

The Ritual of Tellann: Immortality and Its Refusal in Steven Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen*

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While Tolkien presents his immortal people, the Elves, as naturally long-lived paragons of culture and community, Canadian fantasy author Steven Erikson follows a different approach to immortality in his Malazan Book of the Fallen (1999–2010), in which he conceptualizes his T'lan Imass as teleologically rather than naturally immortal, becoming so at the cost of social cohesion but supposedly for the benefit of others. Constructing a Nietzschean-Adlerian framework for power relations, this paper examines the narrative rhetoric Erikson employs to communicate his vision of the challenges their teleological immortality entails for the T'lan Imass in a world reluctant to buy into their supposedly altruistic motivation.

Während Tolkien die Elben als sein unsterbliches Volk als von Natur aus langlebige Inbegriffe von Kultur und Gemeinschaft präsentiert, konzeptualisiert der kanadische Fantasyautor Steven Erikson in seiner Reihe The Malazan Book of the Fallen (1999-2010) die Unsterblichkeit seiner T'lan Imass als teleologisch statt natürlich. Auf der Grundlage einer Kombination von Nietzsches und Adlers Machttheorien beleuchtet dieser Artikel die erzählerische Rhetorik, durch die Erikson seine Vorstellung der Herausforderungen einer solchen zielgerichteten Unsterblichkeit kommuniziert, denen sich die T'lan Imass in einer Welt ausgesetzt sehen, die ihre altruistische Motivation infrage stellt.

Introduction

Whereas the Elves as Tolkien's exploration of natural longevity fill their considerable lifespans with meaningful activities, pursuing for instance proficiency in various arts and crafts, Steven Erikson's conceptualization of an immortal people differs both aesthetically and regarding its purpose. His T'lan Imass, in stark contrast to Tolkien's refined, glamorous Elves, are portrayed as desiccated husks, brutally efficient in combat due to millennia of martial experience

but utterly devoid of existential meaning. Clad in rotting pelts and wielding blades of stone, they represent a bygone age that refuses to accept its own termination. However, rather than being afflicted by an external influence, the T'lan Imass themselves are responsible for their condition, and they propagate the narrative that their pursuit of immortality despite its cultural cost was motivated by altruistic concern for subsequent generations. It is the unique power relations through which Erikson achieves this characterization of the T'lan Imass that is the main subject of this paper, generated from his juxtaposition of the Adlerian categories of individual power and *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*.

Combining theories on power by Friedrich Nietzsche and Alfred Adler, this paper proposes a framework within which the T'lan Imass's grandiose claim of self-sacrifice can be interrogated by approaching them as a group of individual agents pursuing a communal goal for a specific purpose.¹ After a presentation of the narrative situation including the relevant diegetic markers, the Nietzschean-Adlerian framework facilitates a reading of the Imass's pursuit of immortality as either an act of teleological survival or a manifestation of their metaphysical inferiority complex. Both concepts will be illuminated by placing them in the context of the T'lan Imass's war of extinction against the Jaghut. Utilizing the emerging definition of power as the experience of overcoming resistance (Reginster 127; Soll 123) to trace power relations, the intradiegetic judgment of the Imass's transgression of nature for the purpose of destruction is considered as antithetical to their insistence on doing the world, and more importantly the future, a favour, challenging the reader to manoeuvre the conflicting characterizations of the T'lan Imass as either victims or perpetrators.

1 See Nietzsche's original elaborations on power in *The Will to Power*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, supported by interpretations of the primary texts by Nietzsche scholars Bernard Reginster and Ivan Soll. For Adler's concept of power, see *Understanding Human Nature*.

Meet the Imass: Introducing the Narrative Situation

In Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, the identity of the (T'lan) Imass is not only complicated by its lack of chronological narrative presentation, but also by its contingency on diegetic markers such as places, periods, and characters. A brief introduction to who the Imass are, how they are related to the T'lan Imass, and what role the Ritual of Tellann plays in that relationship thus provides the foundation on which Erikson's narrative exploration of immortality can then be illuminated in the context of Nietzschean-Adlerian theories on power. In order to facilitate access to the complex, temporally multilayered, and narratively scattered history of the (T'lan) Imass, this section presents their origins and subsequent development in chronological order, in departure from their original presentation.

