

## CHAPTER VI

# A TIME OF THE LABYRINTH

THE PRINCIPLE OF CAUSE AND EFFECT



Every Cause has its Effect; every Effect has its Cause; everything happens according to Law; Chance is but a name for Law not recognized; there are many planes of causation, but nothing escapes the Law.

– *The Kybalion*

In Frank Herbert's *Heretics of Dune*, belief, imagination, and prophecy raise a shared question: how much of the order we find in the world do we also help create? Beliefs shape what people notice and what they can do together; imagination gives form to possibilities; prophecy extends that power into the uncertain territory of the future. These are ideas explored through fiction, not demonstrations of how nature works. They offer a fitting entrance to our labyrinth: we act through our understanding of events, yet our understanding is always incomplete.

– An introductory reflection on the supplied passages from Frank Herbert's *Heretics of Dune*, not a direct quotation.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, a human being is mortal, but that is only half the trouble. The worst of it is that death can come unexpectedly—that is the point! No one can say for certain what they will be doing this evening.

– Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*. Working translation of the supplied Polish excerpt; not a quotation from an identified published English translation.<sup>2</sup>

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Polarity gave us a language for contrasts within the world. Rhythm added an image of their movement and transformation. Now we turn to another relationship:

how events give rise to other events. Our penultimate journey enters A Time of the Labyrinth, the territory of Cause and Effect:

Every Cause has its Effect; every Effect has its Cause; everything happens according to Law; Chance is but a name for Law not recognized; there are many planes of causation, but nothing escapes the Law.

The principle leads into a maze of connected changes. Read together with Mentalism, it can suggest that the visible world belongs within a more fundamental mental reality. Some modern interpretations go further and claim that every event begins in a thought that will eventually materialize. That stronger claim is not established by the observation that thoughts influence choices and choices have consequences. Our inquiry will preserve the metaphysical possibility while distinguishing it from a guarantee that whatever we imagine must happen. The broader question is whether the cosmos forms an intelligible order, and what sort of order it might be.

The question is not easy. Physical theories, philosophical arguments, and religious traditions offer different accounts of necessity, chance, and responsibility. Nor is the choice simply between complete predictability and complete disorder: lawful processes may be probabilistic, and deterministic ones may be practically unpredictable. We will travel among myths, symbols, philosophy, and science, examining the maps each provides. Beyond our habitual picture of reality lies much we do not yet understand. Two old questions wait there: does the future already exist in some sense, and could we know it?

To avoid losing our way, we will need several guides, both historical and imagined: Indian sages, Laplace's hypothetical intelligence, goddesses of fate, and philosophers. The route resembles a labyrinth quest. One chamber opens into another; corridors divide; riddles and difficult choices wait at every turn.

Many doors lead into this discussion. Quantum research investigates physical predictions; sacred texts and myths explore meaning; philosophy examines arguments; astrology and divination promise forms of guidance. Their methods and evidential standing differ. Entering the same discussion does not make them interchangeable ways of establishing facts.

We begin, however, in an unusual place in India.

## THE LIBRARY OF BABEL

In Tamil Nadu stands Vaitheeswaran Koil, a temple dedicated to Shiva in his healing aspect.<sup>3</sup> The area is also associated with Nadi palm-leaf readings. According to their practitioners, ancient sages recorded accounts relevant to individual lives on palm leaves. The idea of a library containing everyone's destiny is captivating, but its claims remain unverified. It belongs to the story through which the practice explains itself.

A visitor may hope to find a leaf said to concern their life. The hope itself raises a remarkable question: what would it mean to discover that someone had already written our story?

Picture bundles of inscribed leaves kept in small rooms: a far cry from the bright, orderly public library familiar to many readers. How would one recognize a particular life among so many possible descriptions? The problem recalls the information-

hungry robber we encountered in Lem's tale.<sup>4</sup> Historical palm-leaf manuscripts certainly exist, but their existence cannot verify a claim to knowledge of individual destinies.

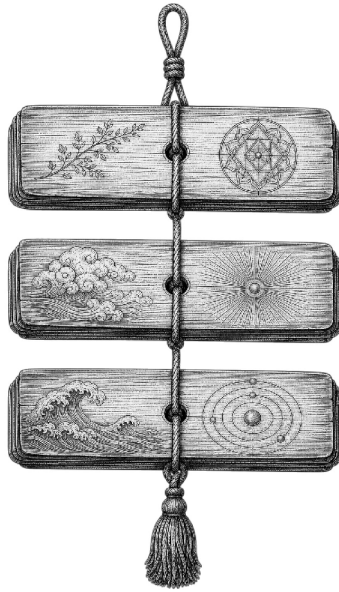


*Figure 6.1. Nadi leaves: a traditional image of a life believed to be written in advance.*

Practitioners commonly describe a selection process involving a thumbprint—traditionally the right thumb for men and left for women—and questions used while examining possible leaves. Accounts of what a reading contains differ, including narratives of the past, predictions, and prescribed remedies. What interests us here is the tension such a practice dramatizes: a written life on one side, the living person's still-open decisions on the other.<sup>5</sup>

The imagined Nadi collection recalls Jorge Luis Borges's "The Library of Babel," whose books contain every possible arrangement permitted by their format. Meaningful histories would lie among countless pages