* is the presence of music. It appears that some types of music – particularly a given Watcher's *Amà'é* ("Power-Song") – can significantly enhance the rapidity with which a Watcher can call upon his or her greatest powers, and perhaps (it is obviously very difficult to apply objective measures here) may also enhance their potency to some degree. Most *Amà'é* are rhythmic tunes with an engaging, undulating beat (a bass beat for males, somewhat higher in the musical scale for females) and are sometimes later set to words. Each *Amà'é* becomes associated with a particular Watcher; exactly how it happens is unclear, but apparently the *Amà'é* is a variation of the same tune as is perceived by others by the Watcher's "psycho-music".

There are several documented instances of Watchers having retained groups of loyal followers for the purpose of singing a *Amà'é*-chorus at opportune times; this is a symbiotic relationship not only for the prestige that comes with associating with a Watcher, but also because (see below) occasionally some of the Watcher's *Amà'ish* can "wear off" on his or her retainers, enhancing their own vitality and super-normal abilities.



Priestess of Virya Nanyé

Finally, one other factor influences the effectiveness of *Amà'ish*, or more properly, influences the potency of the supernatural effects that are powered by it. This is *Amà'érai* (lit. "The Power-Dance"). It appears that under some conditions, the physical movements of a Watcher can enhance – or, perhaps, allow more precise control of – his or her powers. *Amà'érai*, as this is known, involves sprightly, graceful and sometimes spectacular movements on the part of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, particularly in situations of danger or combat. Some of the most common manifestations of *Amà'érai* are ballet-like leaps, somersaults (a favorite movement of the Storied Watcher), graceful movements of the arms and hands, as well as juxtapositions of certain fingers against each other. This *Amà'ish*-enhancing mechanism is usually only employed when a Watcher has at least a few seconds to assess a situation and ensure that the *Amà'érai* movements will not unduly compromise his or her other action plans, but if this is the case, *Amà'érai* is used quite frequently as it can be initiated autonomously by a Watcher himself or herself.

An interesting side-aspect of this is, *Amà'érai* appears to be very compatible with the fluid motions used in certain types of unarmed martial arts combat; for this reason, many of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* have become proficient in martial arts techniques over their long lifespans, a fact that makes them yet more deadly opponents in battle.

Amà'ish differs significantly from other types of extranormal power in that the ability to exercise it can be relatively quickly bestowed, either temporarily or (rarely) permanently, by an experienced Watcher, upon an ordinary mortal being. Different mortals have different levels of sensitivity and receptiveness to *Amà'ish*, but this does not seem to correspond directly to an individual creature's magical or psychic abilities – indeed, in a few cases even characters otherwise completely unable to use conventional "magic" have proved to be very adept at *Amà'ish*, while other mortals with a potent normal magical ability have proved unable to "find the power". There are documented examples of this occasionally throughout history, mostly in cases where a Watcher needed the assistance of his or her mortal companions in some difficult venture. Usually the ability to use *Amà'ish* slowly dissipates over time in a mortal, but in a few cases it persists, greatly lengthening the creature's vitality and lifespan. This may be the mechanism through which some of northern *Ushù'l*'s Heroes have worked the great deeds that have earned them a place in history.

23.3.1. Amà'ish - Métschài

Given a desperate enough situation, all of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* have recourse to a mechanism called "*Amà'ish-Métschài*" (lit. "deep-drawing"), wherein the Watcher attempts to call upon reserves of *Amà'ish* – and, frequently, powers – beyond those that he or she knows that he or she already possesses. This process is always painful, often resulting in severe bruising, stigmata-like lacerations, bleeding from the skin, eyes and/or body orifices and occasionally unconsciousness or coma (rarely permanent incapacitation or even death), but it has saved various Watchers at different times throughout history and usually results in a more powerful, resourceful being once the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* has had adequate time to rest and recuperate.

A very few ordinary mortals, moreover, have used *Amà'ish-Métschài* to become Watchers in the first place, in effect "unlocking" previously undiscovered special powers. Many more, of course, have died trying fruitlessly to develop Watcher-powers that were never there, as *Amà'ish-Métschài* can only be used in a truly life-or-death situation and cannot be performed experimentally or by "practice".

There are a few well-known legends documenting *Amà'ish-Métschài*. One, for example, speaks of a young adolescent half-*Bèni* female – her actual name and homeland is, unfortunately, is now lost, but the name "Laléira" is often substituted in northern *Ushù'l* – who was apparently the offspring of a mortal and one of the greater *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh*. For reasons now lost to history, her biological parents abandoned the girl at the age of five, and she was adopted into a kind, reasonably prosperous clan of urban shopkeepers.

This girl had vague memories of bedtime stories that she "was born of a greater race, with the marvelous powers thereof", but she never put much credence in these tales – common as they are among parents wishing to give their offspring a little extra self-confidence – so nothing ever became of the prediction and she learned to live a happy life as an ordinary young woman. Unfortunately, shortly after her 12th birthday, her kingdom was attacked and pillaged by foreign invaders. As one small part of the collective punishment that the cruel invading army visited on her city for resisting, Laléira, her family and several close friends were thrown in an Underworld cavern to be devoured by the deadly beasts that frequent the Realms of Sinister *Vòrin* Heyklèth.

As one such creature – against which the group was helpless to fight – approached, the girl's parents urged her to make her peace with the Gods, as they forlornly bid farewell to their loved ones. Looking quickly around for Laléira, they found her crouching on the cold stones, doubled up and moaning as if in painful distress; but then they perceived something more sinister – wisps of acrid-smelling smoke were rising from strange, blackened marks on her clothing. The father bent over to embrace his adopted daughter for one last time, but recoiled in pain as his hands and arms were burnt by small rivulets of acidic blood that had started sweating from the pores of her skin. Then he came in front of her, and jumped backwards, startled at her sharp, glistening fangs and at the dull glow that burgeoned in her eyes.

"Child," he cried out, "what witchcraft is this?". "Not witchcraft, or magic at all, Father," she gasped through her grimace, "but the legacy of my ancestors, which comes when it must..." As she said this, a strange, exciting, heartening music began to be perceived by all, issuing from everywhere and nowhere, all at once.





The monster was now almost upon them, and as it reared up to strike, its razor-toothed jaw opened wide, the girl came instantly to her feet and moved, with unbelievable speed, right before it. The deadly fangs lunged straight at their apparently helpless victim – only to shatter as if striking a stone wall, at full force; then the huge creature was struck as if by a gigantic, unseen fist, smashing it to a bloody pulp and sending it flying out of the cave as a child carelessly tosses aside a broken toy.