The most relevant and fundamental distinction to make in the context of Erikson's take on immortality as a fantasy staple is that between the Imass and the T'lan Imass. As their strikingly similar names suggest, they are closely related, with the mortal Imass being the precursor species to the immortal T'lan Imass. In order to understand the processes and causes behind their metaphysical shift from mortal to immortal, a closer look at the Imass as a people is required. Presented as a Stone Age people of hunter-gatherers, the Imass inhabit fertile basins rich with game animals – an idyllic existence that becomes complicated by the expansion of the neighbouring Jaghut (Erikson, *Memories* 450). While the Imass are short-lived mortals without metaphysical abilities, the Jaghut enjoy considerable but unspecified longevity and access to a variety of ice magic that is historically and culturally associated with their species (1). As the oppression of the Imass is only presented from the perspective of their own historiography, the reader is unable to validate the extent of the Jaghut's aggression, which the Imass describe as causing them to “live in the shadow of the Jaghut. Tolerated, ignored, but only in small numbers. Pushed to the poorest of lands” (450). Beyond this displacement from their ancestral hunting grounds and the significant infringement on their freedom, Imass historiography further accuses the Jaghut of manipulating the Imass into worshipping them, resulting in “a night-

marish existence – that successive generations were born into and so knew nothing of freedom itself” (450). Not only does this self-characterization serve to establish the Imass as the unmistakable victims in the Imass-Jaghut conflict, it also justifies the vehemence with which they react to their marginalization by the Jaghut.

Although Erikson provides no focalized account of the Ritual of Tellann itself, its role in turning the Imass into the T’lan Imass is nonetheless frequently and consistently referenced. As a metaphysical event, the Ritual of Tellann removes the Imass’s souls from their bodies and relocates them to the Hold of Tellann, the metaphysical domain leveraged by their bonecasters, resulting in their teleological immortality (88).² The agelessness the Ritual provides the T’lan Imass with is further bound to the Vow of Tellann, a species-wide pledge to wage eternal war against the Jaghut until the threat they pose to the world is removed (3, 451). Like Tolkien’s Elves, Erikson’s T’lan Imass are immortal in the sense that they do not succumb to processes of biological aging yet may still be killed in battle. However, the T’lan Imass culture stagnates as it exclusively strives for the extermination of the Jaghut, a degeneration symbolized by their change in physical appearance, with the T’lan Imass eventually coming to be desiccated, skeletal husks clad in rotting hides and wielding flint swords to emphasize the indefinite nature of their teleological immortality (Erikson, *Gardens* 256).

Finally, the third period of T’lan Imass history relevant for this paper concerns their response to the conclusion of their war of extinction against the Jaghut, as it fulfils the Vow of Tellann but fails to provide the T’lan Imass with the redeeming sense of accomplishment and identity the T’lan Imass were hoping for (Erikson, *Memories* 610). From its invocation, the Ritual of Tellann is designed to be limited to the war against the Jaghut, to be ended by an event referred to as the “Second Gathering” (250), with the First Gathering being the invocation of the Ritual itself. Rather than being called by the remaining, victorious T’lan Imass themselves, however, the Second Gathering requires the birth of a mortal bonecaster and thus the first mortal representative of the T’lan

2 The Hold of Telann is a metaphysical domain controlled by the so-called bonecasters – a type of shaman in Imass and subsequently T’lan Imass society.

Imass species since its inception. In the context of this Second Gathering, the T'lan Imass, who are at the time *Memories of Ice* takes place usually a footnote or legend referenced by other characters rather than actually represented, return from the marginal role they occupy in Erikson's storyworld to the centre stage. In the context of the Second Gathering, their war against the Jaghut as a self-proclaimed sacrifice for the benefit of all mortal species (451) faces the judgment of the peoples and cultures succeeding the T'lan Imass. It is this renegotiation of the T'lan Imass's role as a teleologically immortal species that facilitates my discussion of the Ritual of Tellann as an act informed by a metaphysical inferiority complex based on the power relations the T'lan Imass engage in. However, relating this narrative situation to the domain of immortality and its refusal require the establishment of a functional framework facilitating the analysis of power relations, which will be presented in the following section.

