



7TH SEA

Nations of Théah Volume 1

Delve deep into the secrets of Théah's western nations across enchanted lands beset by Villainous intrigue!

7TH SEA

Nations of Théah
Volume 1

Liberty! Equality! Freedom!

Change is coming to Théah's western nations. Tensions rise as disenfranchised, war-weary people grow restless under the unrelenting rule of the nobility. Now, the people look towards revolution as the only respite.

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- **Castille**, including an inside view into the Church and Inquisition, the ducados of Castille and Alquimia, an all new Sorcery for Castille
- **Montaigne**, including a look into the royal family and l'Empereur's court, the Montaigne countryside and an expansion on Porté Sorcery
- **Vestenmennavenjar**, including a look into the Vendel League, the jarls of Vesten, the ongoings of the various cities in Vesten and Galdr, an all new Sorcery for Vesten

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JOHN WICK PRESENTS A SOURCEBOOK FOR 7TH SEA: SECOND EDITION "NATIONS OF THÉAH: VOLUME 1"

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A note from John...

One day into the Kickstarter, Mark and I had a conversation. The project had quickly grown way out of our original vision and if we were to fulfill on all the promises we planned, we were going to need more people.

We talked about who we should bring aboard this mad voyage to help us along and one of the first people we thought of was Danielle Lauzon Harper.

Oh, who am I kidding? Mark said her name. I had no clue who she was—I'm kind of in my own little world over here in Phoenix—but after her interview, I knew Mark's suggestion was the right call. Danielle not only had the skills but she was a fan of **7TH SEA**. She invoked deep lore when we talked to her and when she told us the things she would do with the line, it became clear that she was the person to do it.

Reading through **NATIONS OF THÉAH: VOLUME 1**, I can see our decision has paid off. Our goal was to present a baseline of the Nations; enough information to get you going, but not so much that you'd choke on the canon. (That was a mistake we made in the first edition. Sometimes, humans learn from their mistakes.) Each Nation here has similar headers and word count, but the voices are all different. Different voices united in a common goal: make each Nation a tool the GM and players can use for their own games. And that's no easy trick. Danielle pulled it off.

This isn't meant to be the definitive Théah, but *our* Théah. Yours can be different. And when you meet me at a convention, *tell me about it*. That's the best part of an RPG for me: hearing the ways different groups play the same game.

—John Wick

Special Thanks

I'm going to tell this story in two parts, just like the **NATIONS OF THÉAH** books are in two parts. The first part is how I fell in love with **7TH SEA**. When I was in college, a friend of mine suggested we play a pirate game. I read through the **7TH SEA** Core book and immediately fell in love with Montaigne, and wanted to make a daring, Panache-filled, Montaigne Musketeer. Normally, when I played games with any kind of historical bent, historical accuracy was the bane of my existence. "Women didn't do those things," my friends would say. No one told me women didn't do the things I wanted my Montaignoise Hero to do, because it was right there in the book, women do these things too. This was my first experience with a game that stressed inclusivity, and I'll never forget it. You get the rest of my story about joining the **7TH SEA** team in **NATIONS OF THÉAH: VOLUME 2**. Spoiler, it involves a great deal of excitement on my part.

I want to thank my rock star team for dealing with pushed back deadlines, edits, rewrites, and a whole slew of other production delays with aplomb and grace. As my first development project with JWP, I learned a lot about the back end of the book making process that I don't get to see in other places. Thank you to Mark and Lenny for walking me through those processes and making sure I always felt involved.

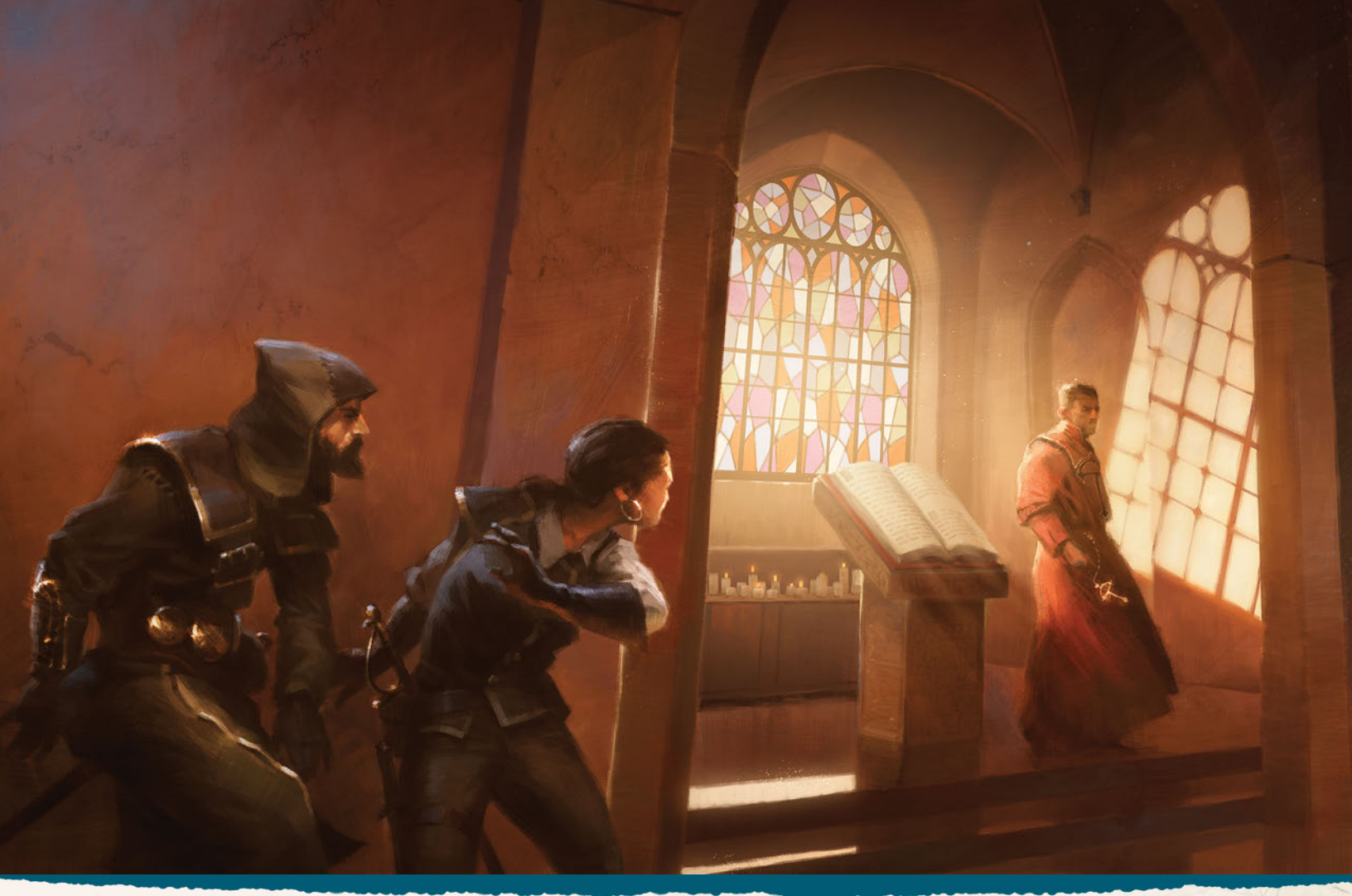
As always, I reserve a very special thanks to my husband, Weston Harper, for dealing with me, supporting me and ensuring I eat, drink, sleep and generally function as a human being when I'm not spending all day writing and developing.

I hope what you find in these pages opens new ideas for Heroes and adventures, and makes everyone feel as though they are capable of doing anything.

—Danielle Lauzon

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An Act of Faith

by Jennifer Mahr

Pike shifted nervously from foot to foot. “You’re taking too long.”

“I’m not.” Evangeline kept her attention on the ornate ironwork lock.

“You are,” Pike insisted. “Hurry up.”

“Calm down. The guard doesn’t pass this way again until the end of the twelfth bell—” A booming peal from the tower above interrupted her. “All the hells,” she muttered, redoubling her efforts.

Pike peered around the empty courtyard—dark except for the flicker of torchlight—one hand on his sword, the other pressed flat against the massive wooden door.

“Got it,” she whispered, the lock turned and the door gave under Pike’s hand. Quick as a fox, he followed her through the opening, both of them putting their weight against the heavy door to close it behind them. The first thudding footfalls of armored boots sounded just as the door slipped silently closed.

Pike took a deep breath and waited for his heart to stop pounding. They stood in an arched entryway, the walls and floor made of stone so smooth and cool they put him in mind of fresh cream. He hurried down the four broad steps that led to the main cathedral and turned toward the long row of pillars to his left.



“What are you doing?” hissed Evangeline, just behind him.

“Following the directions,” he whispered back. In the distance, he could hear more footfalls—the interior patrol on their way from deeper inside the cathedral.

“The directions are to go *right*. Having inside information only helps if you pay attention to it. Haven’t you ever done this before?”

She tugged at his arm, and after a moment’s hesitation, he let her drag him the other way. They slipped behind one of the pillars on the other side, wide enough to shelter them both. They could hear the guards getting closer, three rows of two soldiers abreast walking in formation up the opposite aisle—where Pike would have been in plain sight if his partner hadn’t stopped him.

As the patrol passed opposite their hiding place, Pike and Evangeline darted to the next pillar, then the next, until they reached the broad, open aisle that crossed the body of the main hall. At the top of the corridor, the patrol prepared to turn. In a moment, they’d cross in front of the doors and start their walk back down the south aisle where the pair would be visible. They gripped hands, timing the moment. As the first set of guards began their turn, passing momentarily behind the pillar closest to the door, the two dashed forward, crossing the open ground as quickly and quietly as they could.

On the opposite side of the hall, they slid to a halt, backs pressed tight to the stone wall, breath held as they listened for any change in the guards’ formation. Pike saw Evangeline’s face pale in what little light there was, and her brow was damp, but she set her mouth in a tight, determined line.

There was no change in the patrol’s steady stomp, and they slipped further down the passage until they came to the alcove they’d been told to expect. It was tight, but there was enough space for the two of them to wedge in behind the statue and wait while the patrol finished their march through the main hall.

“No,” Pike whispered.

Evangeline kept her eyes toward the hall. “No, what?”

“No, I haven’t ever done this before.” Then, when she remained silent, he explained, “Your question. You asked...”

He stopped when he realized she was swearing under her breath, a barely audible but steady stream of language so colorful he felt himself blush, glad of the dark.

In the distance, the guards’ footsteps grew quieter as they passed into one of the connecting galleries. Evangeline shifted out of their hiding place. Pike followed her, unfolding too-long limbs from the cramped space. The cathedral was silent now. With a last look around, Evangeline headed for the center aisle, beckoning Pike to follow.

With the fear of immediate discovery diminished, he let himself look around. The grand cathedral in Aldana was like nothing he’d ever encountered. Nineteen years a Vaticine—the whole of his young life—and he never dreamed the Houses of the Prophets looked like this. The ceiling, if there even was one, arched so far overhead that the torchlight couldn’t reach it. Columns as wide as three people abreast stretched upwards. They had to step carefully to ensure their footsteps didn’t echo in the vastness of the place.

They headed for a doorway they couldn’t see, but their instructions said it would be there, to the right and behind the altar. In spite of himself, he slowed to look at the altar itself, magnificent and intimidating on a raised dais, covered with a tapestry embroidered with threads so gold they gleamed in the torchlight. Or maybe they were actual gold.

The familiar countryside church that Pike remembered had a wooden altar and a ceiling a tall worshipper could touch. It had regular windows that let in the light and shutters to latch against storms. This place had...Pike’s breath caught in his chest as he stared up at the enormous wall of glass before him. Brilliant colors winked back at him—blues like the ocean, golds like sunlight, other colors like fragments of flowers and forests and storms.

The stained glass window rose so high, shadows claimed the top of it. There were more torches here than in the rest of the building, as if this marvel was never meant to be left to darkness. It divided into three interconnected images, the central section portraying the First Prophet, the Second and Third Prophets on the panels flanking him. Pike smiled at the scene depicting the Second Prophet, a series of signets arrayed near his feet.



Evangeline was already at the door, plying the same tools she'd used at the entrance. He knew he ought to join her, but he let himself have one more moment to stare at the marvel in front of him and to send up a swift and silent prayer that their work tonight would be successful. Of course, he could appreciate the irony of praying while breaking into a church, but these were complicated times, and if he had to cope with that, then it seemed only fair that Theus should have to do the same.

Evangeline looked up from her work. "Are you seeing everything?" she asked. "I think they have tours once a week for a Guilder." She winked, and he relaxed a little.

"I don't think I'm coming back here any time soon," he whispered back. "I'm too fond of breathing."

The smiles fell from their faces as they both heard the sound of footsteps approaching. Eyes wide, Pike pointed to the door. Evangeline shook her head emphatically *no*. Still locked. The footsteps came closer, along with voices, and he grabbed her arm and pulled her with him back toward the altar. Sweeping aside the tapestry covering it, they both ducked underneath, Pike putting out his palms to still the fabric.

A man's voice, deep and cultured, came to them, only slightly muffled by the thick fabric. "I've no patience for these petty squabbles. It's unseemly—rebels and looters. They think they can stand up to us. A sheep would have a better chance standing on its hind legs to argue with the rancher to keep its wool."

A second voice sniffed. "The sheep has something useful to give the rancher. These would-be usurpers have no value in their heads or their hides."

"Not necessarily," replied the first. "This is your trouble, Father Trevane. You're too quick to discard what could be a useful tool. Their hides are a means to open their heads. And their heads, and the snakes nested within them, are the means to rout the other serpents." He gave a chuckle that raised the hairs on the back of Pike's neck. The steps had stopped, and the voices were close. They must be standing beside the altar. "I tell you," he went on. "Get me just one of these conspirators, and I'll have the names of the others from his tongue before he loses it."

The second man made a harrumphing sound. "No doubt. You are an artist, Father Rosa."

Pike had the sudden fear that the smell of his own sweat would give them away. Father Rosa was infamous. The head of the Inquisition in Aldana and the surrounding area, he had a reputation for cruelty and brutality. He looked to Evangeline, pressed tight against his side in the narrow space. She'd eased a fine, bright knife out of her boot and held it close. Pike's only weapon was his sword, trapped uselessly beneath him. He promised himself that if he survived this night, he'd be better at this the next time.

Possessed by a sudden need to put faces to the monsters before them, Pike leaned forward, easing aside the tapestry a scant inch. He felt Evangeline tense beside him, but she couldn't argue without giving away their hiding place. Pike could see both men. Their bodies were turned away from him, but their faces were angled in the torchlight. Trevane, who'd spoken last, was tall, with dark hair pulled back in a braid and a thick beard obscuring much of his face. Father Rosa had fine features on a clean-shaven face. Pike committed both of them to memory. If he encountered them again one day, he wanted to be sure who he would be looking at. Giving them one last hard stare, he gave in to Evangeline's grip on his sleeve and let the tapestry fall back into place.

After a few minutes, the two Inquisitors continued down the main hall. Pike listened to their footfalls retreating, and each step away was like a vice loosening around his heart. He whispered to Evangeline, "Do you think it's safe to try for the door?"

"I don't think anyone in Castille will be safe until the Inquisition topples," she muttered. "Let's finish what we came for."