The rest of this particular legend is not relevant to a discussion of *Amà'ish-Métschài*, although it is interesting to note that there are several variant endings. In each of these, Laléira's family is saved and her new powers help them escape the Underworld, but one conclusion to the story has her single-handedly slaying the invading army and restoring the kingdom to its rightful rulers; another states that Laléira was called away, for unspecified purposes, by other members of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* shortly after this incident, while a yet a third claims that she not only defeated the foreigners but also became the ruling queen of her kingdom, establishing a long-lived, semi-divine dynasty. As the historical setting (if any really exists) for this tale has never been determined, it is impossible to verify which of these endings is actually correct.

23.4. Powers of the Khùl-Algrenàthi'i

All of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* have access to at least some extranormal powers, and many of them possess an extensive collection of extremely potent supernormal abilities. The list of powers that they have been observed using varies tremendously; a few *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* seem to retain only one or two special capabilities; a much larger number have access to an large set of powers, while a very few possess a seemingly endless array of spectacular abilities. Unlike most other magical powers, these can either be exercised continuously or, at least, can be used more frequently than is usually the case with other magic-using beings. Obviously, even here limits apply, and a certain amount of rest is required by most Watchers after they have used their powers repeatedly in a short time.

Among the more common powers known to the Watchers are:

- **Lifespan:** The *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* are technically immortal in the sense of not having a defined lifespan, or, at least, they have extraordinarily long lives compared to other sapient creatures. While it is, indeed, possible, if very difficult, to kill a Watcher, they are immune from almost all normal diseases and though some *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* appear to be well past middle age (judging them against others of the most closely comparable species), it is hard to tell whether this is a natural process or perhaps reflects the point at which a formerly mortal creature became a Watcher.
- **Physical abilities:** Heightened physical strength, agility and dexterity, when compared with a normal mortal being of their own apparent species and gender, are common among the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*. While the first of these attributes seems to be at least partly powered by *Amà'ish*, interestingly, there have been a few recorded occasions where a Watcher has lost all of his or her *Amà'ish*-related powers, yet has still been able to overcome overboldened enemies through lightning-fast reflexes, agility and sleight of hand. Indeed, many of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* practice exactly this so they have some chance of defending themselves without revealing their greater powers; furthermore, given their typically great chronological ages, many Watchers have developed a high degree of familiarity with the various forms of unarmed martial arts skills over the years and thus can give a good account of themselves in a brawl, without any use of supernatural powers at all.
- **Special movement:** Most Watchers are capable of airborne or underwater flight at very high speeds and for very long distances, although some, particularly the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*, seem to be more limited in the exercise of this power. The motive force behind this is the warping of gravity waves under the control of *Amà'ish*. It is said that some Watchers can combine the flying ability with a combination of disintegrative (see below) and heat-exuding powers, so they can, in effect, "fly through" otherwise completely solid materials such as earth, stone and so on. Doing so requires considerable energy expenditure, but this seems not to be a problem for those *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* capable of it. The greatest of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh* are able to "fly between the very stars themselves" at enormous speeds by warping the interstellar gravity waves found throughout the cosmos, but this mighty power is, obviously, not often employed, given the great distances involved.

- **Attack immunity:** The *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* are essentially safe from most forms of physical and mental attack. This protection is usually manifested as a "force field" effect, which can be extended over persons in the immediate area that a Watcher wants to protect – this field is instinctively always enabled as an invisible, imperceptible aura that envelops the Watcher's body, but most of its protections are inert until the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* perceives danger. The aura can also be used to reverse-channel an *Amà'ish* discharge against enemies who may have physically restrained a Watcher, manifested as a powerful electric or telekinetic shock. However, even though they have a very high innate level of magic resistance, the Watchers have a few counterintuitive vulnerabilities to relatively mundane magical attacks that could be resisted by even a low-grade *Anratscheldor-haii*.

An interesting sidenote to this is, the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* apparently cannot be "drained" of their life-forces and cannot be re-animated as undead monsters by the dread *Mêm-Uhùryo*, although the energy-draining attacks of these sinister creatures, if successful, cause the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* agonizing pain and can, in extreme cases, even kill a Watcher. Another notable aspect of the attack immunity enjoyed by the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* is that they are extremely difficult to "teleport", whether voluntarily or otherwise; for reasons that have never been determined, most magical teleportation spells simply fail when used against or on behalf of, a Watcher.

- **Life support:** A very common ability among the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* allows them to maintain themselves in otherwise lethal environments (for example those under very high or low temperatures or pressures or in the presence of strong radiation); an experienced Watcher can encapsulate himself or herself with a barely perceptible "glow" of *Amà'ish*, which protects himself or herself from extreme environments. Also, the energy that thus surrounds a *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* can be converted back into *Amà'ish*, providing a virtually limitless source of power. Associated with this is the ability to maintain themselves in environments lacking in the basic elements needed to support life, for example under the water, in a vacuum or simply in an area without adequate food or drinking water. How this is accomplished is unclear, but a few sources refer to *Amà'ish* being used "in the stead of breath and repast" (seemingly, it can supply oxygen and nourishment – or some kind of substitute for these – for the Watcher; however it is said that the experience of doing so is unpleasant, and cannot be maintained for long periods of time except among the greatest of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh*; perhaps this is why most of the Watchers have remained on or around Telostic as opposed to having traveled off into space).
- **Pain tolerance:** The Watchers have a very high level of resistance to physical pain, in the sense that an experienced *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* can "mask" most types of pain by means of mental discipline plus other, as yet unexplained mechanisms. Despite this, there are some types of pain – for example, that caused by the attacks of the undead, direct exposure to energy sources or that caused by *Amà'ish-Métschài* – that at best can be dulled, not eliminated, by the Watcher's mental capabilities.
- **Fatigue tolerance:** Although in normal circumstances the Watchers experience fatigue, and exercise sleep, as do ordinary humanoid mortals, they have a high degree of resistance to fatigue in stressful situations. It appears that *Amà'ish* can – at least for a time – be channeled into a *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*'s body, to replenish and stave off the effects of fatigue that may have been generated by physical actions in which the Watcher indulges. *Amà'ish* can also, particularly among the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh*, empower a Watcher to stay awake and reasonably alert for much longer periods of time than would be possible for a mortal, but even here, for most Watchers sleep is eventually necessary.

There are two partial exceptions to this rule. Some of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* seem to voluntarily avoid sleep for weeks at a time, by "meditating" in a lotus position for a few hours each night. Also, a few Watchers have been known to maintain themselves in a state of semi-consciousness, sometimes for years at a time. It is said that the greatest of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* used this ability, in ages now long-past, to travel between star systems – engaging in voyages that took hundreds of years. In this "waking dream" state of suspended animation, their eyes are almost shut and their body and most mental functions (with the notable exception of danger precognition) are reduced to very low levels which can be maintained almost indefinitely solely by *Amà'ish*.