A Nietzschean-Adlerian Framework for Inter-Individual Power Relations and Their Motivations

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche presents his idea of the will to power as an all-encompassing, necessarily pervasive desire permeating sentient existence, a sentiment finding expression in his aphorism "The world is the will to power – and nothing else!" (Nietzsche, *Power* 1067). Since a definition this general does not facilitate the analysis of the behaviour of individual agents in terms of power, a more specific account of what Nietzsche considers the term 'power' to entail is required. Though Nietzsche's aphoristic style is notoriously open to interpretation, several passages from across his *oeuvre* shed light on the specific structure his ostensibly arbitrary concept of power manifests. At its core, the negotiation of wills to power between individuals resembles a "game of resistance and victory" involving "a little hindrance that is overcome and immediately followed by another little hindrance that is again overcome" (699). In this formulation, Nietzsche emphasizes the interaction between a source of resistance and that which overcomes

it, which corresponds with “the will’s forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way” (696). For the purpose of terminological unity, the basic structure of the will to power will thus be understood as a source of impetus seeking to overcome a source of resistance. Nietzsche affords the will to power such a high place in the hierarchy of human aspirations because he claims that “a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs” (Nietzsche, *Morals* I 13) are the underlying principles of human action. This agonistic relationship between the individual and its environment serves the primary purpose of momentarily satisfying the will to power, only for it to identify new resistances, as it “is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance” (Nietzsche, *Power* 696) with its secondary purpose being self-actualisation grounded in the assessment that “all expansion, incorporation, growth means striving against something that resists” (704).³

Since Nietzsche’s ambiguous aphorisms do not present a conclusive or uniform definition of what exactly the will to power is, or is not, across the entirety of his works, it is prudent to consult the estimation of Nietzsche scholars versed in the field’s history of terminological debates and interpretative consensuses. Here, Bernard Reginster provides a useful definitory reduction of the will to power to “the will to the very *activity of overcoming resistance*” (Reginster 127; original emphasis), which aims to settle the debate of what exactly the will to power wills. In slight departure from Reginster’s formulation, his fellow Nietzsche scholar Ivan Soll proposes that it is “*the experience of one’s power*” that proves most consistently applicable to Nietzsche’s various verbalizations (Soll 123; original emphasis). In a reconciliation of the two notions and with respect to the convincing arguments both scholars provide, this paper settles on a definition of the Nietzschean will to power as the will to the

3 Although superficially coextensive, the two purposes constitute a meaningful differentiation under Nietzschean theory. As the fundamental desire underlying human action, the will to power first demands its own satisfaction via the experience of power, but its secondary purpose is the facilitation of personal growth through the mastery of situations in which resistances to “expansion, incorporation, growth” (704) are overcome. Both purposes are essential to the will to power, but the first has to precede the second.

experience of overcoming resistance. In doing so, this paper's approach to power relations is placed on a foundation consistent with Nietzsche's primary text, yet integrated into scholarly discussions from Nietzsche Studies as the corresponding field of experts.

Thus, Nietzsche's will to power offers a useful perspective from which power can be approached as a human universal, providing the agonistic structural formula of power consisting in the experience of overcoming resistance to apply to narrative action. That being said, Nietzsche's focus on the pervasive nature of power rather than its intricacies limits his approach's applicability to inter-individual negotiations of power relations. In order to supplement this deficit of Nietzschean theory, Alfred Adler's individual psychology and its consideration of the individual as a teleological survivor provide helpful categories. Leveraging his experience in clinical psychology and psychiatry, Viennese psychoanalyst Alfred Adler agrees with the main tenets of Nietzsche's will to power. Expanding on Nietzsche's general assessment, however, Adler argues that any pursuit of power is teleological, that is goal-oriented, in nature, with its goal being the acting individual's survival – only upon the completion of which secondary goals may be pursued (Adler 17). On this foundation, Adler deduces that whenever an individual perceives themselves as inferior to a challenge arising from their environment, this perceived inferiority is what motivates them to act (29–32). Not only is this formulation more psychologically tangible than Nietzsche's reference to some vague "desire to throw down, a desire to become master" (Nietzsche, *Morals* I 13), Adler maintains that an individual's self-perception as inferior to their surroundings is perfectly normal from a psychological perspective, as it motivates the individual to overcome that undesirable state of inferiority. However, and especially relevant in the context of the T'lan Imass, Adler proposes that repeated failure to overcome the source of the perceived inferiority can cause the individual to develop a pathology referred to as the "inferiority complex" (Adler 174). Agents affected by the inferiority complex then attempt to overcompensate for their repeatedly perceived shortcomings by publicly and frequently seeking to display themselves as experiencing power to counteract their pessimistic self-image of inferiority

(175–76). Regarding the social conduct of afflicted agents, Adler assesses that “life becomes a chain of battles for them” (177) and “human societies do not look with favor upon such beings” (176), which in application to the T’lan Imass’s teleological immortality re-characterizes their self-declared “eternal sacrifice” (Erikson, *Memories* 451) as the result of a history of perceived inferiority and failure to remedy that impression, as the next section substantiates.