Back at the door, it took only moments for her to open the lock, Pike keeping careful watch while she worked, his ears straining for any new sounds. Once through the doorway, Evangeline closed it quietly behind them, letting out a breath. They were back in darkness now, having only had a moment to inspect the room before the door closed off the light from without. Pike dug in his pockets until he held flint and steel and a pair of short, white candle stubs. Efficiently, he lit the candles and passed one to Evangeline, who promptly started to work. "I'll take the desk," she said. "You start on the bookcases. You're tall enough to reach the tops."



Pike grinned in spite of himself. He was used to being teased about his height—too tall for his width, his father claimed. He did as she said, pulling volumes from the shelves one at a time and fanning the pages. They worked in silence for several minutes before she said, “This is really your first time doing anything like this?”

Pike looked over to where Evangeline opened and closed drawers in the desk, rifling through their contents. “My first time breaking into an Inquisition stronghold? Let me think. There was that time last month... No, wait. That was a market day. So yes, this is my first time rummaging through a High Inquisitor’s office.”

She gave an exaggerated sigh. “I can’t believe Lorenzo sent me in here with a green kid.”

“Hey. You’re not that much older than I am.”

“Maybe not much older, but a damn sight more experienced.”

“How long have you been doing this?” Pike asked, skeptically.

“Four years,” she replied.

“So since you were...?”

“Younger than you.” She stuck her tongue out. “And I was better at it when I started, too.”

He muffled a laugh. “I’m intimidated by your maturity right now.” He put back the volume in his hands and started on the next shelf. “Why did you start working with Lorenzo’s people anyhow?”

“Oh you know, the usual. I was a bit of a prodigy, sent up to study at the university in San Cristóbal. My mother was very pleased, even if she didn’t understand what exactly I was doing.”

“The university? That must have been amazing!”

“It was. For about a year. Then the Inquisition came. One day, everything was normal. The next, the halls were filled with hushed rumors. The third day half a dozen professors were gone. Just gone. The head scholar for my department was one of them.” She didn’t stop working as she spoke. “I didn’t wait after that. I packed a few things and left. I figured it was better to make myself disappear than wait for them to do it. From what I heard, some of my fellow scholars weren’t so fast, or so lucky. A few months later, I found Lorenzo. Or he found me.”

“You never went home?” asked Pike.

“I thought it was safest if I didn’t. No one else in my family has anything that even resembles a heretical bone in their body. My mother’s so devoted, she makes the priest feel guilty. If I went home, I’d just put them in danger. I’ve checked in on them a few times, and they’re fine. I did miss my sister’s wedding last spring.”

“I’m sorry,” said Pike, thinking of his own family.

“Don’t be. If I have my way about it, we’ll bring down this whole corrupted beast before she has her first baby, and I’ll be home in time to be an auntie. What about you? How did you fall into this?”

Pike thought back to his first meeting with Lorenzo a week prior—a tall, square-shouldered man who looked like he owned whatever space he stood in. “My grandfather sent me,” he said.

Evangeline laughed. “Does your grandfather not like you?”

Pike grinned. “I’m his favorite grandchild. Which means he probably likes me better than his dog.”

“Ouch.”

“No, it’s all right. He really loves that dog.” He realized he’d let himself get distracted and forced his hands to keep up with his mouth. Two bookcases down and one to go. “I come from a small village. It’s beautiful, very friendly. So much so that hardly anyone ever leaves. Of my whole family, my grandfather’s the only one who ever went anywhere. Seven generations of farmers, and he decided to be a fisherman.” Pike grinned thinking of it. “My name’s his fault.”

“So he really doesn’t like you,” Evangeline observed.

“He’s the only one who traveled, so he’s the only one who saw what was happening to the Church in other places. In our village, everything’s the same as it’s always been. But it won’t stay that way. Not unless someone puts a stop to the Inquisition.”

“And that’s going to be you?”

He shrugged off the amusement in her voice. “Part of it will. I think. I hope.” He finished with the books and pulled open the doors to a cabinet standing against the wall. “I’ve never been brave. I’ve never been anything, really.” The words were honest, so it didn’t pain him to say them. “But our church has the sign of the Brother of the Heart’s Blade over the door. I grew up on his story and on stories like it.”

He gave a soft laugh. “I’d like to be brave one day.”



He felt Evangeline's eyes on him and kept his attention on the cabinet, so she wouldn't see him blush again.

"Considering where you are and what you're doing, I don't think you have to wait." He blushed harder from her affectionate tone and ducked deeper into the cabinet, running his hands along its back wall as an excuse.

"I don't know the Brother of the Hearth Blade," she said.

"Heart's Blade," he corrected. "His sign is on the window outside, at the bottom of the panel showing the Second Prophet. The Second Prophet had a group of followers who traveled with him while he lived and carried his message after his death. The Brother of the Heart's Blade came from the Crescent Empire. The best-known story about him is from after the Prophet fell, when there was a drought across much of the land. Farms were struggling, people were hungry, and peasants traveled the land looking for work and food.

"There was a family with a decent-sized farm that was still doing well, and one day a stranger with dark skin came to their gate traveling on foot. He offered to work if they would give him food and shelter, and they did. A fortnight later, ten more came to the gate. They asked the same, food and shelter for work, but when they were let in, they took over the family's home. They disrespected the father, harassed his daughters and threatened his sons. They feasted on the food and drank all the wine.

"The first stranger came to them and asked if their behavior was true to what was in their hearts. They laughed at him and threw refuse at him. He brought out the only thing he'd carried with him, a linen bundle, and drew out a sword so bright they say it shone with the Prophet's virtue or else with Theus' own light. He routed the ten, and each one, struck by the stranger's sword, took a wound that scarred as a written word declaring what was in each one's heart—greed, hatred, jealousy. They fled in different directions, but wherever they went they carried the wound, and the word changed to another corruption in their heart. The stranger declared that he was the Brother of the Heart's Blade and that each wretch would walk the world until their word read *virtue*."

He glanced toward Evangeline and found her looking at him. "That's...quite a story," she said. "I've never heard that one."

He shrugged. "The village where I'm from claims that it's the place where he finally settled, and that his blood runs through a lot of the families who live there now."

"Including yours?" she teased.

He shrugged again. "I wouldn't presume. But it's a nice idea."

"It is. Maybe you can tell me some more stories sometime. But right now, we've got to find that list."

Pike nodded, looking around the room. There weren't many places left to look. Maybe behind one of the paintings hung from the walls...

He stopped as Evangeline drew in a sharp breath. She ran her hands underneath the desk, and as she paused there was a soft *click* and a shallow drawer, hidden in the frame of the furniture, sprang forward.

Pike hurried over while she flipped through the thin sheaf of papers there. "This is it!" She held aloft a page in triumph. She laid it flat on the desk, and he could read the list of names on it. Beside each name, their profession had been written neatly, along with a scribbled mark—their offense in the eyes of the Inquisition. Most had an "H" for heresy; a few had an "R" for rebellion or "C" for conspiracy. Pike couldn't make out the rest.

"We have to get this out of here," Evangeline murmured. "The people on this list need to know that the Inquisition is coming for them."

Pike started to agree when the door to the office suddenly opened. Evangeline's knife was in her hand, and Pike yanked his sword from its sheath. Before them stood Father Trevane, but rather than shout an alarm, he closed the door behind him before asking eagerly, "Have you found it?"

Pike realized he was gaping, like his namesake, and quickly closed his mouth. Evangeline's eyes narrowed. "You're our source, aren't you?"

The tall priest nodded quickly.

"But why?" Pike asked, still reeling from the adrenaline of a moment ago.

"Does it matter?" Trevane asked. "Have you found the list or not?"



"We've got it." Evangeline showed him the page before folding it crisply and stuffing it into her jerkin.

"Good," he said, glancing over his shoulder. "You won't have much time. Rosa plans to move on those people tomorrow night."

"We'll make sure they're long gone by then," Evangeline promised, but she still looked suspicious, and she didn't put the knife away. "If you knew this was here, and if you really mean to betray the Inquisition, why didn't you just hand over the list yourself?"

He gave her a withering look. "This is Father Rosa's private study. I have no access to it. And just because I knew a list existed doesn't mean he confided the location or the contents to me. So I reached out to Lorenzo, gave you all the information you needed to get past the patrols."

The precision of their information made sense to Pike now. How their informant could tell them exactly where and when to be to get into the Inquisition's inner sanctuary.

"Only there's a problem," Trevane said, and Pike's heart sank. "The guard captain ordered an early patrol. They're on their way now, and they'll stay posted at the doors for the rest of the night."

Evangeline swore. "You might have started with that." She headed for the door, Pike behind her, but as they opened it, they could already hear heavy footsteps nearby.

"Wait!" Trevane whispered sharply as Evangeline made to bolt. "You can't leave me here like this."

"You want to come with us?" Pike asked in confusion.

"He wants us to hit him," Evangeline supplied, stepping back from the door.

"Precisely. Thank you," Father Trevane nodded.

"You saw the door ajar and came in to investigate," she prodded.

"You were likely hiding behind the door," Trevane agreed. "So..." He turned so he stood a few feet inside the room, his back to the door.

Evangeline took up a position behind him. "Thank you," she said.

"You're very welcome," he replied, and she brought the pommel of her knife down in a vicious strike at the back of his head.

Pike had just enough presence of mind to catch the priest as he fell, easing him down so he didn't make a noise and draw the guards to them sooner.

Outside, the sound of footsteps crept closer. Evangeline looked at him. "We have to be fast. And we'll have to fight our way out. Are you ready for this?"

Pike found himself smiling as his anxiety solidified into something else—excitement. Now he could prove himself brave. And they were going to save everyone on that list. "Can I borrow that for a moment first?" he asked, nodding at her knife.

She looked bewildered, but passed it to him. He cleared the papers from the center of Rosa's desk and deftly carved lines in the wood. A few seconds later he stepped back to admire the circle etched there, a heart in its bottom half, bisected by a cross that would serve as a sword—a rough copy of the sigil on the stained glass panel outside.

Evangeline raised an eyebrow as he handed the blade back.

"I know what's in my heart," he said with a grin. "I'm ready."





Introduction

This book is the first of a two-volume set detailing the nations of Théah. For the purposes of these books, we have split the nations into west and east, with Avalon, Castille, Montaigne and Vestenmennavenjar as our western nations. Within these pages, you will find an in depth look at each of these nations.

The State of Things

The western countries are experiencing flux and change. The War of the Cross ended not twenty years ago, and many of the countries of Théah still feel the repercussions of that war.

The nobility sit on the ruins of their nations pushing an outdated regime at an embittered people. While the peasants suffer under the oppressive nature of tradition, the nobles have their own problems to worry about. They fight and jockey for position, seeking acknowledgement, power and fortune in a system as fickle as a noble's heart.

The nobles are not necessarily ignorant of the suffering of the people, but they find it easier to look the other way and live in denial, than to try to buck the system they benefit from. The peasants, on the other hand, are near the point of revolt. They struggle against the shackles that bind them to their way of life.

Not every nation is at the brink of war, but each has its own problems and challenges faced not only by the common people, but also by their leaders. Corruption, fear, discontent and poverty touch all the nations to some extent. Even the most well-meaning rulers must face down issues waiting at their doors.

Despite the differences in each nation, they are united in the general discontent of the people. That malcontent does not isolate itself within the individual nations, but instead feeds their neighbors' fears. Montaigne's neighbors fear war, Avalon's neighbors fear the spread of magic, Castille's neighbors fear the Inquisition, and Vestenmennavenjar's neighbors fear losing national identity to economic takeover. One thing is true for all—something needs to change, and soon, or else something will break.

Avalon

Avalon is a land of magic, wonder and a disparate group of people with old and bitter feelings. The only things holding the three kingdoms together are the Inish's reverence for the Graal and tradition, and the Marchers' need of the alliance to stay afloat. Each nation vies for individuality while at the same time, union is what makes them strong.

The union rests on the shoulders of Queen Elaine and the trust she engenders, yet Separatists, Realists and the Sidhe erode that trust daily.

Magic has returned to the land in force, bringing wonders and terrors in equal measure. Some people are afraid of the power of the Sidhe, while others embrace it. Humans and Sidhe live side by side, for good or ill.

An Avalonian struggles to maintain normalcy as the Sidhe and Glamour magic encroach ever closer, destroying her way of life. Meanwhile, the Sidhe enjoy positions in Queen Elaine's court, with little done to ease the suffering of the people. The three islands seek stability and peace, but not all agree that unification is the only right way.

Castille

Castille is mired in old traditions that keep it from moving forward. War with Montaigne has depleted the nation's resources, and the Inquisition depletes their morale. The Church rules everything with an iron fist, with control of church and state held in the hands of an intollerant Inquisition.

The Inquisition drives scholars into hiding, and persecutes any who do not follow the letter of the Church's law. They have stolen the King away to Vaticine City and are running the nation into the ground as they attempt to reform the Vaticine faith.

The people are war weary and destitute. More of Castille's poor and homeless are unpaid war heroes and unlanded nobles than simple common folk. And yet, an unlanded noble remains so tied to traditions, he would rather sail to a whole other continent than work for an honest day's pay. A commoner is too proud to admit her leaders fail her daily, and the nation continues to go forward as it has always done.



Montaigne

Montaigne is a land of corruption, power struggles and warmongering. The people are crushed under the power of their mad emperor, and they fear abandonment by Theus with no hope or refuge other than what they make for themselves. A Montaignois is broken by the loss of the Church and the loss of his young in the latest of l'Empereur's misguided wars. He worries that the next conflict will strip him of everything, leaving nothing left to live for.

A noble struggles to stay ahead, afraid a single misstep could anger her mad king and end in her death. She tries to manage her small piece of land, refusing to admit that the wealth she has amassed by hook or crook will not feed her family come winter. Corruption abounds, and everyone from the lowest peasant to the highest noble knows something has to give before the whole country breaks under the weight of war and loss. A peasant now speaks of revolution, looking to places like the Sarmatian Commonwealth as a model to ease his own suffering.

Vestenmennavenjar

Vestenmennavenjar is an economic powerhouse, full of leaders more intent on making money than taking care of their people. The nation is ostensibly peaceful, without a standing army or navy, and yet they seek to control Théah through the Guilder. The Vendel League controls the nation despite the ostensible jarl and carl system of government. Vestens experience unprecedented wealth and peace but at a terrible cost. While the general populace seems to thrive, unscrupulous members the League employs slaves to mine silver for the Guilder and punishes with impunity any who attempt to move against them.

The League may not have a single corrupt ruler, but they have as complete a control over Vestenmennavenjar as l'Empereur has over Montaigne or Cardinal Verdugo has over Castille. As they make a name for themselves across Théah, they may end up selling their own people up the river to do so. The people are happy to keep to the old ways, despite the economic and leadership changes happening around them—remaining oblivious to the dangers of the Vendel League's greed.

What's Inside

Inside this book, you will find four chapters, one for each of the western nations. The chapters are broken down into setting information and new Hero mechanics for Heroes originating in the nation.

Chapter One: Avalon

The Avalon chapter covers each of the three Glamour Isles. We take a look at the major leaders of each allied nation as well as important individuals found in the islands. It includes a detailed look at the Sidhe and their operations in Avalon. Also, we delve into the Realist faction who believes magic is fake, and the Sidhe are a lie.

We examine each of the Secret Societies, and how they operate in Avalon, as well as introduce the Long-Strider's League, a messenger branch of the Močiutès Skara. The Knights of Avalon are expanded in the chapter to include new ways to access Glamour magic and to come closer with your chosen Knight of Elilodd.