Another use for a closely related ability is sadder and much closer to Telostic. The longevity of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* can sometimes cause them great emotional and psychic weariness, since they invariably see the mortals that they have come to know and love, suffer the effects of old age and eventually die. The distress that this sequence of events can cause, especially if repeated over several human lifetimes, is sometimes more than a Watcher can bear; yet causing their own deaths is a foreign concept to the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* (even if it could conveniently be accomplished, something that would not be easy, considering the formidable involuntary defences that these beings have as an innate characteristic).

To cope with this problem, the Watchers have occasionally been known to prepare a pseudo-tomb – usually very well-hidden in a remote or hazardous area – and then to repair to it after saying farewell to remaining friends and family. The *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* performing this ritual then reclines on a stone bier in the tomb and slowly lowers himself or herself into a condition of almost complete suspended animation (except, again, for the Watcher's innate defences, which are always in effect). This state lasts for a random amount of time, never less than decades, sometimes centuries or even thousands of years. When the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* finally awakes, memories of his or her former life, friends and loved ones will be severely dulled, if not lost altogether; thus the Watcher can learn to live and love again, at least for a few human lifetimes.

This practice is thought to account for the long absences from the historical record that have been noted for several of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, and undoubtedly many of these great beings are now resting in this way, allowing the gentle hand of Time to gradually ameliorate one of the few genuine drawbacks of immortality.

- **Cultural skills:** Except for a few "loners" who shun the trappings of civilisation, the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* have excellent artistic and cultural skills (perhaps due to these beings' longevity, although they have a reputation for being superb at prose, verse, singing and playing musical instruments). A curious aspect of this is that the Watchers, especially the female members of this group, have a reputation for having a very strong sex drive, engaging in sexual activity with many partners and with unusual frequency⁵ [this proclivity may be a side-effect of *Amà'ish*, which is said to produce an erotic sensation when regenerated from a real-world energy source (see above)]; such lovemaking episodes are also one of the very few circumstances in which the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* "let down their guard" and are vulnerable to attack, and indeed there are several documented cases of where exactly this was used to entrap – though never, it appears, permanently harm – a Watcher.
- **Acceleration tolerance:** The Watchers can withstand very high levels of acceleration, such as would crush an ordinary mortal to a pulp; this ability is shared equally among the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh* and the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*, even those of the latter group who cannot themselves create enough motive force to generate such high speeds.
- **Reflex powers:** The *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* have unbelievably fast reflexes, including a "sixth sense" that allows them to anticipate most attacks made by mortal creatures and take precautions ahead of time. A far more potent ability, however, is that a few Watchers can – for a relatively brief time (no more than a few seconds or so in each instance) – "slow" the passage of time from their own perspectives, so that the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* has, in effect, minutes or hours to formulate strategy for events that in fact take place in split-seconds; needless to say, this makes them extraordinarily difficult opponents in situations of combat. This ability does not actually retard the passage of chronological time, of course – it merely accelerates the Watcher's own, internal cognitive and action-taking powers.
- **Mental-physical powers:** Many of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* have extremely powerful forms of telekinesis, pyrokinesis, thermokinesis, cryokinesis, magnetokinesis and control over other environmental factors, extending, in some extreme cases, to control over tornadoes, hurricanes, storms, volcanoes, earthquakes and the like. Apparently, some of the Watchers "specialise" in a particular discipline of elemental abilities, a factor that is influenced by the powers of the Pendant (if any) that they possess. Thermokinetic powers are among the most favoured of the Watchers; quite a few slavers and jailers have watched helplessly as the chains they have used to bind captive *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* have simply melted away like butter in a hot pan. Conversely, the Watchers are able to absorb massive amounts of elemental forces by drawing the latter into their bodies, in a manner analogous to a ordinary person sucking water through a straw; large fires, blizzards and other similar phenomena can be nullified easily through this process, and it also has the salubrious side-effect of multiplying the amount of *Amà'ish* available to the Watcher concerned.

One well-known account of thermokinesis describes Hlià-Elér'é ("Mistress of the 10th Pendant"), a lone female *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh* confronted by a crowd of ruffians in a public-house in a cold mountain village in Mähag in the mid-Third Age; according to the story, there had recently been a blizzard, and the fireplace of the inn had just run out of fuel, leaving the drinking-room freezing cold. Two of the ruffians menaced Hlià, demanding that she give up her shawl to them. Her reply was to assure them that they would be warmed – and "within a trice, all perceived themselves as in the bowels of a furnace, and ran screaming from that awful heat into the night". The environmental effects in cases like the above can either be real (which in most cases would instantly destroy any unprotected mortal) or simply a psychological force, or, more commonly, a little of the former and a lot of the latter. One unfriendly encounter with a Watcher is usually all it takes to disabuse hostile mortals of further aggressiveness.

- **Mental powers:** The Watchers are widely known for their use of telepathy, sometimes, but not always, accompanied with other mental control abilities. All of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* can "read minds" to one extent or another, and the greatest of them possess a special variant of telepathy; this allows the minds of thousands of sapient creatures within a wide radius of the Watcher, to be simultaneously scanned for a particular surface thought or linguistic phrase. While this power can be thwarted by certain magical protections as well as by mental self-discipline on the part of a being within the scanned area, it has, in the past, proved highly effective in helping a *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* identify and isolate a particular sentient being of interest within large concentrations of other beings.

The Watchers also have a high level of mental self-control as well as a pre-perceptive feature that warns them of an impending mental assault, so they are very difficult to "charm" or subject to other mental controls (although they are not completely immune to this, and there are documented examples of Watchers falling victim to various types of mental attacks).

Some of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* – these powers seem for some reason to be more common among the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh* than among the "greater" Watchers – also have recourse to a relatively wide array of offensive mental abilities. Perhaps the most frequently employed of these is a type of psychic attack that instantly overloads the neurons in the brain of an opponent; depending on the amount of *Amà'ish* that is used to power the assault, this weapon can easily stun enemies or render them unconscious, but it has never been used to actually kill an opponent. (Whether this is due to some intrinsic limitation in the power of the neural overload attack or whether it is due to moral strictures on the part of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, is unclear.) The neural attack has a few limitations; it seems not to work through metal and is difficult to focus on a single victim in a crowd, so that although it may, indeed, knock out a single opponent that a Watcher wants to incapacitate, other sentient beings – even those allied with the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* – within about an eight metre radius are usually also affected to a lesser degree, suffering unexpected perceptions of dizziness or fatigue.

One other factor is the ability of Watchers to instantly perceive harm – particularly anything causing bodily injury, pain or death – to other *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* within a very wide radius (scores to thousands of kilometres distant, subject to limitations that are not well understood); as can be imagined, this usually causes a Watcher who is not himself or herself already heavily preoccupied, to show up quickly to the detriment of whomever harmed the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*'s associate.