The Ritual of Tellann as an Act of Teleological Survival, or the Metaphysical Inferiority Complex

Returning to the situation of the Imass preceding the Ritual of Tellann, the Nietzschean-Adlerian framework established above facilitates an analysis of their pursuit of immortality by reducing the dynamics of that pursuit to three major problems and the solutions the Imass conceptualize to overcome them. Firstly, the Imass’s general desire to experience power is challenged because they are threatened by the Jaghut as a superior people occupying the same ecological niche. By virtue of this perception of a threat, the negotiation of further power relations, such as territorial expansion, stockpiling for times of need, and the construction of a species-wide self-image as dominant in their niche and thus thriving is frustrated. Following Adler, this perception of inferiority regarding their immediate neighbours and the subsequent marginalization of their people motivates action, in this case martial acts, which demonstrates the Imass’s second problem. As the Jaghut have innate, that is, natural, control of the Hold of Omtose Phellack, a potent variety of ice magic capable of devastating Imass lands and thus prohibiting their expansion and procreation, the Imass’s martial impetus is not only foiled but results in yet another case of experiencing themselves as inferior. Thirdly and lastly, then, the Imass identify the root cause of their continuous and multi-factored inferiority to the Jaghut in the physical limitations imposed on them by their species, that is, in nature. Not only are their lifespans shorter than those of the long-lived Jaghut, the Jaghut’s ice magic also proves a natural counter to their hunter-gatherer lifestyle. It is this recognition

of the Jaghut as a naturally superior enemy, of nature as the final frontier delineating the range of their options against the Jaghut threat, that finally causes the Imass's self-perception of inferiority to turn into an Adlerian inferiority complex, to be rebelled against publicly and frequently, as the Imass then set out to do in spectacular excess.

From the perspective of the negotiation of power relations between Imass and Jaghut, the Ritual of Tellann is no occultist last resort to higher powers in times of desperate need, but emerges as a tailored solution to the three problems just presented. By disconnecting their souls from their bodies and containing them in the Hold of Tellann, the Imass's bodies no longer house their life force and become ageless, if not invincible. Thus, their transformation from Imass to T'lan Imass counteracts both their susceptibility to the Jaghut's ice magic since their bodies are no longer vulnerable to the cold or the frustration of the food supply, which the ice magic causes by extension. Further, their metaphysically extended lifespans now match or even exceed those of the Jaghut. The resolution of their third problem also alleviates the second one of experiencing themselves as martially inferior to the Jaghut, as their successful campaigns against their erstwhile superiors emphasize (e.g. Erikson, *Memories* 4–5). By further extension, this experience of martial superiority due to their metaphysically acquired immortality means that the T'lan Imass manage to solve their first problem, namely the frustration of their negotiation of power relations as a species, by mounting a superior counter-threat against the Jaghut. However, in doing so, the species initially setting out to fight the Jaghut is transformed into something inherently different – no longer socially or culturally active but entirely devoted to their eternal war.

Thus, illuminated by the Nietzschean-Adlerian framework constructed above, the Ritual of Tellann emerges as both an act of teleological survival and the metaphysical manifestation of their inferiority complex. The Imass, now turned into T'lan Imass, achieve immortality for the specific and pronounced purpose of destroying the Jaghut species, which is identified by them as a requirement for their continued survival. The fact that the cost of this survival is

their future and legacy as a people constitutes the tragic core of Erikson's take on immortality. Considering the Ritual of Tellann as a metaphysical manifestation of the inferiority complex from the vantage point of Adlerian theory, however, the T'lan Imass's pursuit of experiencing power over the Jaghut is cast in an even more tragic light, as an entire species foregoes life and all its constructive potential. Not only do the T'lan Imass eradicate another species due to their pathology but abandon their own capability for progress in the process. According to Adler, it is part of this pathology not to acknowledge it and to hide behind an air of self-righteousness (Adler 75). However, over the millennia of their war of extinction against the Jaghut, the T'lan Imass are confronted with the judgment of agents unwilling to buy into the narrative of noble self-sacrifice propagated by the T'lan Imass themselves, as the Jaghut threat fades and the context of the T'lan Imass's abandonment of their future along with it.