We examine dueling in the Glamour Isles, and how Duelists utilize their skills, as well as introduce the Skatha's Cleasa dueling technique. Avalonian legends include fæ creatures, those touched by Sidhe magic, and details on the fabled drachen.

Chapter Two: Castille

The Castille chapter contains detailed information on the structure and activities of the Inquisition as well as details on the important people within Castille.

We examine each of the Secret Societies, and how they operate in Castille, as well as introduce the Inquisitio Aquila (Dark Inquisition), a faction of Die Kreuzritter determined to destroy the monsters inhabiting the Vaticine Church and restore the Inquisition back to its original purpose. Alquimia, Castille's secretive alchemy, is a new Sorcery option for Heroes originating in the nation.

We examine dueling in Castille, and the five-day celebration surrounding duelists, as well as introduce the Siqueira dueling technique. The legends of Castille include ghosts, monsters and the Villainous bruja, who practice dark Sorcery.



Chapter Three: Montaigne

In Montaigne we offer detailed write-ups of important members of the court, as well as the movers and shakers across the nation.

We examine each of the Secret Societies, and how they operate in Montaigne, as well as introduce La Bravoure de l'Épervier (The Sparrow's Bravery), a group of Los Vagabundos dedicated to replacing the Sun King with his youngest daughter as ruler of Montaigne. The chapter contains new adventures related to Porté and the dark space between. Also, we include information on how that space may warp a sorcier's magic and change Porté into something slightly different.

We examine dueling in Montaigne and the strict policies on formal dueling, as well as introduce the de Vore Dueling School. The legends of Montaigne include superstitions surrounding dark deeds and creatures warped by the magic of the peaks of Mont Doré.

Chapter Four: Vestenmennavenjar

The Vestenmennavenjar chapter gives a detailed look at the Vendel League and the members' relations to one another, as well as important jarls across the nation.

We examine each of the Secret Societies and how they operate in Vesten territory, as well as introduce the Seekers of the Word of Ekerila, a group intent on reviving an ancient runic language in order to learn its secrets. Galdr, Vestenmennavenjar's runic magic and language of power, is a new Sorcery option for Heroes originating in the nation.

We examine dueling in Vestenmennavenjar, and how Vesten Duelists only work for pay, as well as introduce the Hallbjorn Dueling School. The legends of Vestenmennavenjar include legendary Jotun, trolls and the living myths of the land.

Appendix

Here we introduce various new Advantages available to any character, and new backgrounds for each of the four nations presented in this book.

How to Use This Book

This book is supplemental to the **7TH SEA SECOND EDITION** Core Rulebook. As such, you need access to that book to make the most of **NATIONS OF THÉAH VOLUME ONE**. The information presented here is supposed to help both players and Game Masters better understand the game world. Each nation offers setting information to help ensure rich character backgrounds and stories. The people of the nations are approachable, and a GM can use these people as presented in her game, or tweak them to fit her story.

This information is presented with an eye towards an insider's view of the nation, though anyone could know what is in these pages. Each chapter contains secrets about the people and locations therein, and the GM should decide how much of that information is widely known outside the nation, and within.

The new mechanics presented in each chapter are meant to give additional choices to Heroes and are completely optional to use in your game. The introduction of new Sorceries, Backgrounds, and Advantages do not replace those previously published, but instead add to and enhance them.

The GM is the final arbiter as to which options are allowed in his game.







Chapter 1

Avalon



AVALON

*“Where is my bonny love, my heart’s true one desire,
With tall white cliffs, and stalwart shores,
I’m far away, by ship and foot, yet every night I pray,
To find myself in your loving arms,
Avalon, you call me home.”*
—You Call Me Home, *traditional sailing song*

The United Kingdoms of Avalon are known as a land of living legends, a glorious set of countries resurrected from the grips of war by its mighty leaders and the Sidhe magic uniting them. Avalon is a place where the boundaries between the real and the fantastic are hazy, if sometimes nonexistent. Magic in Avalon is held together by the sacred compact between the (so far) undisputed Queen Elaine and the kingdom’s faerie inhabitants, the Sidhe.

From the day Queen Elaine received the Graal from the Sidhe and solidified her right to rule, Avalon has remained a united trifacta, bound together by honor and dedicated to the ancient magical rights of the land.

This magical renaissance comes at a price, as the Sidhe annex lands previously held by humans. Sidhe Glamour overtakes the lands in which they live, twisting and shaping it to suit their needs. In the process, the people living there have lost their homes, their livelihoods and in some cases, their lives. Tensions between humans and Sidhe rise, and yet their ruler espouses goodwill and unity between them.

Learning to live with the Sidhe is not the only challenge facing the denizens of the Glamour Isles. Each island nation has its own slew of issues, from those who wish to separate the United Kingdoms to those who deny magic all together.



Three Nations as One

The history of the Glamour Isles is a long and bloody one. Avalon has for centuries sought to rule the three islands through war and subjugation. The island of Inismore especially has had difficulties winning their freedom from Avalonian rule through the years. The last such time was as far back as the original O'Bannon's rule. Even when they were able to cast off Avalon, the nation fell into civil war, each clan seeking the throne in a bloody mess. The Highland Marches has had a strong history of uniting under a single clan's ruler as High King in efforts to stave off Avalonian rule, though they have had their fair share of civil uprisings through the years.

In the last three hundred years, the people of the Glamour Isles have suffered under the burden of civil war, inter-island war and war with the rest of Théah. Queen Elaine's rise to power brought unprecedented peace, but at the cost of each nation's right to sovereign rule.

Rebuilding After the War

During the War of the Cross, the Glamour Isles were as embroiled as any other Théan nation. Avalon sent ships to Eisen, and Montaigne and Castille regularly invaded the islands. Toward the end, after Avalonian troops finally expelled Montaigne, Castille sent a large armada into Inish waters to take advantage of their weakened state. While clan leaders panicked, bloody warrior Jack O'Bannon took up his sword and single-handedly slew the Castilian invaders. His legendary actions, and the blessing of the country's magical Fâl Stone, earned the O'Bannon the throne of Inismore.

The expulsion of Castille from Inismore relieved the Glamour Isles of Théan invaders and allowed the nations a chance to finally rebuild. Unlike their sibling country of Inismore, the Highland Marches fell into civil war at the end of the War.

Ten years after the end of the War, Elaine appeared carrying the Graal and declared herself Queen of the Glamour Isles. The power of the Graal caused O'Bannon to bend his knee, and MacDuff followed suit aid his failing nation. The Graal signaled to the people of the Glamour Isles that the magic of their homelands accepted Queen Elaine as the rightful ruler. Since then, a full decade of peace and prosperity has proven trust in Queen Elaine to be a wise choice.

Avalon

Avalon is the seat of Queen Elaine's power. It is the jewel of the Glamour Isles, and ground zero for the Sidhe incursion. Those living on the island have a hard time recognizing how much it has changed in the past ten years.

It is a center of beauty on Théah's western shores, united by the economic growth that has brought prosperity to every part of Avalon's population since the unification. The rising merchant class expanded outward with the help of privateers, and Avalon became a powerful trading partner across the known world. From Avalon's many ports, its people traveled east to the far-off Crescent Empire and even west to the Atabea Sea and the new worlds beyond.

It is to those new lands that many an Avalonian has turned his eyes with the hope of expansion, yet tensions at home keep the Queen and her court occupied. Underneath the prosperity and good fortune standing as the hallmark of Queen Elaine's reign, old resentments still burn true, and those who believe Queen Elaine unfit to rule wait in the wings for the right moment to strike.

Inismore

Freedom and independence burn in the hearts of the Inish. The passionate people of Inismore have spent twenty years rebuilding their kingdom in the shadow of a long, bloody history, only to be shackled to Avalon in the middle of it.

Though a typical Inish may raise a glass to the Queen's health and the strong heart of the O'Bannon, she would not mind the chance to see her lands free once more. She speaks about the days of legend, when the people of Inismore fought against the darkest creatures to tame the land and live in harmony with the Sidhe. And while many cheered the return of the O'Bannon to the throne, they did not expect their leader to return in such a volatile form.

Where the old stories once said the O'Bannon would return to Inismore in its hour of need, the people never expected this returned king to be so capricious and act so wild. The O'Bannon disappears into the countryside for days or weeks at a time, fueling fears he will one day walk away from the throne and never return.



The Highland Marches

Of the three kingdoms, the Highland Marches has come out the worst for swearing fealty to Queen Elaine. While other parts of the Glamour Isles have seen growth since the unification, the Queen's resources never quite reached places that needed aid in the Marches. Additionally, a Marcher noble seems to hold a lesser place in court, stymying his economic growth. No matter how much Avalon prospers, a person from the Highland Marches has to work doubly as hard for the rest of Théah to take him seriously.

Meanwhile, the Marches have come together to foster a new renaissance for their culture during this time of rebirth. A typical Marcher has rededicated himself to his national heritage and old festivals. Holidays and traditions have resurfaced, as have old clan grudges and the worship of old gods.

Much of the Marches has always been heavily traditional, with women unable to lead households, run businesses or inherit property. With the rise of Queen Elaine, a movement has erupted for women's equality in the public sphere. Led by noble and peasant women alike, these "Bonny Swans" demand equal opportunity in the new and growing Highland Marches.

This fight for equality fuels conservative Separatists, who see Avalon's influence as a corruption of traditional Marcher values and believe that the Highland Marches should rule themselves. This, matched with the people's discontent over the Sidhe annexing Highland lands, has perhaps finally given the Separatists the leverage they need to drive the Highland Marches out from under Avalon's control.





Important People in Avalon

Queen Elaine

Queen Elaine grew up the bastard child of a king and rose to become one of the most powerful women in all of Théah. Her father fostered her in the house of a loyal noble and convinced her she would lead an unassuming life. At nineteen, she was engaged to marry a young noble whose child she carried when the wizard, Derwyddon, came to her wedding and led her away. He led her on a quest into the heart of the land of the Sidhe, Bryn Bresail, to recover the Graal that would help her unite the kingdom and make her queen.

Elaine spent many long years in the land of the Goodly Folke and suffered many difficulties, including the loss of the child she carried. Derwyddon prepared her for the trials at the hands of the Three Queens, who tested her right to become the ruler of Avalon. When she returned from her time among the Sidhe, ten years had gone by, her father was dead, her fiancé was nowhere to be found and Elaine hadn't aged a day. She traveled to the court, united the lands and accepted the allegiance of the O'Bannon and James MacDuff to create the unified Avalon of today.

With every passing year, Queen Elaine becomes an even more composed and confident ruler, wise beyond her years and giving in a way that makes her beloved by all the people. Yet, she struggles with threats against her nation that no amount of loving and giving can help.

The Highland Marches, despite her best efforts, sink deeper into debt and poverty. Jack O'Bannon traipses about the Inish countryside rather than ruling his people. Regardless of his loyalty to her, his leadership is lacking, and yet she cannot control him. Derwyddon has left her court, and with it, her only true advisor on the Sidhe at court.

The Separatists gain ground daily, and many criticize her for allowing King James MacDuff to deal with them instead of striking them down. The Realists dislike her support of Glamour magic and the Sidhe. Still others gossip about her personal relationships with not only Duchess Colleen MacLeod but also her trusted knight, Lawrence Lugh.



The biggest controversy comes from her involvement with Lugh, her personal guard and constant companion. Some claim he is a Sidhe prince, exiled from his homeland. Others claim he is simply a Knight of Elilodd. No one can doubt his powerful control over Glamour, and people fear Queen Elaine is too deeply involved with the Sidhe to accurately assess them as a threat.

While these struggles may seem overwhelming, Elaine takes them all in stride and with grace, dealing with what she can and making contingency plans for the things she cannot. She struggles constantly with knowledge that her people suffer, while she can do little to help them. All the while, her enemies pull at the strings available to them—which are few and far between—in an attempt to bring her kingdom toppling down around her.

Portraying Elaine

Ten years have barely dimmed Queen Elaine's vision or stride. While those around her age, the Queen remains fresh-faced and vibrant, a gift of youth granted by the Graal.

Elaine is proud and strong, slow to anger, but has a fiery temper when provoked. Her one true love is Avalon, and she endeavors to meet the needs of her land and her people at all times. That isn't to say that she does not enjoy some distractions, but ruling over three disparate groups of people is trying at times.

Story Hooks

- The Separatists have a spy in Elaine's court. She knows it is someone close to her, but she also knows she is too close to the situation to see it clearly. She needs someone to help her identify the spy, and find out everything he may know.
- The overwhelming return of the Sidhe to Avalon is causing serious issues all across the Isles, but Elaine cannot act openly against them. Her reign depends on their continued goodwill. She needs someone to give her true accounts of their activities and help her stay their incursion for as long as it takes to formulate a real plan.

Duchess Colleen MacLeod

Colleen Carlyle was born to the Duke of a small county just across the channel from the Highland Marches. She grew up connected to the Marches, immersed in its culture. It was no surprise when Colleen married Monty MacLeod, the second son of Duke MacLeod, a powerful clan in the Highland court. When his older brother died in an accident, Monty became the next Duke. Colleen quickly rose in court, despite the second-class status of Marcher women. She became a symbol to the Bonny Swans, who push for equality in all levels of society.

She publicly supports the King, but secretly believes the Marches can only thrive when ruling themselves. She pushes peaceful separation, and maneuvered herself into an ambassador position to the Avalonian court.

At first, Colleen feared she would have to feign affection for the Queen, but once they met, they became fast friends. They share a mutual love for learning and the people of Avalon, and soon Colleen found herself drawn into the Queen's confidence.

In an attempt to discredit her, Separatists spread rumors that her friendship with the Queen was something more. It took those rumors for Colleen and the Queen to acknowledge their feelings for one another, and the two soon began a quiet relationship with her husband's blessing. Colleen feared tensions in the court, as rumors held Lawrence Lugh as the Queen's lover, yet Elaine has managed to have relationships with both the Duchess and Lugh without publicly admitting to either romance.

Portraying Colleen MacLeod

Colleen is practical, though often loud and outspoken. She is a fighter, and does not give up easily. She has a strong Marcher accent, though born in Avalon. She loves Elaine, and her desire for separation wars with her feels on a constant basis.

Story Hook

- Colleen's relationship with Queen Elaine puts her in a difficult position with the Separatists. She cautions a long plan, but they wish her to act quickly. They seek to force her into action. Her life may be on the line if she doesn't act soon. She needs someone to help her talk sense into the Separatists, if only to buy her more time.



Derwyddon, High Wizard of Avalon

Of all the residents of Avalon, none is more mysterious than Derwyddon, High Wizard of the Glamour Isles and advisor to Queen Elaine. Countless rumors circulate about Derwyddon and his life. Some say he ages backwards and the end of his life spells the end of the Glamour Isles. Others spread rumors that he has existed as long as the Glamour Isles themselves, a living incarnation of its magic.

The truth is no less fantastic. Derwyddon is the son of a Sidhe and one of the very first rulers of Avalon to make a deal with Bryn Bresail. The boy was born spouting visions of the future from his cradle, a power that frightened his mortal father so much he begged the Sidhe to take the boy away.

Derwyddon's mother gladly raised her son in the Sidhe homeland, but knew his mortal lifespan would take him away from her too quickly. To preserve her son's life, she bound him to the timeless heart of Bryn Bresail itself. For as long as Derwyddon remained in the Sidhe homeland, he would age impossibly slow. Derwyddon grew up in the Seelie court and studied the depths of magic, offering his prophecies to the Three Queens for a dozen mortal lifetimes before he ever set foot back in the mortal world.