- **Sensory abilities:** All Watchers possess enhanced sensory abilities compared to those of the ordinary races. "Standard" abilities include excellent hearing and a variety of infra/ultravision. Unlike the more familiar versions of infravision and ultravision this is merely an adjunct to the ability to see in the normal visual spectrum as opposed to a completely separate vision mode, but conversely, it operates at very long range and, at least in some individuals, also detects invisible objects and extends into certain alternate planes of the multiverse – it is said that some of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* can detect the presence of a living being at a distance of many kilometres using this aptitude. Another perception mode, which is (as far as is known) is unique to the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, is the ability to perceive the presence of solid objects, especially those composed partly of minerals or metal, at very long distances; this is vital to high speed flight, as it allows a Watcher to detect the presence of aerial hazards at long enough ranges to take appropriate evasive measures.

Many Watchers also have "omnidirectional" hearing that alerts them to sounds from all directions and, last but not least, many have an ability to perceive minute disturbances in air and water currents, which makes it extremely difficult to hide in the presence of a Watcher.





- **Body integrity and control:** The Watchers are famous for very rapid wound healing (with a curiosity here – it is said that their blood, especially that of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh*, is a strong corrosive acid that can melt iron even in small quantities, so a wounded Watcher can be a dangerous patient). There are many well-documented stories of Watchers having survived injuries that would have been instantly fatal to any other creature – the only sure way to kill one of these beings with conventional weapons is to sever the neck or completely destroy the Watcher's body. There are actually several distinct mechanisms by which this self-preservative ability is manifested, but one in particular bears remarking upon. This is the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*'s power to "heal-concentrate"; essentially, this involves the Watcher forcing *Amà'ish*, plus his or her body's innate healing abilities, to overwhelm a wound or infection in a single body area, before the latter progresses to the point of being unmanageable. Almost anything – including normally unrepairable body parts such as bones, tendons, vital internal organs and components of the central nervous system – can thus be quickly healed by an experienced Watcher, provided that he or she has a few minutes to an hour of undisturbed time to perform the heal-concentration process.

A few of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* also have amazing abilities to heal others by "laying on of hands" or other sympathetic means, though doing so tires the Watcher involved considerably.

A less dramatic aspect of this is that the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* can "fine tune" the mundane aspects of their body integrity simply through meditation. In practice this means that despite whatever vices in which they indulge, the Watchers are always quite physically fit compared to normal beings of their own apparent morphology. Furthermore, the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* have a limited ability to modify facial and other personal appearance features – for example hair and eye colours, bone, muscle, lip and breast sizes, and so on – so as to increase their physical attractiveness. This process, again engineered by meditation, takes time, so it is difficult to use as short-term disguise, but it does ensure that the Watchers (especially the female ones, who practice the art more often) are unusually beautiful. A more important side-aspect is that female *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* seem to have nearly complete control over their own reproductive systems, and can prevent pregnancy, or enhance fertility, simply by willpower.

- **Invisibility:** All of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* have the ability to make themselves largely, but not completely, invisible, although like many other powers this one seems to be considerably better developed in the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh* than in the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*. The Watchers' "invisibility" appears to be equally an ability to "bend" light rays and an ability to mentally block their presence in a scene, from the minds of lesser creatures, so there are many types of beings (greater variants of the *Mêm-Uhùryo*, for example) that may be able to detect even an "invisible" Watcher – but note that except if physically trapped, a *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* detected in this manner would be able to move away very rapidly and blend in with covering terrain.
- **Molecular transformation:** Some Watchers have the ability to manipulate materials on the molecular level just by touching the latter, although their capability to "transmute" one material to another seems to be quite limited – this power is more often manifested in the disintegration of substances (for example an iron door) that happen to be in the way of a Watcher at one time or another. This **can** also be done to living tissue (with predictable consequences), but documented instances of such attacks are very rare.
- **The Light of the Watchers:** In a more sinister vein, many of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* have a potent weapon in the *Light of the Watchers* – apparently a very powerful, coherent directed-energy beam attack of some type. This can be fired either out of the eyes (it is most powerful when used thusly), from the index finger or, less commonly, from any direction from any part of the Watcher's body. It is usually reddish-orange or white-yellow in colour, but blue-green and, rarely, silver or black versions have also been observed.

Unusually for a directed-energy attack, the *Light of the Watchers* can be modulated in power, so that a *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* wishing to deter a foolish opponent can strike the latter at a harmlessly low energy-level, then gradually increase the potency of the ray until the putative victim gets the message of what may happen if he or she persists. Another non-standard characteristic of this weapon is that it is not only largely ineffective, if used against other Watchers (there are a few dramatic exceptions to this principle, so most *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* are very careful not to test it in real life), but it can actually be used as a method for transferring *Amà'ish* from one Watcher to another if the Watcher firing the *Light* wishes to use it in "benign mode".

The *Light* can penetrate most forms of magical protection and usually blows anything unfortunate to be in its way, to bits; but the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* rarely use it except in really dire situations, which is probably more a reflection on their ethical orientation than on any intrinsic limit on their ability to use this weapon. However, on occasion, it has been observed that members of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh* have tired noticeably after repeated use of the *Light* in situations of combat. As with so many other aspects of their shared powers, this does not seem to be as much of the case with the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh*.

- **Communication and intelligence:** Most of the Watchers do not have any magical linguistic or script-writing abilities, but they are endowed with high to exceptional intelligence (compared to a humanoid of their own apparent species), so they learn unfamiliar languages and scripts very rapidly. One special aspect of this is an ability – perhaps due just to the accumulated guile of having lived for many centuries, or perhaps because of some actual supernormal power – to rapidly identify, decipher and/or disarm codes, puzzles and traps. The *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* are said to be able to "smell" all but the most professionally or magically concealed traps; this is a sort of instinctive sixth sense that warns them when something in a scene is "not right".

Not all the Watchers possess all these abilities, as far as is known, and they do not all possess them in the same measure, nor can all the above powers necessarily be exercised at the same time, even by a senior Watcher. Conversely, certain Watchers have special capabilities unique to themselves. These seem to be mainly element-related, with some Watchers specializing in heat, others in cold, etc., but there are many exceptions to this principle.

23.5. The Known Watchers of Ushù'l

Many of the details of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* are unknown. An example of one of typical legend surrounding them, is the claim that Orhon-Sermilè-du-Pvâchep, bearer of *Còs Nwùma*, established himself as the ruler of the then minor Trillian town of Kee'Ha in 5633 BU. He allegedly renamed the habitation Làvy-Tvòn to welcome the arrival of Khònhòrod-on-Dperumu (owner of *Còs Jjònci*, "Pendant of Green"), and then the two Watchers disappeared from the pages of history for hundreds of years. Orhon and Khònhòrod do not reappear until the Great Council of the Watchers in Arconia that marks the start of the years After Union – from this, one may infer that either the Pendants confer immortality on their users or that there is more than one being of the same name having controlled a given Pendant.

A partial list of currently known Watchers is provided below.