Diegetic Judgment of the T'lan Imass and Its Narrative Rhetoric

Focalized via the eponymous Malazan Empire and its contemporaries, the T'lan Imass with their skeletal bodies and outmoded weapons are presented exclusively as a bygone thing, menhirs of warning rather than the wellsprings of inspiration they hoped to be at the inception of the Ritual of Tellann. In terms of diegetic judgment, three primary approaches can be distinguished. Firstly, a representative of the renegade T'lan Imass argues that they erred not in their abandonment of meaningful cultural progress but rather in their choice of target.⁴ Instead, they propose that the Jaghut were targeted for the indignation they caused the Imass by manipulating them into worship, causing more threatening foes to go unopposed and sacrificing their future as a collective for an unworthy cause (Erikson, *Dreams* 1089). Secondly, another faction of renegades, represented in the narrative by the characters Kilava and Onrack, judge their peers' degeneration into immortality and

4 Renegades are members of the T'lan Imass race that break the Vow of Tellann by abandoning the war against the Jaghut.

lament the potential for the meaningful social development their species collectively renounced. Thirdly and lastly, Silverfox, the bonecaster in charge of the aforementioned Second Gathering, passes judgment on the T'lan Imass in her assessment that despite the functional annihilation of the Jaghut, their war is not yet finished and they do not deserve the oblivion they yearn for. This section examines how each of these three perspectives presents the reader with a slightly different assessment of the T'lan Imass's decision to forego cultural progress in their pursuit of immortality, each calling into question the altruistic motivation the T'lan Imass themselves continue to claim.

Kalt Urmanal exemplifies the conviction held by most renegades, namely that it is not the pursuit of teleological immortality for the purpose of overcoming their natural limitations that is an issue, but the fact that the Jaghut were chosen as that war's target not out of necessity but out of wounded pride:

The Jaghut played games with us. They painted themselves in the disguises of gods. It amused them. Our indignation stung to life became a rage of unrelenting determination. But it was misplaced. In our awakening to their games, they had no choice but to withdraw. [...] The wars were not necessary. Our pursuit acquired the mien of true madness, and in assuming it we lost ourselves... for all time. (Erikson, *Dreams* 1089)

Urmanal's critique initially focuses on the *casus belli* he considers unjustified, suggesting that the T'lan Imass sacrificed their future for an empty ideal out of spurned pride, but he continues by pointing out that "[t]he Jaghut were the wrong enemy. The Ritual should have been invoked in the name of a war against the K'Chain Che'Malle.⁵ They were the ones who hunted us. For Food. For sport. They were the ones who saw us as nothing more than meat" (1089). Returning to the Adlerian inferiority complex, Urmanal's regret of his people's choice of enemy supports the notion that their war against the Jaghut was never motivated by a reasonable assessment of them as the most threatening foe but dictated by their repeated

5 A species of sentient reptilians, the K'Chain Che'Malle are considered one of the Elder Races alongside the Jaghut and the (T'lan) Imass, and the storyworld's earliest apex predators (Erikson, *Gardens* 660).

experience of inferiority to the Jaghut. Further, the unintentional nature of their victimization by the Jaghut directly contradicts their narrative of selfless sacrifice, as it characterizes the motivating impetus behind their war of extermination as active when it was in fact passive.

While Urmanal contests the target of their war, Kilava and Onrack stand apart from most renegades by questioning the necessity of the Ritual of Tellann as such rather than its direction. Despite being a bonecaster herself and thus having access to metaphysical impetus, Kilava is one of very few Imass who refuse to participate in the Ritual and thus never become T'lan Imass. The fact that she nonetheless participates in the war against the Jaghut underlines her belief in the justice of their mission – but not in the excessive ends her people are willing to go to in its pursuit. Her concern for the irreversibility of her people's decision to become immortal is exemplified in her own eventual conclusion as she states: "I have enough Jaghut blood on my hands" (Erikson, *Memories* 4), although the option of abandoning the Ritual is not open to any of her kin lest they become renegade.⁶ While Kilava never becomes immortal, Onrack the Broken, abandoned by his people for being disillusioned with their fixation on the Jaghut as their only source of identity, regains his mortality and rediscovers the joys of mortal life with its sensory delights and the thrill of its perils (Erikson, *Gale* 578). Though he initially also fought the Jaghut, Onrack agrees with Kilava in judging that the T'lan Imass took their war too far, allowing it to dictate the entirety of their conduct as a species, which in his opinion constitutes a loss as severe as any military defeat (Erikson, *House* 1015). While the Imass identified death as the primary cause of their inferiority to the Jaghut, Onrack presents the reader with the teachings of the E'res – the storyworld's first humanoid species, preceding both the Jaghut and the Imass – according to whom it is precisely the necessarily limited nature of humanoid life that provides it with meaning, as