When the Old Kingdom invaded Avalon in the 6th Century, Derwyddon realized he had to do something or the Glamour Isles would be wiped away. He left Bryn Bresail, despite his mother's warnings, and bargained with the Three Queens for power to draw down a curtain of mist to obscure the Isles until the danger had passed.

The pact he made hid Avalon for nearly one hundred years, frozen in time but safe from its enemies. But to accomplish this massive feat of magic, Derwyddon bargained away his place in the Sidhe homeland. Instead, he must wander the mortal world, forever separated from his beloved mother, in service to the Glamour Isles and the Seelie court.

It is for that reason Derwyddon serves the court of Queen Elaine. Her future was written long before she was even born, foretold by one of Derwyddon's own prophecies.

The vision told of a ruler who could reawaken the bonds between the Sidhe and the mortals of the Glamour Isles, whose decisions and allegiance would either lead to a golden age or bring ruin and destruction. Derwyddon came to prepare Queen Elaine for her future, and only he knows the full truth about Elaine's ascendancy. Of course, his motives may be more personal, as this could mean a possible way to get back into the good graces of his Sidhe homeland.

Portraying Derwyddon

Derwyddon is a master strategist. Using the wisdom accumulated during his time in the Sidhe kingdom, he has done his best to ensure a person important to the future of the Glamour Isles is just where she needs to be.

While he is a master at manipulation as well as magic, Derwyddon stops just shy of influencing an individual's choices, instead allowing him to choose his future for himself. Perhaps it explains why the self-titled High Wizard of Avalon often looks so frustrated, stalking about on whatever business keeps him busy.

Story Hooks

- ♦ Derwyddon's time in Avalon is coming to an end. The magic to slow his aging seems to be fading while in the mortal realm and indeed seems to have advanced his aging process in the past few years. He recognizes his time is coming to an end, and he looks for someone who can ensure his vision for Avalon reaches its intended fruition.
- ♦ For the past week, no one has seen or heard from Derwyddon. The court Sidhe are restless, and communication between them and the Queen is taking a turn for the worse. She needs his advice now more than ever, but she does not know where he went.



Daníele

Daníele is the emissary of the Sidhe, representative of the Seelie court in Théah and perhaps the most controversial person in Avalon. Much of the controversy around Daníele is no fault of their own. They are an ethereally beautiful Sidhe, kind and witty, with a soul full of quiet contemplation, deep thought and mischievous humor. Identifying neither as male nor female, they dress alternately as a handsome youth or in gorgeous gowns at court. They play music, sing, ride horses, and speak half a dozen languages. They are polite and hospitable, dangerous in politics and caring to everyone around them. They also bear an uncanny resemblance to Queen Elaine.

Mystery shrouds Daníele's history. No one knows what happened to Queen Elaine while she was in Bryn Bresail, but most guess she made a deal with the Seelie Queens to gain their support. Daníele's arrival on the tenth anniversary of Elaine's ascendance to power, along with their appearance, leads many to believe that Daníele is Elaine's child from her days with the Sidhe. Others believe Daníele is the true Elaine, kept among the Sidhe while a double was sent back to rule the kingdom. Some think Daníele is Elaine's sibling, stolen away at birth as a bargain by the wizard Derwyddon. Whatever the case, Daníele and Elaine know the truth behind their connection, and the secret is a source of tension in the royal court.

Portraying Daníele

Daníele is devoted to the survival of Avalon, provided the Sidhe are equal partners alongside their mortal counterparts. They speak candidly—especially for a Sidhe—and show concern to the plight of both mortals and Sidhe, working diligently to sooth any conflicts. When not at court, they travel the countryside to calm flare-ups in Sidhe and mortal relations and explore new pockets of Glamour erupting across Avalon.

Story Hook

- Daníele is preparing the Avalonian people for a Sidhe invasion. While they represent the Sidhe to the Avalonian court, they do not agree with their brethren's plans. They need someone to help them spread word without alerting the rest of the Sidhe.

Jack O'Bannon, King of Inismore

The ruler is reflected in the spirit of their land and vice versa. If that is the case, then Inismore may be in a spot of trouble because Jack O'Bannon is quite erratic in nature. The king always seemed a little unstable since his appearance at the very end of the War of the Cross and has only gotten worse since then. Regardless of how he acts, there is no one quite like the O'Bannon. And his people love him for it.

The rumors about the O'Bannon's early years are plentiful. The most widely accepted one is that the O'Bannon's mother, a Sidhe Lady, tried everything she could to make her son into a true Sidhe like herself. All the attempts drove young Jack into madness, and he fled her for the mortal world. Still others believe he is the returned O'Bannon of ancient legend, sent back by the Sidhe whenever Inismore needs a champion to put things right. In those legends, the O'Bannon leaves after the land is safe and his duty complete, returning to his resting place until the next time he hears the call. Every story about an O'Bannon appearing out of nowhere to save Inismore, of which there are several, corroborate one thing: each time the O'Bannon returns, he is a little madder than the last time. This time, Jack O'Bannon appeared during the Castilian invasion and slew six hundred invaders before claiming the crown. After all, who was going to stop him? The Inish were happy to celebrate the man who helped free them from Castille and the threat of civil war. But, as time went on, the cracks in the O'Bannon began to show.

He seems preoccupied and does not spend as much time ruling as one would think a ruler should. Inscrutable to those around him, the O'Bannon sends his Fianna warriors on one mission or another, at every chance. Despite his temperament, the people of Inismore love their king, owing all their current prosperity to his presence. He alone keeps the people from rising up against Queen Elaine, despite a growing desire to break free from her rule and become an independent nation once more. He has extended a personal protection over the queen, and many say he believes the Graal is the only thing keeping Inismore currently safe. Yet, due to distractions, madness and his unpredictable nature, many wonder how much longer ol' Jack's force of personality can keep the alliance—and perhaps even the Queen—alive.



Portraying the O'Bannon

Jack O'Bannon is a rugged man with a shock of thick grey hair he keeps in a loose carefree mess. He appears to be in his mid-thirties, though he has looked that age for the past twenty years or so. He is lean and muscular, nothing like the descriptions of wild warrior who killed hundreds of Castellians.

The O'Bannon is quite mad, but that does not make him any less powerful or shrewd. Even if the rumors about his Sidhe heritage are not true, he has a command over Glamour magic outside the scope of the Knights of Avalon.

He seems as moody and tricky as a Sidhe, and though he is often absent from his castle in Donega, Heroes can find him disguised as a commoner wandering the Inish countryside, on a mission only he seems to understand.

Story Hooks

- ✦ With the Sidhe expanding their borders and rumblings of clan dissatisfaction with Avalon rule rising up once again, Inismore needs their king more than ever. But Jack O'Bannon has a problem he needs to solve: the crown of Inismore is missing. He spends as much time as he can searching for it, but he fears his people believe he is abdicating his throne. Yet, without the crown, his proof of leadership is tenuous at best. He needs someone he can trust implicitly to find the crown and return it to him before he can rest easy.
- ✦ Inismore is at peace, and the O'Bannon fears his time in the mortal world is almost at an end. The Fál Stone sings on its own, humming and pealing ancient lyrics into the night sky. While rumors say it calls him home, he knows better. Something is wrong, and he needs help investigating the cause of this disturbance.



King James MacDuff

Raised from a young age to be the leader of his clan, James MacDuff II never expected to deal with the kinds of problems that came after the War of the Cross. After the war, the High Council fell into civil war, rebuking James the elder as their High King. The MacDuffs had sat on the throne for generations, descending from the great Robert the Black, who became High King in 1219. The fighting lasted nearly eight years before the MacDuffs regained some stability, but not before the elder James died.

Shocked from years of war, the country barely limped along as restoration efforts required more resources than the nation could muster. When Queen Elaine appeared in Avalon with the Graal, MacDuff viewed it as a golden opportunity to rebuild his nation using someone else's money. He believed an alliance with Avalon would bring prosperity for his people, enough to allow the Marches to grow until it could stand on its own safely. When the time came, King James bent the knee to Queen Elaine of Avalon, choosing stability for his people rather than the harder road of independence. The choice has cost him dearly over the years.

King James has fought constantly with his government to keep the peace and remain unified. While a majority of the High Council agrees with him, a smaller—and louder—faction of Separatists fights him at every turn. They are not large enough to overthrow him, so they have resorted to assassination attempts. While he has bested these attempts, he lost his son, Robert, in an attack while the two were out hunting. His son's death has hit him hard, and he has become quiet and circumspect in a time when his kingdom needs a strong, decisive ruler. Where once he believed the Marches would separate from Avalon after a short period of growth, ten years later he has yet to declare his intentions, afraid of the chaos that might ensue.

Ever the political mastermind, King James has held off the Separatists as well as difficult social questions in favor of tackling a more difficult issue: namely, what to do about the Sidhe, and how can he transform the Highland Marches into a country others will recognize with more respect?

Portraying King James MacDuff

In the ten years since the alliance, King James has aged dramatically. His once thick black hair and beard are shot through with silver, and though he remains a powerful warrior, the years have left lines in his once youthful face. His age belies his warrior's strength and grace, which he is quick to show to people who challenge his rule.

King James is an affable man, exhausted from years of dealing with a failing nation. He is quiet, reserved and prone to long contemplation before acting.

Story Hooks

- The Bonny Swans are pushing their agenda on King James, and they refuse to take no for an answer. He wants to support them, but knows to do so openly would spurn traditional members of the court, possibly even driving them towards the Separatists. He needs someone to act as a go-between so that he can give these women the aid they seek without tipping his hand.
- The Separatists under the direction of Fergus MacBride have devised a plan to free the Highland Marches of Avalonian rule. They are making deals with Montaigne and the Vendel League to fund a war against Avalon. James knows about the plot, but he does not want to act openly against them, hoping a public failure will dissuade anyone else from such endeavors. He just needs agents to help him ensure their plans fail.



Jeremiah Berek

Leader of the Sea Dogs, Jeremiah Berek was an Avalonian noble known more for his love of wine and parties than for his sea prowess. When Queen Elaine made a call for ships, Berek put his family's money to work, commissioning Wandesborrow's shipbuilders to build many fast and powerful ships. The first, the *Black Dawn*, he captained and took to sea. Instead of acting as a defense against attackers, Berek took to piracy almost immediately, handing most of his proceeds to the Queen.

A decade later, Berek is no longer the foppish young man. Now one of the most powerful pirates across any sea, he is a near mythological name. Knighted by Queen Elaine after unnamed exploits, Berek rarely spends any time at court. Instead, he travels far and wide aboard the *Black Dawn* in search of gold to fill the Queen's coffers. No one questions his loyalty to the Queen—he carries a portrait of her in his stateroom, and rumor has it the two were childhood friends.

His fortunes have expanded as a member of the Brotherhood of the Coast and as the leader of the Sea Dogs. Where once the Dogs were only his crew, they have expanded to encompass sailors across dozens of ships. The Sea Dogs maintain a presence in most ports across Avalon, and control Carleon's docks and a good chunk of the enterprise surrounding import and export in the capital. All of this has made him a wealthy noble and internationally known privateer, with hundreds of loyal sailors and pirates.

Portraying Jeremiah

Anyone who gets past his public exterior of the flashy, dashing captain realizes he is still the self-effacing man he was in his youth; happier aboard the deck of a ship than in court or manor. Don't upset him; he is the leader of the Sea Dogs.

Story Hook

- Berek has chosen to travel across Théah to connect with other privateers and learn about the expansion of territory west. He prepares for a major push to the New World in search of new lands for the Queen, and he is looking for information and crew.

Realists

Many organizations have broken off from the main Vaticine Church over the years, but few have challenged the very foundation of the Church's beliefs with their extremism as much as the Realists. This offshoot of the Objectionists believes that not only should the use of magic be eschewed by churchgoers, as stated in the Book of the Prophets, but in fact, magic itself is not actually real. Instead, a Realist thinks magic is a dangerous collective hallucination that can affect the world around him. Simply put, he believes magic does not exist, but those who believe it will it into existence. He concludes people must stop believing in magic to end its scourge on the world.

The Realists' beliefs are a startling departure towards further conservative thought, well past even what the Inquisition believes. The idea that magic does not exist at all, in fact, borders on heresy, since the Prophets themselves acknowledged magic as a real force. This has made the Realists an unwanted blight on most of Théah, and the group has fled from nation to nation looking for a home. Good Queen Elaine's doctrine of accepting all religions allowed the Realists to find shelter in Avalon, despite the fact that Avalon is one of the most magical kingdoms anywhere. With the land literally transforming around her through Glamour, a Realist preaches turning away from magic, which has not made her too popular in Avalon.

They are looking for a home across the seas, where they may find a land free of magic. The group eagerly seeks word of any location that may make a good home for the small church. In Avalon, they remain clustered in any town that allows them to hold their meetings. Each group of Realists is led by an Elder; a former Vaticine priest named Prestor Mathor helms the organization. Their largest chapter house is in Carleon, though they have a presence in other major cities. A Realist avoids towns where ancient traditions are ingrained in magic and avoids any contact with the Sidhe—dangerous manifestations of the collective hallucination that is magic. He preaches to everyone to turn away from magic before it consumes all of Avalon.

Traditional Realist clothing is dour, modest and humble. She wears high collars and dark colors with head coverings hide her hair.



Walter “Sawbones” Kelly

Walter Kelly attended University in Donega as a young man, first for philosophy, but then changed to studying medicine when his mother fell ill. He hoped to cure her, but strained the limits of his training and the local hospital’s capabilities. After her death, he set out to learn all he could about medicine. In his searching, he came across a Sidhe who offered Kelly supernatural intellect in exchange for a favor. Kelly accepted the offer, traveled to Montaigne to deliver a message to another Sidhe. He searched for nearly four years, but never delivered his message. His original benefactor seemed satisfied with the effort.

Later, Kelly found himself once again in Inismore, working as a field medic and tending the wounds of fallen warriors, saving lives with his newfound medical genius. There, he befriended one of Inismore’s Fianna warriors, a woman by the name of Maeve MacGowan. Kelly saved MacGowan’s leg from a nasty infection, and they became fast friends; she protecting the wily doctor, and he entertaining her with stories.

Wherever he went, she followed though his life as a doctor rarely saw much in the way of danger. After Queen Elaine took the throne, MacGowan had a falling out with other Fianna over her staunch support of the new Queen. She traveled to Avalon, to pledge her service, but found that Avalon’s own military was nearly non-existent. When Jeremiah Berek took to sea in the *Black Dawn*, following Queen Elaine’s call to arms, MacGowan and Kelly joined the crew. Berek welcomed them, not knowing the boon having Kelly on board would serve him in the coming years.

To this day, Kelly remains a member of the Sea Dogs, sailing with Berek and MacGowan and keeps the ship’s crew the healthiest of any Thean fleet.

Portraying Walter Kelly

Walter Kelly lives a hard but satisfying life as a Sea Dog. While he might be the most educated doctor in all of Theah, he plies his trade sewing up privateers on the open seas. Kelly has a healthy fear of the Sidhe, preferring a life at sea rather than living side-by-side with the fae back in Inismore. He is jovial and friendly, and always has a smile on his face, a drink in his hand and his medical bag nearby. He is an educated man and is probably the only Sea Dog better-spoken than Berek himself.