- **Chrài** ("Sir" or "Knight" in archaic versions of the Meshònian tongue) **Dondré-Hàlo**, male of indeterminate species (but probably human, *Bènlì* or an admixture of the two), bearer of a Pendant of unknown description (may have been a "Scarlet" or "Red" Pendant); this character, supposedly as old as the ancient Mahàgi Imperium, is one of the legendary Heroes of northern *Ushù'l* and several landmarks are named in his honour – an odd situation, when one considers that virtually nothing remains of the record of his accomplishments; one of the few tales that does survive involves Dondré-Hàlo having warred against "those malign entities who inhabited the Towers of the Vortexes" during the Second Age; there is no subsequent record of him past this point, except that according to one account he attended the Great Union of all the Watchers which took place in Arcònia in northern Mahàg in 0 BU/AU. He is believed to have belonged to the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*.
- **Qlànu-Lé'Hnàyu**; "Blue Son of Black Night" (so named because of his strange, blue-green complexion – a mutation of *Bènlì* genetics, perhaps – ?); by vocation a mercenary general and warrior from Amplaë in the 6th Century BU; notable in that although he is said to have been quite a powerful member of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*, Qlànu (apparently) never had or used a Pendant; he is one of the very few Watchers who is documented as having been slain (under mysterious circumstances); but his tomb, the location of which is a well-known landmark in north-central *Ushù'l*, has remained impregnable over the ages, giving rise to the usual tales of him having escaped or having been put "in a sleep of the ages".





- **Màrfak-àl**; male human (with a few signs of *Bènlì* and more exotic ancestry as well), apparently from the *Amplae* region, but his exploits are well-known throughout *Ushù'l*; this Watcher has been documented at least as far back as the 5th Millennium BU, with a hint of exploits considerably before that. Màrfak is one of the most powerful members of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh* and he is said to have co-operated on several adventures with the mighty Storied Watcher, *Karéin-Mayréij*. His abilities seem to be even more destructively potent than those of the Storied Watcher in some ways, but they are less varied and flexible. For example, unlike great *Karéin*, he can heal only superficial wounds on other beings, and he lacks many of her artistic and charismatic powers.
- **Yi-Sah Wà Pé Mi'i**, female human from the extreme south (*Ràhax*), first identified in the early 7th Millennium BU, bearer of *Còs Nchòsti*, ("Invisible Pendant"); little is known of Yi-Sah or her Pendant, save that it was evidently one of the most powerful ever discovered; a few legends refer to her having been "entombed", "exiled" or otherwise magically confined after having lost a battle with certain sinister entities, centuries ago. One of the latter may have been the dreaded *Ròao*n, according to some accounts. In any event, there are no instances of her having appeared later in the historical record.

An interesting aspect of this is, the legends tell of friendly "contests of supernal strength", carried out millennia ago between *Karéin-Mayréij* and several of the other *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh*; Màrfak, so it is told, was the only Watcher who could consistently defeat the Storied Watcher, but at last, captivated by her beauty and presence, he deliberately failed a final test so she would win and come to love him. Upon learning of this ruse, *Karéin*, furious, spurned Màrfak's advances for over a hundred years' time, but later she found herself in desperate straits in an unequal battle against several senior Demons, and was rescued when Màrfak showed up at the last moment. "Lord-Mahkàilh," the Storied Watcher implored, "if ever again you plan to fail, be it not now!" To this, Màrfak is reputed to have replied, "Lady-Mahkàilh, no Demon's tooth could wound as you did, when last I checked my strength." At this, the two, feeding off each other's psycho-music, rejoined the battle, unleashing awesome powers that quickly defeated their sinister enemies. They went on to become close friends and, eventually, lovers – a state that apparently persists today, although Màrfak and *Karéin* frequently operate separately.

Màrfak is about 1.8 metres in height, with an average build. He has dark eyes, a tanned complexion, brown-black hair, a goatee beard and, unusually for a Watcher (given that these creatures have a considerable ability to avoid physical disabilities) is almost completely bald. He is prone to wearing suits of dark brown or black leather overall, occasionally with a cape or traveling-cloak.

Like many of the long-lived *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, Màrfak is an excellent linguist and he can communicate fluently in the tongues of almost every part of northern *Ushù'l*... and, undoubtedly, those of much of the rest of *Telostic*, as well.

- **Orhon-Sermilé-du-Pvachep**; male human from the far south, first identified in the 6th Millennium BU, bearer of *Còs Nwùma* ("Pendant of Orange"); he is said to have been deeply involved in *Canto-Trillian* politics in the Second Age and then dropped off the historical record for many years; his Pendant apparently bestowed great powers over radiation and light, in addition to the abilities otherwise normal for the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*; he is thought to have been one of the Watchers involved in the great campaigns against the Shadowed Empire in *Roctien* recently.
- **Khònhòrod-on-Dperumu**; male half-human, half-*Bènlì* from the far south (*Cantien*), first identified in the 6th Millennium BU (along with Orhon; see above), bearer of *Còs Jònci* ("Pendant of Green"); famous for his artistic and rhetorical skills, Khònhòrod has appeared sporadically throughout history, most recently as an actor in *Ontars*; unusually for a Watcher, his description is fairly well-known: he is about 1.8 metres tall, with black hair, almond-shaped eyes, a prominent chin and a spare build; he has a smooth, almost hypnotic voice and is considered very attractive to both genders; his Pendant's powers are mainly protective but also involve mental control. He is one of the better-documented members of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*.



The great *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* Màrfak-àl and *Karéin-Mayréij* confront demonic opponents