6 Kilava's original decision to not participate in the Ritual and thus become T'lan Imass was motivated by her concern that the reasoning used to justify the war against the Jaghut may eventually expire, leaving her species immortal but bereft of their just cause. Without their moral high ground of defending themselves, she judges their *casus belli* as unjustified.

joint struggle against natural adversities acts as a social cohesive and civilizational accelerant:

Their power comes [...] from layers. Stone shaped into tools and weapons. Air shaped by throats. Minds that discovered, faint as flickering fires in the sky, the recognition of oblivion, of an end... to life, to love. Eyes that witnessed the struggle to survive, and saw with wonder its inevitable failure. (888)

Echoing the Nietzschean assertion that “all expansion, incorporation, growth means striving against something that resists” (Nietzsche, *Power* 704), Onrack’s adherence to the teachings of the E’res opposes the T’lan Imass’s insistence on the necessity of the Ritual with an altogether different sentiment than those of Kalt Urmanal and Kilava; namely, that rather than seeking meaning in victory at the cost of their sense of community, continuing to struggle as a group would have offered its own benefits. The consideration of this alternative was prevented by the T’lan Imass’s inferiority complex.

Lastly, Silverfox as the bonecaster in charge of ending the Ritual at the Second Gathering seeks to instrumentalize the T’lan Imass against yet another enemy instead of releasing them as is her purpose (Erikson, *Memories* 612). Utilizing Silverfox’s identity as the first flesh-and-blood T’lan Imass born since the Ritual of Tellann, Erikson presents her as childishly vindictive against the people who abandoned her in pursuit of their war, seeking to punish them by damning them to the warmongering state they chose over her (611). Silverfox’s petulant defiance challenges the reader to recognize the ultimate consequence the T’lan Imass’s race-wide rejection of communal identity confronts them with, namely that in doing so, they rendered themselves irredeemable from within, as the sense of compassion and social responsibility required to qualify for redemption was sacrificed in the Ritual. In a significant turn of events, Erikson has an outsider show the T’lan Imass the compassion Silverfox refuses them, as Itkovian accepts the pent-up pain accumulated over millennia of meaningless existence, remarking that “compassion is priceless in the truest sense of the word, [i]t must be given freely, [i]n abundance” (873) before he is killed by the

sheer force of the T'lan Imass's suffering.⁷ The fact that the T'lan Imass, now relieved of their collective pain, seek to continue their immortal existence, utilizing it to help distant kin in need in their struggles (886), echoes the sentiments expressed by Onrack and Kilava. They identify that the problem afflicting the T'lan Imass has never been their immortality itself, but rather the monolithic alignment of their entire species to the cause of publicly and frequently presenting themselves as experiencing power in an effort to dispel their self-perception of being inferior to the Jaghut.

Conclusion

In their development from a thriving Stone Age culture into an army of desiccated husks in rotting armour, the T'lan Imass exemplify a special kind of fall from grace, as the immortality they metaphysically acquire is what causes their degeneration as a people. Within the Nietzschean-Adlerian framework introduced in this paper, the T'lan Imass's struggle against the Jaghut emerges as personal and eventually pathological once their continuous failure to experience power over their main competitors translates into an Adlerian inferiority complex. By exploring the power relations the Imass, then turned T'lan Imass, engage in, their grandiose claim to a narrative of self-sacrifice for the benefit of all living beings can be recontextualized as an altruistic cover for their genocidal ambitions against the Jaghut.

As the T'lan Imass's war of extinction spans millennia, Erikson's conceptualization of immortality as having a degenerating effect hinges on the fact that the storyworld moves on without them, uninterested in the justifications of fallen warmongers. What is more, Erikson's juxtaposition of T'lan Imass self-representation with the conflicting perspectives of the renegades as well as Silverfox and Itkovian recontextualizes the T'lan Imass's refusal to adhere to the laws of nature in the pursuit of the moral imperative of their quest

7 Introduced earlier in *Memories of Ice*, Itkovian initially serves as the Shield Anvil of the Grey Swords mercenary army, in which capacity it is his duty to shepherd the souls of his comrades fallen in battle over to the afterlife.

as not only a farce but a grave folly, as it strips their culture of all sense of social identity. Erikson's narrative decision to then grant the T'lan Imass not the redemption they seek but a second chance at being a people caring for one another with solidarity and compassion then emerges as another transgression. This time, the reader faces a transgression against the demand for justice, as they are challenged to reconcile the T'lan Imass's history of genocide with their genuine suffering, and the implications Itkovian's focus on the latter has regarding the former.

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