Captain Eilionoir NicDappel

Eilionoir NicDappel—known as Eilidh (pronounced AY-lee) to her family, Helen to her peers in the Avalonian Navy and Captain to her subordinates—has always been between worlds. She is the daughter of a flamboyant Avalonian naval captain, and a rugged Highland Marches plantation owner, who is well-educated for a farmer. While Eilionoir spent much of her time traveling between the Highland Marches and Avalon, the rugged lifestyle of her father’s estate and his practical, no-nonsense attitude made the biggest impact on her development. And yet, her mother’s stories held such wonder and fascination that as soon as she was able, she ran off to join Queen Elaine’s navy.

NicDappel rose quickly through their ranks, and earned a ship of her own within short order. Her detractors claim her mother as the reason, but Captain NicDappel has proved a rather capable sailor and captain on her own grit. She is determined and loyal, and it shows in her command style. She has one of the most disciplined ships in the Avalonian navy, much to the chagrin of other captains.

Though the Sea Dogs ostensibly serve Queen Elaine, Captain NicDappel and Jeremiah Berek have no love lost between them. She views Berek as a self-centered, spoiled, reckless man who is likely to get Avalon into another war. She has no patience for the pirate’s antics, no matter if he has a writ from her Queen.

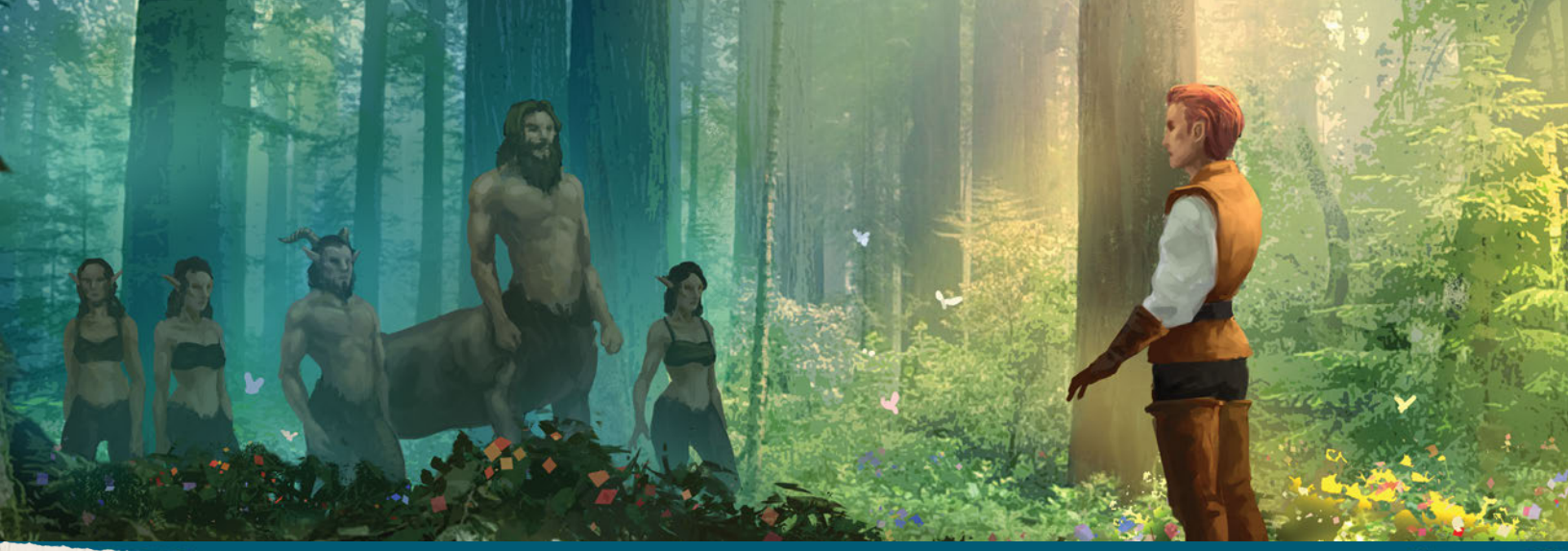
The only thing keeping NicDappel from working to disband the Sea Dogs entirely is her utter devotion to Queen Elaine. She realizes that though Berek is rash, he is loyal to the Queen, and so are his men. While NicDappel is not in command of the Queen’s navy, she is the most respected of its captains, and when she speaks or acts, others follow.

Portraying Eilionoir NicDappel

Eilionoir NicDappel has reddish brown hair, brown eyes and fair skin, ruddy from her time on ship. She is pragmatic above all else. This makes people believe she is cold, but she is anything but. Those who know her best see her as an impassioned woman, slow to anger.

She puts aside feelings when making decisions, thinking only of tactics and focused on details. Eilionoir’s devotion to Queen Elaine comes not from childish superstitions about the Graal and the Sidhe, but by her wise rule which has brought peace to Avalon.





The Goodly Folke (Sidhe)

The Sidhe are creatures of infinite life and magic living alongside the people of Théah, walking across all of Avalon. Capricious and ever-changing, these mercurial beings fought terrifying wars against primordial enemies and reveled in their power unfettered for thousands of years. Yet the rise of mortal civilization inexplicably tied the future of the Sidhe to humanity in a dance that would change both forever.

History and Evolution of the Sidhe

In primordial times, the world was at war between powers both wondrous and terrible, beautiful and dark. The Sidhe ruled the land until mortals propagated and spread across Théah. They became fascinated with humanity and mimicked their behavior to better interact with the mortal world. They delighted in challenging mortals with puzzles, riddles and quests, rewarding those who passed their tests and punishing those who fell short. This time period lasted for hundreds of years where mortals grew powerful through the magic gifted by the Sidhe, fostering an age of powerful heroes and terrifying monsters.

That age of legends ended as humanity began warring with itself. Across the world, mortal civilizations rebelled against magic and the creatures who used magic. The humans overthrew gods and drove out the Sidhe or destroyed them outright. Some Sidhe hid themselves away while many more fled back to Bryn Bresail, the Sidhe homeland on the far side of gateways all across Théah. Sidhe everywhere noticed a disturbing change in their immortal, fluid natures. The nature of magic was changing, and the rise of humans as the rulers of Théah affected the

Sidhe as well. The unchanging mortality of humanity warped them from their constantly shifting forms until they became fixed, limited from their previously immense power.

Two factions developed among the Sidhe as a result. The Seelie chose to embrace the mortal perceptions on their form, adopting many of the trappings of humanity out of fascination, adaptability and necessity. Many furious Sidhe, with no wish for mortal influence to contain them, rejected this decision to adapt. The three sisters of Earth, Sky and Sea—the three Færie Queens—fostered the idea of embracing mortals and banished these malcontents, and the second faction, the Unseelie, were born. These Sidhe rejected containment and instead embraced their more chaotic natures, taking on terrifying forms to torment and bedevil humanity.

As distrust of magic spread across Théah, the Sidhe chose to withdraw almost completely from the rest of the world, leaving gateways to Bryn Bresail open only in the Glamour Isles. Their pacts with King Elilodd and his Knights remained undamaged in all the turmoil. They gifted the Glamour Isles with the sword Firinbrand, the MacLeod Færy Flag, the Fål Stone and the Graal as symbols of their friendship. The Unseelie were outraged and cursed the Seelie, saying they would see the day when their gifts are turned against them.

Their curse came to fruition when over six hundred years ago, invaders from Théah arrived, bringing a war that stretched for generations. The Sidhe entered the conflict in hopes of protecting their land; they gifted the Graal to King Elilodd for this purpose and gave magic to his knights. Years after Elilodd's death, the



Sidhe's magic was corrupted, their mortal allies slain and their hiding places destroyed; magic once again became feared by the people. The tipping point came when a Montaigne Villain blessed with Glamour magic bound the Lady of the Lake, a Seelie Queen, and turned her power against the Glamour Isles.

The heroine Athrwyn used the power of the Graal to free the queen during the defense of the Bran Bridge, but the damage was already done. The Lady of the Lake took the Graal and left for Bryn Bresail, sealing off Glamour to the three kingdoms behind her. For the rest of the Montaigne occupation, the magic of Avalon lay dormant and many believed the Sidhe would never walk the Glamour Isles again.

The Reclamation

Earlier this year, on the tenth anniversary of the ascension of Queen Elaine, the waters of Bran Bridge Lake drew open and a Sidhe delegation appeared. The glorious retinue rode across Avalon and presented themselves to the court, led by Daníele, emissary of the Seelie. They declared that the Færie Queens assigned them to oversee the expansion of Sidhe territory in the mortal world. They explained the Sidhe would be retaking land they once occupied so many centuries ago, before they were driven out. The Reclamation, as they call it, has begun.

For the most part, Daníele and the other Sidhe at court serve as liaisons to the territories most densely held by the Sidhe now living openly across Avalon. Their main stronghold is in the Síocháin Forest, a dense and mysterious wood at the heart of an entire county now run by the Sidhe. The area has been renamed Arcadia, where mortals and Sidhe live peacefully side-by-side. A lesser stronghold in the Highland Marches, called the Dagna, is a Sidhe paradise of wild vegetation surrounded by a wall of thorns.

Things are not as peaceful in the Highland Marches, where nobles attacked the lakeside Sidhe territory of Ballorwick, only for a dark and terrifying Sidhe, known as the Cursed Prince, to drive them back. And reports have come in from across Avalon about a terrifying Sidhe lord, a creature known as the Red-Eyed King, who favors a return to the ancient ways and violence against mortals. His terrifying Unseelie Host has been spotted riding across the Highlands of both the Marches and Inismore and across the wilds of

Avalon proper, hunting stray mortals who have gone back on deals. Many wonder at the disposition of the three Seelie Queens in all this. The addition of territory in the mortal world may have upset the balance between their powers.

Sidhe on the Move

Sidhe come in many shapes and sizes, from the glorious beauty of the Sidhe Queens to the horrible nightmares of the Unseelie court. Yet where once these magical creatures tried to hide themselves from mortal view, they have stripped away obfuscations in favor of living out in the open. Instead, seal women swim lakes and rivers and centaurs gallop forest trails, while Sidhe lords and ladies create dazzling palaces in forgotten glens, transforming the landscape with a thought.

In general, a Sidhe walks through Avalon simply as himself, though another may wish to hide her true appearance, blending in and experiencing everything that mortal life has to offer. Yet another may take to looking up families whose blood carries his blessing to either call on long-lost descendants, or else cash in on favors hundreds of years past due.

A Sidhe may choose to leave Avalon, taking ships across to the mainland and other parts of Terra to find Sidhe left behind when the doors to Bryn Bresail closed, or else to discover new adventures she could hardly imagine. One trait follows every Sidhe, however, no matter how disguised she is or far from home: stare long enough at a Sidhe in a mirror, and you can see her reflection ripple.

Sidhe and Mortal Relations

The return of the Sidhe has been a celebrated, if jarring, experience to modern Avalonians. The Sidhe have taken a prominent place not only in the court of Queen Elaine, but across the landscape of the United Kingdoms. Entire forests, towns and sections of major cities have transformed into these new Glamourlands.

Even the people living in these areas are transformed by the Glamour's influence. Children born to parents living in pockets of Glamour have a natural affinity for the magic without a Sidhe blessing. Others have accepted Sidhe blessings, granting them Glamour beyond the originally blessings to Elilodd's Knights.



Many mortals have fled from lands too wild and out of control with magic. Others stay and accept Sidhe management, and should their new local Sidhe be kindly, they reap the benefits of a magical patron. If their new Sidhe neighbor is less kind to mortals, the outcomes can be very dire.

Earning a Sidhe's favor, can bring enormous benefit. In ancient times, King Elilodd forged the very first pact with the Sidhe that allowed mortals to create deals with the Sidhe ever-after, a pact sealed with the Seelie gifts to Avalon that exist to this day. The pact maintained that the Sidhe could bestow their magic onto humanity, provided the mortal proved himself worthy in some way set down by the Sidhe in question.

Some Sidhe are more altruistic and others more vindictive. Unseelie Sidhe are almost always terrifying, chaotic and dangerous to encounter, while the Seelie are more likely to be helpful. Still, even a Seelie Sidhe enjoys his games of riddles and wordplay, and any mortal must be careful when dealing with him. Only a mortal deemed extraordinary gains exceptional returns on her pacts, and woe betide anyone who is not careful when wording her pacts with a Sidhe.

Many pacts are short term, with limited duration or gifts that, once bestowed, allow a mortal to go on her way. There are, however, longer-lasting bonds that create connections between the mortal and the Sidhe. A mortal may find his farm protected from wild animals thanks to an ancestor's bargain with a local Sidhe or a child might be born once a generation with the power of foresight thanks to some ancient service provided by an ancestor to a kindlier Sidhe.

Favor with the Sidhe

A Hero may earn Favor with the Sidhe in much the same way she would with a Secret Society, by creating pacts with a Sidhe. But Sidhe Favor always comes with a cost, which is often determined by the Sidhe offering the Favor.

Additionally, a Hero who has performed a challenge for a Sidhe may spend Favor she does not have, but going into debt with a Sidhe can have serious consequences. A Hero with debt to a Sidhe may have an unexpected visitor demanding her to drop everything and complete a task. If she refuses, the Sidhe is likely to curse her or worse.

A Hero may earn Favor with the Sidhe in the following ways:

- Performing a task for a Sidhe is worth 2 Favor. This task is often a challenge set forward by a potential Sidhe benefactor, and must be performed before a Hero can earn any further Favor with the Sidhe. The challenge might be something as simple as a riddle, or as complex as a quest, provided it satisfies the Sidhe's requirements and the mortal agrees.
- Helping or saving a Sidhe's life is worth 6 Favor. A Sidhe whose life has been saved by a mortal is in debt to him.
- Gifting a Sidhe with a present, or providing assistance to the Sidhe is worth 3 Favor. These assistances are often more taxing than the original challenge put forth by the Sidhe.

A Hero may spend Favor with his Sidhe benefactor for the following rewards:

- For 4 Favor, a Sidhe can grant a single Rank in one Major or two Minor Glamours to a Hero, even if he does not have the Sorcery Advantage. The Hero picks a Major and Minor Trait when he receives the Sidhe's blessing, unless he already has Glamour Sorcery. This Glamour access is temporary and can last no longer than a week's time. The Hero suffers the same Gesa that a Knight of Avalon would suffer (**CORE RULEBOOK**, page 210).
- A secret costs 2 Favor. This secret can be anything the Sidhe could reasonably know or find out about a situation, person or Sidhe. Sidhe have ways of finding out people's secrets easier than others, but that does not make them all-knowing.
- Temporary access to a Sidhe artifact costs 3 Favor. It functions as a Signature Item, although the effects of a particular relic are at GM's discretion. A Hero is expected to return the artifact within a week's time, regardless if he accomplishes his mission. If he does not, he is likely to incur the wrath of the Sidhe.





The Secret Societies of Théah have branches all across the continents and in every kingdom, and Avalon is no different. The ten years of peace have allowed many of these organizations to thrive and entirely new ones to spring up in the midst of both growth and recent tensions with the Sidhe.

Die Kreuzritter

The expansion of Die Kreuzritter from their origins protecting Eisen from everything dark and terrifying in the forests has proved an excellent assistant to the people of Avalon in their time of need. With magic on the rise all over Avalon, Glamour has awakened creatures not only beautiful and friendly, but awesome and terrible as well. Though Avalon is chock full of Heroes ready to take on any challenge, the members of Die Kreuzritter are uniquely trained to tackle monsters. With many mercenaries in Eisen looking for work outside of their borders, they have started exporting their expertise to the darker parts of Avalon.