- **Vònkhai ai Vlùkor é Dròthia on Villoc**, female human of Lòdua-Naai in Mesho, first identified in the mid-6th Millennium BU, bearer of Còs *Oradwàuy*, ("Sea Blue Pendant"); like Orhon she became involved in the affairs of state, except in this case as a behind-the-scenes courtier in north-central *Ushù'l*; she suffered some kind of mishap in or around the Tower of Kòloc, but later showed up to assist in the War of the Tower later in the Second Age, in which she was instrumental in turning back the forces of darkness; Vònkhai is a relatively well-known member of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*, having appeared as recently as 37 BU in Amplaë (doing so to put out a disastrous fire that occurred after an earthquake); her Pendant has many diverse powers, including enhanced control over the winds and, curiously, language and communication; she is also famous in that some of her offspring (for example at least one recent ruler of the Meshònian Imperium) have attained high public office in their own right.
- **Nfézu Bshah Rargòfu**, first identified in the early 6th Millennium BU, bearer of an unknown Pendant; this character may not have been a Watcher at all, as he appeared and then disappeared from the historical record relatively quickly – what he found may now be in the possession of someone else (possibly, it is whispered, frightful *Ròdon*... but supposedly, a given being can only use one Pendant at a time, so if that evil being *does*, in fact, have Nfézu's Pendant, it must be in safe-keeping somewhere –?)
- **The Second Watcher**; supposedly an early lover of puissant Karéin-Mayréij and a member of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh* (albeit, a powerful one), he (or she – the "Storied Watcher" is said to have had lovers of both genders over the ages) is a legendary figure only; some tales associate him/her with Còs *Olamélla* ("Pendant of Transit"), which was, according to tradition, one of the few Pendants capable of some degree of inter-planar transportation; in any event, nothing has been heard from, or about, this being for thousands of years.
- **The Third Watcher**; first identified many centuries ago; this individual's history and characteristics are almost completely unknown, but evidently he (this Watcher was definitely a male, that much is known) never possessed or used a Pendant; the "Third Watcher" must have been a senior member of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh*, judging by the exploits attributed to himself by legendary tradition, which include the single-handed defeat of Demons other similar achievements; he has not been heard from in the last thousand years or so, for whatever reason.
- **The Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Watchers**; these beings – the species and genders of whom have never been publicly identified – supposedly belonged to the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*; the Pendants they controlled [Còs *Kchèhkn*, "Iron Pendant", Còs *Shità*, "Quicksilver Pendant" and Còs *Evénà* (translation lost)] are known in name only; according to the records of the *Anratschèldor-haii*, they traveled to other parts of Telostic, perhaps *Dsshànikah* or *Rhàavna*; no further record of their actions exist, and they are not listed among the Watchers who attended the Great Union in Arcònia, so presumably they are lost or are otherwise occupied.
- **The Twins**; these two creatures are morphologically – but not chronologically – very similar to human identical twin children of apparently about 10 (Telostician) years (equivalent to about 13 Earth years) of age. The first, Emia, is female, while the other, Eiòs, is male. Despite their appearances – for some reason, they have never aged past the start of puberty – the Twins are in fact very old; there are many well-documented examples of their activities in northern *Ushù'l* since at least the 14th Century BU. Furthermore, both of these beings are senior members of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*, although neither one of them has ever possessed, used or needed a Pendant, and their innocuous countenances are very deceptive. Though they maintain some of the emotional characteristics of young adolescence, they are highly experienced (in every sense of the word) in the ways of the world, and they both possess many highly potent *Amà'ish*-fueled powers which seem to be growing slowly over the centuries.

While deeply devoted to each other's well-being – a fact that has brought disaster on several enemies who have attempted to harm one or the other – the Twins travel together only infrequently and sometimes do not associate with each other for years or even decades... one must keep in mind, however, that such a separation is, to creatures as long-lived as the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, rather like a summer holiday would be to someone from 21st-Century Earth!

- **Sinàyamaya** ("High Lady", in an unknown tongue of the far south) **Aijéin**, a member of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh* about whom very little is known, save that her powers are great (perhaps second only to those of mighty Karéin-Mayréij), and that she has dwelt – along with one or more other, as yet unnamed, Watchers – in the distant southern regions of Tmylmx and Sunggulàya, since at least 40th Century BU (and possibly long before that). She is said to roam not only those lands but also at least part of *Rhàavna*, but she has never, so far as is known, attended a Council of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, so her personal appearance and other details regarding her are largely a matter of conjecture.

- **The Ninth Watcher**, Kar-Eòforn VIII of Javertien; this is another character whose status as a Watcher is uncertain, as (like certain other mortal rulers, for example one recent Emperor of Roctien) Kar-Eòforn was merely seen frequently in the presence of several "true" Watchers, from which was inferred that he, himself belonged to that fraternity. None the less, he – or someone very like him – has been seen within the last fifty years (specifically, in an unsuccessful assassination attempt in central Roctien; Kar-Eòforn, or his look-alike, stopped an attempt to kill the *Wézzu* of Fief Convràssa), which would bespeak having far outlived the normal lifespan of a human being. Whatever the truth of this, the historical Kar-Eòforn is not associated with any known Pendant, but some tales describe his powers as having been "bestowed" by other, senior Watchers. This, if true, would mark him as being a lesser member of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*.

- **The Storied Watcher** (also referred to as the "Watcher-Queen" or "Highest of the High"), mighty Karéin-Mayréij; acknowledged as the greatest of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh*, Karéin has been present in the legends of northern *Ushù'l* almost from the beginning of recorded history. Some of these tales (particularly those from before the Second Age) are probably fanciful or at least very exaggerated, as the best evidence has her having been born some time between 4900 and 4800 BU, in that the first clearly documented example of her appearance was at the Union of the Watchers at Vané. However a few pedants claim that Karéin was one and the same as Thaelia the Great of the Ebon Empire – a hard theory to believe, given the great antiquity of that Empire, to say nothing of the significant physical and philosophical differences between the modern Karéin and the historically documented figure of Thaelia. She seems to have been absent from *Ushù'l* (possibly, from all of Telostic) for extended periods, but has supposedly been sighted lately in the far west.

In those parts of *Ushù'l* north of the *Nòlan Oblé*, many of the legends associated with Karéin seem very similar to those describing green-clad *Virya* Karènn-R'Làché and merciful *Virya* Fèttian-Ithé of the Rocto-Ardæe pantheon of deities, so it is probable that the common folk have confused her with these two greater supernatural beings... a situation that is, no doubt, displeasing to all three!

Karéin does not need – and is not known to have used – a Pendant, but she is an expert in their functioning and has sometimes helped new Watchers discover how to unlock the Pendants' potential and powers. She is said to resemble a beautiful human female (perhaps with some *Bènlì* blood in her, as a slight greenish tint can be observed in her skin and fingernail colours under the right conditions) in her late-20 or early 30s, with green eyes, a short, boyish figure and straight, blonde hair.

One unusual factor of her personal appearance is that on first regard, Karéin seems to be merely "pretty" or "winsome, in a peasant-girl manner"; it is only after a few hours that mortal men and women (and other sapient) begin to realise how beautiful her countenance really is. This may be a defensive adaptation of some sort, because evidently the Storied Watcher can turn it on and off as best fits her purposes. Her list of powers and abilities is far too long to describe here, but one fairly uncommon one – shared with only a few other of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* – is a hypnotic singing voice that entrances all who hear it, making it virtually impossible for those so affected to meaningfully oppose her. Her reserves of *Amà'ish*-energy are, for most practical purposes, limitless, and she can use virtually every one of her powers simultaneously.

Despite her great age, Karéin has an abiding interest and a recurring fascination in the life stories of ordinary persons, so she often disguises herself as a typical mortal and participates in everyday society; tradition claims that partly because of this, she is burdened by sorrow, since she constantly out-lives those to whom she becomes emotionally close. She is said to have had at least two children over the ages, but curiously, the identities of these – nor, of the males who must have fathered them – have never become publicly known.





- **Karéin of the Other Worlds**, a Watcher who, given her physical description that closely matches the one above, is probably Karéin-Mayréij, but who may be a different being entirely.