Favor in Avalon

A Hero who belongs to the Die Kreuzritter can earn Favor while in Avalon in the following ways:

- Bringing evidence of destroying a Sidhe creature is worth 4 Favor.
- Selling information about Sidhe or Unseelie Sidhe encroachment is worth 2 Favor.

The Explorer's Society

Not only has the transformation of the land by Glamour unearthed a myriad of different sites never seen before all over Avalon, Inismore and the Marches, but Avalon has become the jumping off point for many ships heading west across the ocean. Explorers flock to Avalon to hear accounts of things seen in the New World, or to witness some incredible artifacts brought back from Synchron cities discovered for the first time. Many a member of the Explorer's Society believes Avalon is the new frontier in magical exploration and has set aside his fascination with Synchron ruins to focus on ancient Sidhe sights, creating a whole new branch of study and understanding for Explorers all across Théah. A collection of Explorers have even dedicated themselves to leading expeditions into Bryn Bresail itself and actively seek Sidhe to secure safe passage into what might be one of the most magical realms anywhere.

Favor in Avalon

- A Hero who belongs to the Explorer's Society can earn Favor while in Avalon in the following way:
- Acquiring a Sidhe artifact or knowledge about the Sidhe is worth 4 Favor, if that artifact or knowledge is turned over for study. The knowledge could be specific information on types of Sidhe, where they make their homes or items and tools used by the Sidhe in their daily lives.



The Brotherhood of the Coast

The Brotherhood has a large presence in Avalon, thanks to the patronage Queen Elaine offers to privateers. Her relationship with Berek has her look the other way when it comes to many dealings of the Brotherhood. Privateers also have their hands full gathering crews to head towards the New World and the Atabean Sea. Avalon is a major stopover before heading for Brotherhood centers like La Bucca and Aragosta in the Sea of Monsters to the southwest. Conflicts come up between various Brotherhood crews, and parleys happen often off the coast to settle differences.

The Invisible College

The Invisible College's goal to continue scientific research despite the intrusion of the Inquisition led them to seek any safe port in the storm. Thanks to Queen Elaine's edicts, Avalon was a perfect choice. The Vaticine Church is all but expelled from the unified kingdoms and the Church of Avalon's stance on scientific research is much more lax. An Invisible College researcher can continue her explorations without fear of persecution.

The only city that poses a challenge is Carleon, where Vaticine priests visit often, and the Inish city of Liumech, where the Church attempts to establish a foothold. The College is aware of Inquisition agents seeking to combat the spread of the Sidhe, and members have dedicated their time to combat the spread of the Inquisition into Avalon.

Knights of the Rose & Cross

The ten years of peace in Avalon and the diligent work of the Queen's Knights have kept Avalon clear of any wide-scale conflicts. But with tensions on the rise once more with the expansions of the Glamourlands and conflicts with Separatists brewing in the Highland Marches, a Knight of the Rose & Cross has his hands full managing small issues across Avalon. While the unified kingdoms might not have the large-scale wars or disasters of other countries in Théah, there is room for the Rose & Cross to protect the peasants across the Glamour Isle. Moreover, a Knight can find himself in the position to protect Sidhe under attack by displaced villagers and nobles, earning him thanks, and often rewards, from the Sidhe.

Los Vagabundos

With tensions between Castille and Avalon still fairly high, it has not been easy for a member of Los Vagabundos to make herself at home in Avalon. Still, the spirit of Los Vagabundos to maintain the country for its people has its members scrambling to help keep the peace and unity of Avalon. With Separatists tugging the Highland Marches away from the United Kingdoms and strife destabilizing the O'Bannon's support, a Los Vagabundos member spends her time supporting Queen Elaine's regime for the sake of the people. Since the thwarted assassination on the Queen, sightings of the masked vigilantes in purple have become a more welcome sight in Avalon.

Močiutės Skara

Though the Močiutės Skara began as an organization in the Sarmatian Commonwealth working to aid and feed the people, the agents in Avalon have embraced a new goal. While Avalon has become a land of plenty, the spread of Glamour and magic has sent Avalon slipping under the influence of Bryn Bresail, unseating local nobility and sending Avalonians fleeing from their homes. From the main meeting places in Carleon and Liumech, a member of the Shawl works to not only secure donations from the wealthy for those in need, but to organize attempts to halt the spread of Glamour into areas heavily populated by mortals. Additionally, he spends much of their gathered resources feeding and clothing those refugees fleeing Sidhe encroachment. Some members whisper of darker options to drive back the Sidhe, ancient weapons once used to slay the powerful færies, but overall the Shawl's members are dedicated to aiding unfortunate people in need rather than taking up arms.

Rilasciare

The Rilasciare has had a great deal of trouble finding a foothold in Avalon for many years, for obvious reasons. The peaceful age of prosperity brought by Queen Elaine has redoubled most citizens' belief that the monarchy, backed by the approval of the Graal, is powerful and righteous. With the tensions with the Sidhe on the rise and people losing their land to the magical encroachment, there has been an uptick in interest.



Sophia's Daughters

Though this organization is primarily concerned with protecting and rescuing Fate Witches from Vodacce, Sophia's Daughters has found a surprising ally in the women of the Highland Marches and Avalon. Many Vodacce women who wield magic see Avalon as a paragon, where a woman is not only free to do as she chooses, but where the ruler is a Queen who wields a magic Graal and lives in a magic castle. Agents of Sophia's Daughters have made Avalon the final destination for many Fate Witches on the run and relocated countless of them into any of the three kingdoms. Sophia's Daughters have also tangentially found help from the women of the Marches, discovering kindred spirits fighting their own, albeit less dire, battle for equality.

The Long-Strider League

Born from the ministrations of the Močiutès Skara in the Glamour Isles, this group spreads information and tidings across Théah, ensuring the right people have the information they need. The group owes its beginnings to druidic orders of Inismore, devoted to telling stories as a way to pass along information. Today, the Long-Strider League has spread across Théah to become the safest way to pass information across land or sea.

The original Long-Striders were trained druids, believers of the old gods of Inismore, who used the gifts of their benefactors to travel across great swaths of land in short periods of time. Trained as bards and storytellers, the Long-Striders were also accomplished secret messengers, capable of concealing important documents or missives for delivery anywhere. During the War of the Cross, the Long-Striders spread out across Théah, recruiting those capable of swearing the Long-Strider oath: *The truth is the story which binds our lives, and to that truth, I pledge my life.*

Any Long-Strider initiate must begin her training as a *dalta*, an apprentice to a fully initiated bard. The storytellers train their students not only in spycraft, wilderness training and mastery of languages, but also in the arts of storytelling and music. By the time a *dalta* stands before the bardic masters, the *Seanchaí*, she is capable of traveling for days without rest and would rather die than let a message in her care slip.

Every Long-Strider wears ten-league boots, magical footwear able to help the wearer travel hundreds of miles in a single night. Many view the Long-Strider League as small, yet a threat, as it supports organizations, kingdoms and causes dedicated to truth, charity, hope and justice. Their flagrant use of magical objects and support of the old gods of Inismore have set them in direct opposition to anti-magical groups, especially the Inquisition.

Favor with the Long-Strider League

The Long-Strider League primarily concerns itself with delivering important information to Avalonians across Théah. They deal in national secrets just as easily as tidings from one town to another.

A Hero who belongs to the Long-Strider League can earn Favor in the following ways:

- Successfully delivering an important message is worth 4 Favor. If that message is particularly important or delivered particularly fast, it may be worth an additional 2 Favor.
- Recruiting a messenger or someone trustworthy to pass along a message for the League is worth 2 Favor.

A Hero who belongs to the Long-Strider League can call upon it for aid in the following ways:

- Access to a reliquary costs 4 Favor. A Long-Strider League reliquary contains items imbued with Glamour used to increase speed of travel or ensure safety while in the wilderness. Such relics function similarly to a Signature Item, although the exact effects are at the GM's discretion. An agent is expected to return the relic after his mission is complete, and refusal to do so could result in the agent being declared a traitor.
- Access to information gathered by the Long-Strider League costs 2 Favor. If the information is particularly sensitive or earmarked as private for the recipient only, the request costs 4 Favor.





Places

Avalon

Avalonians long prided themselves on living in a glamour-touched country, and no one was surprised when Queen Elaine's ascension sparked a resurgence of magic across the realm. Most attributed it to the Queen's connection to the Graal and her time among the Sidhe and welcomed a return to the old ways.

As time went on, that initial joy gave way to unease as the Glamour warped the land around its mortal inhabitants. Locations simply Glamour-touched transformed into unrecognizable magical places out of ancient legend, dangerous as they were wondrous.

Forests once passable became dense, and enchanted greenery annexed dark woods and towns on the outskirts. The change forced mortal populations to flee their homes or submit to living under the baffling, often horrifying and inhuman, rule of the Sidhe. Avalonians dubbed these new, inexplicable places Glamourlands.

Carleon

Carleon is "The Shining Star" glittering on the country's southern coast. While other countries boast ancient capitals, Carleon is a gorgeous city in which the very magic of Avalon created the halls and streets.

Upon Queen Elaine's rise to power, the wizard Derwyddon declared that the Queen and her kingdom needed a capital worthy of the Glamour Isles. Overnight, he turned the ordinary port city into something out of legends, transforming sea foam into the brightest stone castle to stand high above tree-lined streets and promenades, glorious cathedrals and opulent marketplaces. It is the single most powerful reminder that Glamour is truly the lifeblood of Avalon.





Glenayre Castle

The black cliffs overlooking the ocean host the magical city of Carleon, crowned at the very top by Queen Elaine's spectacular castle, Glenayre. The gleaming spires and high walls of the castle look even more astounding and fresh than the day they were created, though now ten years old.

In the heart of the foam-white walls, in a throne room encircled in gold-veined pillars entwined with living trees, Queen Elaine sits at court. The high-ceiling throne room is large enough to hold hundreds of diplomats, courtiers, knights and attendees, while the magic of Glenayre allows the voice of the Queen to carry across the great crowd with ease whenever she pleases.

The rest of the castle is full of lavish art galleries, lush gardens full of citrus trees and a large feast hall lined with tapestries depicting ancient legends of Avalon. The lower section of the castle hosts a well-stocked training pavilion where the Queen's knights train new recruits and maintain their own martial readiness, while high above in the towers, dignitaries and members of court fortunate enough to live in the castle look down on the city or the sea below.

The Queen's tower is enormous, hosting a small library, private meeting chambers and servants quarters for her ladies in waiting. Elaine entertains important guests and dignitaries in her private quarters within the tower.

The Queen's tower also hosts a direct entrance to the Walking Hall, where petitioners wait in the hopes of catching the queen on her way to court to ask for her aid or a simple blessing. The Queen may circumvent the Walking Hall by taking Elaine's Stairs, a glorious outdoor staircase that leads down the side of the castle. Her personal guards maintain watch over the stairs. It stretches from her tower all the way down to a private inlet in the cliffside that leads out to the ocean. Elaine is fond of taking visitors down the stairs during private talks, to ensure no one eavesdrops on her conversations.

The City Proper

North and west of the castle lies the rest of Carleon in a twisted jumble of streets that wander down the cliffside to the sea. It is easy to get lost here until you realize the streets follow the natural rock formations of the cliffside. Even that does not give much in the way of reason to the meandering streets. The Procession Way is the main road that leads from the castle to a wide park at the very heart of Carleon called the Promenade. This park is always open, and plays host to performers, sightseers, visiting dignitaries and small merchant stalls selling fake Sidhe trinkets. Further down the Promenade lies the national Parliament building, where leaders from across Avalon come to attend to the business of the governing the Glamour Isles.

On the opposite side of a wide green square is the National Dock, where the high courts sit in judgment over the most important cases brought up from the county courts. Above the dock lie the judges' chambers and law libraries, as well as the Advocate School, where advocates for the accused are trained. Behind the Dock lies the prison of Endwell, where prisoners stay to await their trial. The worst criminals in Avalon, such as traitors or those deemed truly dangerous, dwell in the lowest levels. The Endwell is built deep into caves in the cliffside, and Glamour protects and maintains the prisoners by the glow of eerie *færie* lights.

Just before the waterfront at the edge of the Promenade lie the Marking Stones, a circle of ancient rocks where the wizard Derwyddon practices his magic. Since Derwyddon has been seen less and less in the capital in recent years, those followers of the old gods and loyal to the Sidhe have taken to gathering at the Marking Stones to worship or to entreat for aid.

Northern District

Beyond the Promenade, the city splits into three districts on the north, west and south of the park. The northern section holds the majority of the homes within the city, with the nobility boasting homes closest to the Promenade and the castle. This stretch of town also hosts a series of religious buildings, including the Church of Avalon's Grand Chapel, which lies just beyond the Parliament building.

This grand structure boasts high stonewalls in a darker grey-blue and stained glass windows depicting scripture and doves in flight. Not far away, the more subdued St. Benedict's, a small Vaticine Church, ministers to the believers that remain in Carleon. Further into the poorer sections of the town lies the Realists' Meeting Hall, a no-nonsense dark-roofed building which hosts Avalon's newest religious sect. They therefore live the farthest from the city center they can, citing the city's Glamour-filled streets as a collective delusion given form.

Western District

The western side of the city hosts the diplomatic homes, bustling businesses and merchant halls fueling Carleon's complex political world and robust economy. Closest to the Promenade on the north side is Vendel League Row, a stretch of the most prime real estate bought and maintained by the Vendel League. There, the League's representatives not only do business but patronize lavish art galleries, musical performances and theater, all catered to the highest of clientele. Diplomats from across Terra rent the houses, each wishing to claim a home closest to Glenayre and the court. Renting these houses may cost a pretty penny, but the display of wealth is a great way to impress the Vendel League abroad.

Nearby lies the Explorer's Society Charter House, the headquarters for the Society across all of Avalon. From here, members of the Society organize expeditions to the Thalussian Islands or to newly discovered pockets of Syrneth ruins in the swamplands of Inismore.

The west side of town also hosts the city's marketplace, a colorful lane of shops, stalls and vendors selling their wares. Here, a short walk from the southern docks, is where a Hero can offload wares, restock her ships and find maps and other assorted items for a long voyage.

Morgan's Roost

On the south end of the western district lies Morgan's Roost, a glorious mansion uniquely crafted out of the wooden planks of retired ships. There, privateers from across Théah may retire within spitting distance of the sea and among other sailors and captains just like them.



The odd retirement home began as a joke among the privateers hired by Queen Elaine, who asked if they returned to retire to “a home with a view.”

The Queen apparently found the idea amusing and built the landing as a tribute to all those who served her on the sea. The mastheads recovered from scuttled and destroyed ships line the main hall, given a place of honor after they have served their time. While it may seem ridiculous, some of the most notorious retired privateers call Morgan’s Roost their home.

Morgan’s Roost faces southeast, towards the port at the very foot of Carleon. A visitor from the sea can find everything he needs upon landing at the finest docks on the Glamour Isles. The Sea Dogs rule the docks, from the cozy tables and rooms at Hopewell’s Inn overlooking the Marking Stones to the Burning Gyre tavern down at the water’s edge. The Dogs not only own a good chunk of the ships in dock, they also own a number of the dockside warehouses merchants use to store goods coming in from across Théah. Everything passing through the docks gives a cut to the Dogs, and anyone breaking the law might find himself apprehended by the Dogs before the city guards are even on the cast. And woe betide anyone found breaking the Dogs’ code of conduct by harming the innocent on their streets, as the Dogs have their own justice and it is swift and terrible.

Glamourtown

Beyond the market lies the newest part of town, sprung up from the far end of the marketplace. Called Glamourtown by the locals, this section of the city began to warp and transform under pockets of wild Glamour popping up all across Avalon. Walking out of the market and into Glamourtown, a traveler immediately notices the colors around her getting brighter, the buildings a little taller and grander and perhaps a little more wondrous as well.

Magic lurks around every corner and the Sidhe live alongside their mortal associates. The Sidhe diplomats to Queen Elaine’s court keep a residence here, a tall manor house called Seabright. Its blue-green walls and silver accents beggar even the wealthiest nobles’ homes on the opposite side of town. Be careful wandering Glamourtown without an escort; wild magic has a way of causing mischief.

Síocháin Forest

To the east of Pomitain and lying in the shadow of Mt. Cymru is the enchanted woodlands known as the Síocháin Forest, the heart of Sidhe power in Avalon. Once known simply as a mystical wood, many travelers ignored the odd and mysterious events occurring there. Riders disappear into the night, led by the voices of long-lost loved ones, while færie lights guide the bewildered off, never to be seen again.

In recent years, the Glamour-soaked forests have more pronounced effects, specifically around the fields at its southern edge that host the Bran Bridge. The bridge itself is nothing more than an ancient ruin barely poking up from the earth. Its stones end at the still waters of Bran Bridge Lake, supposedly the location where Athrwyn threw the Graal to keep it out of Montaigne hands six hundred years ago.

In the days before Queen Elaine’s reign, a unicorn emerged from deep within the woods, a creature hidden for generations to all but the most pure of heart. The unicorn walked to the water’s edge and touched it with its horn. The waters parted and from within rose the Sidhe. Some rode white færie steeds on to Carleon, while others established a stronghold within the forest. Since then, Síocháin Forest, also known as the Unicorn’s Forest, has become the center of the new Sidhe territory, Arcadia.

The trouble is that much of what is now their territory once belonged to people living on the land. The mortal villages of Cordelia, Broken Bow, Harlenn and Wandinhome now fall inside Sidhe territory. The Sidhe offered the inhabitants an option once they arrived: stay and live under Sidhe ministration, or leave. While many fled to nearby towns, others chose to stay behind. Travelers through the area report the people have begun transforming, growing more Sidhe-like, with more children born with an affinity to magic every month.

Those wishing to traverse the territory do well to learn the ins and outs of Sidhe customs, such as bringing gifts to placate the spirits. But a wanderer who chooses to accept gifts without a clear and equal exchange may find himself owing the wrong Sidhe and becoming bound to the land before he can escape. Some don’t find that fate too unkind, as the towns and villages within the Síocháin Forest have transformed into idealized versions of what the Sidhe believe mortals want from their homes.



The people living there now deal with odd beasts roaming their city streets in exchange for food that tastes as sweet as candy and self-mending clothing.

A council of three Sidhe maintains the peace within the borders, each holding a mark of power and representing different types of the Sidhe. Elenyth is the eldest of the three and representative of Magic. Elenyth acts as guide for the Glamour awake in the Forest and serves as the chief voice between mortals and the magical creatures. Her symbol is a scrying bowl full of glowing water from Bran Bridge Lake, which never moves within the bowl, or spills.

The second of the triumvirate is Lady Anne Ladybee. Lady Anne was once a mortal, they say, but the Sidhe took her away at a young age. She returned more Sidhe than woman and is now a handmaid to Daniele. She represents the power of Sidhe Wisdom and acts as host to the library of magical knowledge rumored to be secreted away in the caves below Mt. Cymru. Her symbol of power is a holly branch, always in full bloom, and a small flock of ladybugs always surrounds her.

The third of the triumvirate is Bailiwick Brownteeth, a terrifying Sidhe with grey, mottled skin, long skeletal arms and legs, and teeth stained a deep, rotted brown. Bailiwick represents the power of the Sidhe in their most intense, martial form, and he serves as the leader of the forest's Redthorn Guard. The Sidhe Guard rides from one corner of the territory to another policing the borders on steeds that only drink single-malt whiskey. Bailiwick's mark of office is a black thorn branch that can cut through anything.

The Queen's Respite Inn

No Sidhe pacts are made within the Queen's Respite; only mortal business deals may be struck, and any within the inn are safe against harm. An exiled Sidhe, the tall Lady Gwynnfra, runs the place. Her giant golden horns and grey-blue skin marks her a proud "fallen" member of the Goodly Folke.

A guide service operates from the inn, in an attempt to help humans navigate the Glamour-changed forest. Solis, a Sidhe, and his brother Tolus have gathered experienced travelers to act as guides within the forest. Their prices are reasonable, though if you go without a guide and need a rescue, the prices are much steeper. Either way, the Queen's Respite is a great place to have neutral meetings with people and Sidhe alike.

Tallow Hill

The territory encompassing Siocháin Forest is expanding. Where once it only encompassed a few square miles, the territory now spans from the northern border of Balig all the way back to Mt. Cymru. The Sidhe delegates in the capital have bid anyone who wishes to live safely in the arms of a magic-based culture to join them there. News of this has spread across Théah, attracting many a magic user from lands where his talents have seen him persecuted and even hunted. A small settlement on the northern edge of the forest called Tallow Hill has sprung up, where magic users have settled as refugees. This new community exists to share knowledge about magic in safety. It is a great place to find information, assistance or even the stray magical artifact if you know who to ask. The location does not sit well with the Realists, though no part of the Siocháin Forest sits well with them.

Wandesborrow

The port city of Wandesborrow lies on the eastern shore of Avalon, directly north of the capital city of Carleon and east of Mount Cymru. A visitor to the port notices right off that its design and architecture are much older than much of the rest of the cities of Avalon, built off the ancient black cliff rock with high walls to protect against invasion from the sea. She also notices that the accents and language of anyone from Wandesborrow is different, thicker and much more pronounced, with a lilting brogue often confused for Inish. In fact, the people of Wandesborrow are descendants of the Cymry people, one of the ancient tribes of old Avalon, and one of the most culturally traditional groups in the whole kingdom.

History teaches that once the Cymry stretched across a good portion of eastern Avalon, with their ancestral home at the base of Mt. Cymru. When emissaries from the Old Empire arrived, they built many of their new colonies in Cymry land, driving back the tribespeople to their high-walled port at Wandesborrow. While many Cymry assimilated into other tribes and became part of the larger people of Avalon, the people of Wandesborrow have remained traditionally Cymry within the city's black walls.



Their ancient traditions of music and songs to honor the old ways have held fast, and a sailor putting into port often reports hearing the music of Wandesborrow long before he even docks.

Wandesborrow is the largest port in Avalon outside of Carleon and sports the finest boat-builders in all three kingdoms—or so the Wandies say. The city is also a haven for sailors, boatswains and anyone else coming ashore for some good rest after a long tour at sea. Called “Sailor’s Haven” by many, a ship can berth at Wandesborrow and let its crew carouse freely. Once through the great gates that separate the docks from the city proper, the city itself is a raucous adventure, full of taverns, alehouses and any other place a sailor might spend her freshly earned purse. Get too rowdy and you will run afoul of the Cymry constables, a tough breed ready to take on even the hardiest sailor on a binge. The Cymry elders run the city, all former sailors with decades of experience at sea under their belts.

For all its ancient roots, Wandesborrow is also a city on the rise. Visitors or new arrivals can find work along the docks or on newly constructed ships heading out to raid on the high seas. Some say the head of the elder council, Tamarin Driscoll, made a bet with Jeremiah Berek himself that given five years, the Wandies could create a pirate fleet that would rival the Sea Dogs. The city has certainly taken up the challenge, turning its attention to building new ships and providing them with supplies, making Wandesborrow the perfect place for a pirate trying to build up his reputation. Young Wandies and newcomers alike gather at Hugh Manson’s outdoor tavern called the Hwyl overlooking the sea to swap stories about their first adventures.

The other half of city life is dedicated to music and the creation of art. Those dedicated to beauty and traditional culture can linger among the stalls in Owens Gardens. Formerly just a copse of old, gnarled trees surrounded by the homes of the wealthy, the Gardens are home to those passionately dedicated to worshipping in the old ways through song and dance and the creation of tapestries depicting old legends. Behind the scenes, however, those interested in trading and selling ancient relics of old Avalon use Owens Gardens as their black market, even going as far as to trade items from all across Théah and beyond.

Inismore

The country is a contradiction in terms, made of large cities of stone dispersed across leagues of wide-open and wild spaces. The stories claim that the ancient people of Tuatha spent their lifetimes battling the darkness of horrible monsters alongside the Sidhe.

Those Sidhe influences remain all across the wilder parts of Inismore, in the craggy caves of the O’Bannon Highlands or the bogs and swamps that notoriously dot the landscape. Yet everywhere across Inismore are proud towns and strong people building lives alongside the ancient ruins of the past, prospering in the grace of Queen Elaine’s golden age.

Donega

The capital of Inismore is a city newly reborn in the wake of the ten years of plenty thanks to the unification. The formerly ancient city going to ruin has been invigorated once more. The return of the O’Bannon twenty years ago brought attention back to the old capital, then called Tara, which for decades people viewed as merely a ceremonial bit of history for a people fractured under foreign invasion.

When the O’Bannon claimed the throne, nobles began to flock back to the city, and rechristened it Donega after the surrounding O’Bannon’s ancestral territory. Still, the city’s very design and architecture presents a besieged air more than the center of a new and developing nation. And for the most part, that is just the way the O’Bannon likes it.

Fâl Stone

At the heart of the city in the wide Tara Square lies the Fâl Stone, the symbol of the true king from time out of legend. The wide, smooth stone stands taller than a person and seems plain enough to the eyes. However, the stone is imbued with the magic of Inismore itself. The O’Bannon proved his identity as the true king by kissing the stone, which began to weep and sing in his presence. Donegans say the song of the stone foretells the future of the king, though what the song said in the O’Bannon’s presence ten years ago, no one shares. Rumors around Donega say recently the stone began to weep again and sing on nights when the moon is full. Though the Knights of Tara have kept away those eager to hear the song, it is pretty clear something is not right.





Castle of Tara

The castle of Tara, left to keep the old name, is a ramshackle old keep overrun in many places by decades of trees and vines that threaten to pull down the ancient walls. Yet somehow not only does the old castle still stand, but in the twenty years since the O'Bannon's return, Glamour entwined the green within the architecture until nature and masonry became one.

The O'Bannon sits in the heart of a throne room with grass underfoot and a ceiling open to the sky overhead, though the outside weather never seems to come within the walls. His throne is an ancient tree with a well-worn seat, with a place set for the ancient crown of Inismore, now empty.

The rest of the castle hosts two feuding groups of warriors under the king's command, the Fianna and the newly forming Knights of Tara. The Fianna were established long ago as knights who set aside their clans to serve only the king, their *ard ri*. Guardians of the throne, crown and the Fál Stone, these knights faced the single greatest blow to their honor in years when the crown of Inismore disappeared.

Many of the other knights, and even commoners, have lost confidence in the Fianna's ability to protect the king. The O'Bannon's obsession with rediscovering the crown has not only led him traveling without his *flaith* (his honor guard) in search of the crown, but has sent the Fianna from their training halls all across the world to track it down.

Since the king started taking long treks away from the castle, his councilors took the opportunity to establish the Knights of Tara, a second order loyal to the country as much as their king.

Much of the old Fianna lists, training grounds and weapon's stores have been repurposed to the Knights of Tara. Warriors from every clan come to the castle in the hopes of joining the new order, filling the halls with people from all over Inismore.

The knights are a controversial bunch, their ways fashioned more after the Knights of Queen Elaine's court than the warriors of Inismore. The populace sees them as anything from a novelty to an affront to Inish traditions.

The Knights of Tara—though controlled by the Inish nobility—are a stabilizing force in the capital and across the region when the O'Bannon disappears on his kingdom-wide walkabouts for weeks, sometimes months at a time.

O'Shay's Provings

On the east side of the city—far from the castle of Tara—is the raucous O'Shay's Provings, a tremendous indoor and outdoor training area for fighters, mercenaries and those who would like to improve their martial prowess.

Run by legendary brawler Mickey O'Shay, the fighters gathered at O'Shay's are the best from all across Inismore, brought to Donega to teach anyone who wants to learn. Entrance exams to O'Shay's are a lot like those to Burke University, only the testing is a lot more hands on.

Those who survive can learn from the best teacher of armed combat, wrestling, horseback riding, archery and more. A graduate leaves the school with a new tattoo of a bull rampant over a blazing sun, the mark of her proving.



Burke University

South of Tara Square and past the homes and businesses lie the two institutions in Donega that most typify the spirit of the city: Burke University and the O'Shay Provings. Nestled on the west end of the city just against the walls, Burke University hosts some of the greatest thinkers and philosophers from all around Avalon. A center for higher learning, its arched-roofed libraries boast texts imported from all across Théah. They invite teachers from the various universities across the continent and beyond to come and lecture there, and though not as lavish as the universities in Castille or Montaigne, Burke University hosts some of the leading magical researchers. Its administrators are a mix of the local Inish people, and invited luminaries from around the world, including Yachidi teachers from the far-off Crescent Empire. Students interested in studying at Burke must provide three letters of recommendation from scholars, leaders or thinkers, as well as pass a rigorous entrance examination. After that, however, tuition is free and a student can remain within the university for as long as he wishes, often traveling abroad to further his knowledge and return with new discoveries to study.

Liumech

The city of Liumech has become the hotbed of political and naval power in the country. A port city just north of Dunkeen, Liumech had fallen into disrepair shortly after the War of the Cross. It served as a den of criminal activity frequented by mercenaries, sailors and ships in need of a jumping off point into the western oceans beyond. Ruled by the O'Malley clan, its leadership was notoriously corrupt and debauched until the coming of a new leader only five years ago.

Aileen O'Malley lead a coup against her wine-sotted uncle Stanley, and established Liumech as a center for commerce and sea trade once more. A natural-born diplomat and ferocious sea captain in her own right, Aileen, the former Pirate Queen of the Shannagary Islands, brought her small fleet of ships to Liumech to protect the coasts against sea raiders and thereby gained the love and loyalty of the people. Slowly, she transformed Liumech into a safe, peaceful town and one of the most cosmopolitan of all the cities in Inismore.

Ships from all across Théah dock at Liumech on their way west towards the Atabean Sea or beyond, and goods from across Terra cross the Liumech docks to be sold at a fair price at market. Clan O'Malley maintains the city's just and even-handed trading rules, as well as its justice, in conjunction with aid from other clans who maintain homes in the city. An ad hoc ruling council from these clans, as well as the Merchants' Guild and Captain's League, serve as advisors to Aileen as she sits in the High Lord's Castle.

Old Town

Since the city's revitalization, the seedier elements have clustered themselves around the western side of the city down to the docks in what has been dubbed Old Town. The changes brightening up Liumech has yet to reach down to Old Town and the crooked streets are often dark, the buildings ramshackle and falling down. Still, you can find anything in Old Town, and those more unsavory characters from across Théah looking for a place to lie low before heading off to sea find Old Town the perfect port in a storm.