This Watcher is listed separately partly because many of the legends surrounding her are set in worlds and environments – for example, in one case (incorporating many different legends and stories) she⁶ acts as a super-heroic guardian of a technological society very similar to late 20th-Century Earth, while in another she assists a group of stranded humanoids on an isolated space-colony, which is being menaced by deadly alien monsters – that clearly cannot refer to *Ushù'l* (or, indeed, anywhere in modern-day Telostic, for that matter). Another reason is that the powers available to the "Karéin" described in the other-world legends differ dramatically from those known to the Storied Watcher; in at least the latter tale, for example, she must (and does) defeat the monsters in risky hand-to-hand combat, whereas the Karéin-Mayréij known to *Ushù'l* could destroy such enemies with nary a shrug of her shoulder. Perhaps this is indicative of a *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh* whose powers have changed over the ages or, possibly, perhaps it refers to more than one being. The Gods alone may know the truth of this.

It should be noted that the abovementioned stories, while widely available to the sages of present-day *Ushù'l*, are generally regarded as "curiosities" with little or no practical relevance; the items and societies described within them are beyond the comprehension of all but a tiny handful of scholars, and are normally regarded in the same detached manner as would be the trappings of any other extra-dimensional setting.

- **Hlià-Elér'é**, "Mistress of the 10th Pendant"; a human female of southern Mähag in the Third Age; little is known of this individual except that she seems to have participated in the Great Union of the Watchers in Arcônia in Mähag, so obviously she has the longevity typical of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*. A few sagas of the Temple of *Vîrya Hé-Enriath* claim that Hlià fought on behalf of that faith against "the Dark One From the Frozen North" (possibly, an obscure reference to the "Ancient One of Nightmares" or some other demonic entity), but this seems oddly out of character for a Watcher, particularly Hlià who is said to have been one of the more "virtuous" of the female Watchers.

1 An alternate phrase that has, from time to time, been used to denote the Watchers is "*Khùl-Mahkàilh*" (kool MAHK-eye-leh) or "Knowers (of the Many Planes)"; it is interchangeable with the former terminology. A notable feature of this is, the Watchers are known to use the term "*Mahkàilh*" as an honourific title, used when addressing each other. The same word also refers to one Brotherhood of the *Antratschêldor-haii*; perhaps the latter group appropriated it many centuries ago, after contact with one or more of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*.

2 It should be noted that the term *Aablùshyé* is used figuratively, not literally, in this context; that is, while some of the *Aablùshyé* known to the historical record have, indeed, been worn around the neck as would be a mundane pendant, others have taken the form of different types of jewelry, for example rings, belts, bracers and (more rarely) ear-rings or neckbands – almost any durable, metal object that can be worn as personal adornment. One notable exception to this is, however, that these powerful supernatural artifacts are never found in the form of a weapon or piece of armouring.

3 The being referred to in this passage is not precisely known but many of its characteristics bear an eerie resemblance to terrible *Jojjirra* ("Monster From the Fires of Hell"), a huge, dinosaur-like Demon that has plagued *Ushù'l* periodically over the millennia. It is said, by the same legend, that mighty Karéin-Mayréij returned to the huge crater that had previously been the site of the city, to settle her score with the "Demon from the Fire-Pit". As she flew, the story says, "her eyes glowed so dazzling bright that none could look at them save in pain; her vestments were fire, the very air around her was fire, like that of the stars that fall from heaven, that (it) lit the sky to be seen many kingdoms away; and all those below her heard, in rapt awe, the music of her power; and she did battle with the Demon, and the earth shook, and those who dwelled for many *Ochràn* fled in fear; but one lone survivor of the city witnessed the clash, and would say nought but that the Demon was driven back into the sea, and that not even the Gods Themselves could stand in the way of the power he had seen that day".

If the creature that Karéin-Mayréij fought in this legend was, in fact, dreadful *Jojjirra*, then she must have had awesome abilities, indeed, to have defeated it by herself; but such tales are common, where the Watchers are concerned...

4 One of the best-known such tales involves the same Karéin-Mayréij noted above; apparently this great Watcher was once thrown through an interdimensional "nexus" due to treachery on the part of one of her most trusted companions, suffering serious injury in the process and being left completely without memory, on the alien world in which she awoke. This planet, while fortunately populated primarily by humans (along with several other, unfamiliar sapient races), contained many Empires with a level of civilisation comparable to those found on Telostic, but Karéin – being initially unable to speak the predominant language and also being in desperate physiological shape – was soon captured by a band of brigands and sold into slavery; shortly thereafter, she developed a serious illness (caused, no doubt, by the trauma to which she had been subjected as well as due to the biota of the new world, against which her natural immune systems were unprepared) that nearly killed her.

Despite this inauspicious start, through a combination of her very high intelligence (she learned the difficult language of the Empire in which she had landed, in less than a year), considerable physical attractiveness and the guile learned over the hundreds of years of her life prior to that point, Karéin worked and schemed her way up the social hierarchy until she was one of the most favoured mistresses of the Governor of the local province. However, this individual (and the Emperor of the local Empire, to whom the Governor was related by blood) had many powerful enemies.

One day, at a lavish state function where the Governor was entertaining the Emperor himself, a terrified courtier suddenly burst in to the affair, his face flushed with fear. "Mighty Lords," he shouted, "a great doom approaches! Let us make haste and flee! Naught but dust shall remain, ere it be upon us!" Many, including Karéin, the Governor and Emperor, quickly rushed to a nearby window to see what the messenger was describing – only to recoil in horror at the apparition – a gigantic, razor-toothed reptilian monster of some sort (apparently summoned by a hostile wizard in the pay of the ruling family's opponents, though this is not specifically mentioned in the story), lumbering towards the Governor's palace, crushing everything in its way underfoot and destroying buildings everywhere with a "gaze of death and fire" from its cruel, orange-yellow eyes.

As might be expected, utter panic ensued, with all in attendance running in terror for any available exit; everyone, that is, except Karéin, who stood absolutely silent, staring straight ahead at the oncoming monster, with an odd, saturnine expression on her face.

By now the festival-chamber was virtually empty except for the Governor and his mistress. "Woman! What bewitches you!" he shouted as he desperately gestured for his favourite concubine to also make haste, "Do you wish to suffer a cruel death? Come hither!" Then a second later, he remarked, "What is that music? By the Lord of the Red and Yellow, it unfears me... Woman! Your countenance – " Fighting a strange, involuntary urge to fall to his knees in awe and amazement, the Governor saw her eyes blazing brilliant yellow, turning to blue, then back to yellow-white, so bright he had to block out the glare with his hand. Through her now-prominent fangs, Karéin (perhaps remembering her encounter with *Jojjirra*, although it is not clear whether that incident had happened before or after the events of this tale), feeling all her greatness returning, welling up within her, replied, "My Lord... ah, it comes back... ohh, it comes *baack*... yesss... thou must leave me now; though I may not survive, I must fight... if thou love me, *leave me now!*"

Wisely, the Governor did not dispute her on this advice. Experience had taught him that sentimentality was a luxury a ruler could not afford; there would always be another concubine and what was going on in front of him was unknown and dangerous. So he headed straightfor the door, leaving the slim, slightly-built woman to whatever the Fates had in store for her.

His heart pounding, the Governor raced down a secret stairway from the audience-chambers to the street, where he found two of his most trusted bodyguards waiting frantically, cowering as they watched the frightful monster steadily approaching, the very ground shaking at its every footstep. "Sire," one of them cried, "we thought thou lost, and our lives therefore forfeit! Let us escort thou to safety!" Then another, looking to the centre of the street alongside, exclaimed, "Who is *that*? Is she not thy mistress? She stands directly afore the Creature! She will be killed! She must have taken leave of her senses – should we overpower and rescue her, my Lord?"

"No," replied the Governor, "and it would be the mark of a fool to try, for she is not what she seems."





The monster was very close, now, and it roared with a terrifying, unearthly bellow, then let loose a deadly "bolt of refulgent destruction" (the meaning is imprecise) which issued with a deafening howl and struck Karéin full-square... and simply bounced off "as water is shed from the feathers of pond-fowl", much to the astonishment of the three onlookers as they dashed for cover against the debris that was falling all about – except for the Watcher, the monster's bolt blew everything it touched to pieces.

An atmosphere of tremendous excitement, thick and lugubrious yet at the same time stirring and pregnant with anticipation, was perceived not only by the Governor and his hirelings, but indeed by every mortal anywhere in the vicinity, as mighty Karéin's psycho-music played invisibly and incessantly. Her body was clothed in shimmering, blue-green bolts of pure *Amà'ish*-force; she began levitating; she was struck again, and again, by the creature's attacks, and faltered momentarily; then her eyes glowed with such incandescent brilliance that none could look upon her, and she loosed a blazing beam of energy at the sinister, gigantic foe. The monster was struck, and wounded, but fought back even more savagely; then Karéin enveloped herself in a "sphere of flame, as that of the stars that fall from the heavens" and rocketed skywards out of sight; the despair of the citizenry at this was short-lived, as in a trice, she returned, this time as a sphere of flame nearly as large as the creature, which was struck dead-on with a thunderous crash as Karéin flew directly forward at incredible speed.

The struggle between these two titanic entities raged on and on and much of the city was reduced to rubble as the Governor, Emperor and all others with any common sense took the opportunity to get as far away as possible. From a distance, all that could be discerned was a thick pall of smoke, lit from below by the many fires burning all around; the earth then shook as if affected by a powerful earthquake and an immense flame, akin to that made by a volcano and accompanied by a "mushroom cloud" of dust and hot ash, shot into the sky from almost the direct centre of the city.

Eventually the deafening noise of the battle – as well as the haunting, stirring chords of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*'s psycho-music – subsided. Scouts were sent into the city, followed after a time by the army and finally the Governor. He found an exhausted and wounded Karéin reclining on a piece of rubble next to the remnants of a huge rift in the earth; smoldering, semi-molten rock lay all around (indeed, Karéin's bare feet were resting right on top of one such outcropping, the heat of which was so intense that none could approach closer than about a metre), but other than for many gigantic, claw-toed footprints, there was no sign whatsoever of the monster. Small amounts of acrid blood dripped from one or two open wounds on the Watcher's body, scoring and dissolving the rock with a faint hiss and waft of smoke. Simultaneously awed and fascinated, the Governor addressed *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i-Atailh* Karéin-Mayréij.

"Woman –," he said hesitantly, "if you are of any race that I can address without disrespect, I would seek to know more, much more..." But Karéin interrupted him, as she stood up with some difficulty.

"Sire," the Watcher replied kindly, "I now know who I am, and though I am not a mortal woman, still do I love you; for this is why I risked my life."

The rest of this tale is, unfortunately, now lost, but evidently mighty Karéin-Mayréij *did*, after a time, find a way to return to Telostic, since references to her are found subsequently in the historical record, indeed almost up to the present day. One of the greatest of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i*, her exploits – both real and (no doubt) apocryphal – are the subject of countless legends and sagas throughout northern *Ushù'l* and, perhaps, the rest of Telostic as well.

5 These trysts rarely cause female Watchers to become pregnant, as they seem to have evolved one or more natural contraceptive abilities; however, the reverse is *not* the case, and a sexual encounter with a male *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* has just the same chance of an unplanned pregnancy as would be the case with any other normal male character. The offspring of matings between Watchers and ordinary mortals often inherit at least some ability to use *Amà'ish*, but frequently have to use *Amà'ish-Métschài* to "unlock" these hidden powers; a few exceptions to this, however, are known to history.

6 As well as a number of other benign and malign beings, otherwise unknown to recorded history, who (judging from the descriptions of them in the legends) are clearly Watchers; in any event none of these creatures seem to have returned to Telostic with mighty Karéin, if the heroine of these legends is actually her.

23.6. The *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* in *Shakhàn Campaigns*

It should be noted – if this fact is not obvious, by this point – that the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* are not suitable for inclusion in a normal *Shakhàn* adventure party except under unusual circumstances, for example a titanic quest of some sort. Their main purpose in the *Shakhàn* game system, apart from being an integral part of its history and setting, is to act as powerful nonplayer characters available to the Referee to avoid the campaign being ruined by the "invincible player character syndrome".

Furthermore, although this is not true to the same extent as would be the case with truly divine entities such as the Gods and Demons, it should be for all intents and purposes impossible for all but the most powerful *Shakhàn* characters to seriously harm, let alone slay, a Watcher. (Recall that even the youngest and most inexperienced of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* are likely to have the knowledge and cunning bestowed by having already lived hundreds of years, and they have recourse to super-normal powers that, unlike those available to most magic-using *Shakhàn* characters, can be used repeatedly. Furthermore, a party of mortals that somehow **does** contrive to injure a single Watcher, may soon be fighting several other *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* who are responding to the former's psychic cries for help. The chances of success in such a battle would not be very high, to say the least.)

One other factor should be noted here: some of the beings currently identified as members of the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i* (almost uniformly, these belong to the "lesser" Watchers, the *Khùl-Algrenàthi'i Srelkh*) seem to have ascended to this status by stumbling across a Pendant of Mastery. This raises the interesting possibility that at some point, a *Shakhàn* player character might also achieve this exceptionally rare and empowering accomplishment. For the record, in over 20 years of intermittent *Shakhàn* campaigning adjudicated by the author, no player characters of the original campaign have so far come close, although a few have fancied that they have...!

Marcus Shields

Author

Shakhàn 2000

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