Many of the old buildings of Liumech fallen to ruin are now being repurposed for use. Stelladora's, a music hall where musical performers from across Inismore come to play, lies in the remains of what once must have been a library in Old Town. The meetinghouse for the Brotherhood of the Coast rests in an old noble's manor.

The most contested real estate in all of Liumech is St. Rose Church on the border of Old Town. The former Vaticine cathedral was the treasure of Liumech back in its heyday before the Church was evicted from Inismore in favor of the Church of Avalon. Recently, the Vaticine Church petitioned Clan O'Malley to reconstruct the cathedral and provided such hefty tribute, Aileen O'Malley could not refuse. Since then, the returning church leaders have encountered a small problem: new tenants took up residence after they abandoned the structure and are not interested in leaving.

Jennys use St. Rose Church as a place of safety and refuge as well as an ad hoc meeting hall, and they see no reason to give up their new home. So far, the church has been allowed to continue construction on the massive structure provided they do not oust the jennys. But both groups are in heated and contentious struggle over the future of the towering cathedral.



The High Lord's Castle

The High Lord's castle is an ancient manor dating back to the days of the first O'Bannon, with gorgeous stonework architecture weathered by time and neglect. Before Aileen's arrival, the castle was a moldering ruin. Now the funds brought in by the Pirate Queen have rebuilt the castle to transform it into a modern, tasteful center of power for Clan O'Malley, resplendent in their banners and decked in always-fresh wreaths of holly. The clan treats visitors to the best food and drink Liumech has to offer, often expensive imports. Aileen hosts important visitors in the wide receiving hall and does not snub even the poorest of petitioners. Her reign may have started with a backbone of piracy, but Aileen rules Liumech with an honest and fair hand.

Lady Morwyn's Gardens

The most recent addition to Liumech comes in the form of a massive construction project on the northern end of the city. One morning, the people of Liumech awoke to find a large chunk of the hillside just north of the city had transformed into a series of rocky but beautiful gardens full of standing pools of water and the most beautiful birds. Sidhe magic clearly transformed the area, and Lady Morwyn runs the grand house resting among the water gardens, a woman who appeared just as mysteriously as the gardens.

The Lady offered to open the magical gardens to everyone with the clear instructions that they must not linger after nightfall without her express permission. Since then, the lush gardens have become a haven for poets, musicians, writers and artists, all drawing tremendous inspiration from the unearthly beauty of the place.

A festival called the Sea's Grace Festival has sprung up there in the late autumn where people from far and wide come to celebrate Liumech's artists in the days before the weather turns cold. Lady Morwyn sits as the gracious Lady of the Sea, watching over the proceedings alongside Aileen O'Malley. That the two women do not get along is no secret. Aileen worries that Morwyn has political aims and does not trust the Lady. Yet both put aside their enmity for the sake of the festival once a year.

The Highland Marches

The lands of the Highland Marches are split into numerous small holdings each maintained by the Highland clans. One clan or another owns every farm, city and piece of unarable land. The larger holdings have evolved into cities, often encompassing multiple clans, usually one powerful family and all their smaller subsidiaries. Castles dot the landscape, the ancestral homes of the clans, some no larger than a farm house, and others the centers of large cities.

Kirkwall

Rising high above open, windswept land as far as the eye can see, the city of Kirkwall is a proud and ancient city caught in between its regal past and an ever-evolving future. The political center of the Highland Marches is a city at war with itself. Its very architecture and design makes evident the battle between the old and the new going on in the Marches, as those allied with the MacDuff's strategy of aligning with Avalon reap the benefits of the Glamour Isles' golden age. Still others intend to hold onto the past, and the city's quarters sport new constructions in a host of new styles imported from all across Avalon, built just alongside the oldest meeting halls and homes.

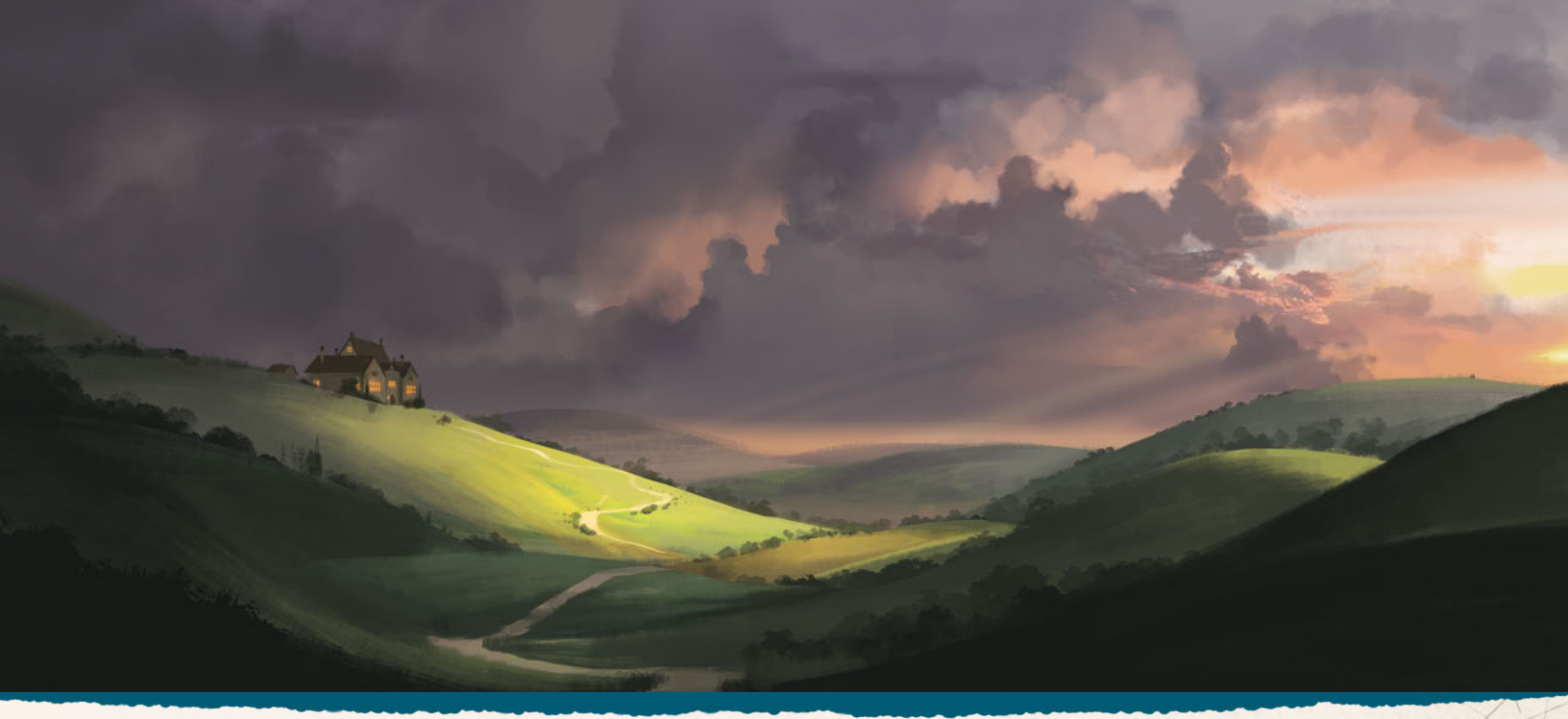
Parliament House

Unlike other capitals, the heart of Kirkwall is not the castle of its king, but its Parliament Building. The Parliament hosts the High Council of Advisors, a five-hundred-person body of clan leaders and gentry from across the Marches. Each seat is inherited and serves as a touchstone to each corner of the Marches for the king, who sits as leader for every session.

Politics can be spirited in the Marches, and many an argument has transformed into a shouting match and even a round of fistfights and duel-challenges at day's end. No issue invokes such responses quite as much as the issue of support for Queen Elaine.

The arrival of Parliament to Kirkwall for the legislative and political season transforms the capital. Since most of the representatives are also landowners and clan leaders, many of the High Council spend most of the year elsewhere in their own counties and clan lands, only coming into Kirkwall once a year.





The Noble's Mile

When the High Council convenes for one week during the spring, the entire city must prepare to host hundreds of dignitaries and notable figures from across the country and even across Théah. This amounts to tens of thousands of people including nobles, their families and households, diplomats, merchants and tradespeople flocking into the city at once.

Due to the yearly influx of Parliament, Kirkwall is constantly expanding, building new facilities to host the visiting horde. Most of those important visitors maintain houses on Noble's Mile, the long mile of well-appointed houses between the Parliament Building and the chapter house of the Knights of the Rose & Cross.

Since many of the households are only in Kirkwall for a limited time during the year, some remain empty until High Council season. Others allow people they support to live in their residences within the city while they are away to maintain the house, leading to many second or third sons and daughters and their families taking up residence.

Inverness Castle

The building at the very top of the Noble's Mile is the small castle built in recent years for King James called Inverness. The castle is a miniature scale of the MacDuff ancestral castle in their home across the Marches, presented by the Unionists after the unification with Avalon netted them quite handsome profits

due to trade and expansion. The idea was to create a castle to proclaim their king as grand as Avalon's Queen without being too ostentatious. Inverness is only as large as a great manor house estate, with a small courtyard for the king's guards to muster and train in the open air. King James himself often retires to Inverness when in the area, accepting visitors and dignitaries as necessary, though he prefers political meetings to occur at the Parliament Building.

MacDougal's Manor

Threats are alive and well in Kirkwall, such as the central meetinghouse for the Separatists movement headquarters in Noble's Mile. MacDougal's is an ancient manor house just before one reaches the end of the Mile. The manor once belonged to the MacDougal clan and its lord, who ran afoul of King James and was exiled when he espoused his anti-unification rhetoric once too often at Parliament. The Separatists used the MacDougal's plight as a rallying cry and took over the manor as their central rallying point and meeting location. The home might once have been lavish and well appointed, but it has since fallen into disrepair. The Separatist members stripped out any comforts outside of the barest necessities and used the great hall to hold talks and meetings. The king's guards have no love for MacDougal's which, due to its size and orientation, makes it difficult to monitor in case of treasonous activity. The meetings are led by the MacBrides, who have taken to staying at the old manor.



St. Marigold's

Beyond the wealthy homes lies one last large structure before the ground opens up on the way to the city walls. St. Marigold's is the tallest building in town aside from the Parliament House. It also stands as the only Vaticine Church left in all of the Marches.

The Highland Marches never adopted the Church of Avalon, but instead adopted Objectionist views, ever since Mattias Lieber escaped the Church. At the end of the War of the Cross, the last few Vaticine representatives were forcibly expelled from the Marches.

Within recent years, the Church petitions to return to the Marches, and tend to the few Vaticine members still found there. They were surprised when King James let them enter, though the money they brought with them was more likely the cause than any act of faith.

Emissaries wasted no time going to Kirkwall to begin work on a grand structure that would capture people's attention. Unbeknownst to most in Kirkwall, the Inquisition largely funds the emissaries, looking to build a beacon against the magical forces of the Sidhe in any of the three unified countries.

Fairegrounds

Beyond the grand buildings of the nobility and the church lie the outskirts of town, an open swath of land before the gates where merchants, tradespeople and artists can ply their wares. Called the Fairegrounds, this area lies mostly fallow for the year until High Council season arrives.

During that week, a giant market springs up around the town to support the influx of people. Merchants bring fresh food, crafts and entertainment to the people of Kirkwall. The Fairegrounds has become such a popular attraction that people come from all across Avalon to see the amazing displays of music, theater and art during Parliament season.

This weeklong extravaganza proves the richness of Highland culture and the hope Marchers have for their futures. Even Queen Elaine takes time to attend Parliament sessions, hoping to foster goodwill with the beleaguered people.

Shannagary Islands

At the mouth of the Highland Channel, between the western shores of Inismore and the Highland Marches, lies the rugged Shannagary Islands. The islands may be little more than rocky outcroppings at the edge of the huge ocean, but they have served as a major strategic location when approaching Avalon for as long as anyone can remember.

Several large islands, and nearly a dozen smaller ones—some so small they do not appear on larger maps of Théah—make up the island chain. Only the savviest sailors, or those with well-detailed maps can chart a course from one side of the Shannagary to the other.

History of the Islands

The first settlers to the islands fled Inismore during occupation by the Old Empire. They named the three major islands in the chain after the stages of their grief for their homeland.

They settled the southernmost island first and named it Keening Rock. They named middle, and largest, island Misneach, which loosely translates to "pushing forward through adversity." Finally, they named the northernmost island in the chain, closest to the Marches, Uisce, or "Source of Life." These Inish refugees were only the first wave of settlers who fled to the Shannagary to escape war, famine or tragedy on the mainland.

These hearty survivors united to create a special breed of Avalonians dedicated to three ideals: *comhar*, *ceol* and *cara*. *Comhar* encapsulates the spirit of shared work towards a common goal, uniting the Shannagary at their tasks. *Ceol* represents the rhythm within, the vibrant music of life that invigorates and drives the people onward. Finally, *cara* calls for a connection in friendship between the people of the islands that bonds newcomers and natives into one community.

The Shannagary Islands became known as a home for the lost and lonely, drawing in people from across Théah looking for a second chance at life. The architecture across the islands' settlements mixes traditions from nearly everywhere, wind-swept and sun-bleached like everything on the Islands.



A Cultural Hub

The oldest city of Taisce on Keening Rock is primarily a fishing village that looks like a throwback to the most ancient Inish settlements. San Spleodar on Uisce is a former Castillian outpost overtaken by Inish and Marchers escaping the War twenty years before. A microcosm of all that intermingling is Port Saoirse on Misneach, home to privateers and the vagabonds of the world.

After Queen Elaine created a navy of independent ships and privateers, many came to the Shannagary hoping to score easy money from a group of people outside the Queen's influence. What they found instead was a group of fierce islanders who repelled them time after time. Privateers began making port under flags of peace, knowing the islanders would provide a safe harbor for the time they were there. Many of the privateers liked the islands so much, they decided to stay.

There was only one catch: the islanders swore after settling the islands to remain neutral to conflicts and dedicate themselves to peace. A typical islander commits herself to becoming a haven in the wind-swept seas, picking up weapons only to defend herself and her guests from harm. Instead, she devotes her energy to her spirit of hard work and communal living.

Each island's *taoiseach*, translated as "first among us," is deeply committed to keeping outside politics beyond their borders, and anyone whose personal issues bring trouble to the islands can find himself tossed off if he puts his own personal needs ahead of the rest of the community.

Life in the Shannagary

It takes a strong communal dedication to survive in the harsh Shannagary Islands. The intense currents of the Highland Channel make it difficult to land ships in any of the bays.

The wind-swept islands themselves have little vegetation, and settlers subsist on hearty sheep and goats and a steady diet of fish, seaweed and other sea creatures. They remain insular, refusing to trade even with Inismore or the Highland Marches unless pressed.

No single island produces enough to provide for all its people, and a strong economy of trade among the three major islands keeps the communities alive.

Uisce has a huge spring of fresh water that runs from the middle of the island to the sea, hence the name. The islanders barrel and export the water south to Misneach, which serves as the trade hub and central meeting city.

Keening Rock, despite its sorrowful name, is rife with tough, thick trees whose wood burns smokey but long. Once dried thoroughly, the pleasant-smelling wood makes an impressive fuel and works even better for making ships.

The islanders bring these resources to Port Saoirse, for sale under the neutral banner of trade. Anyone who breaks this truce is met with ferocious retribution and expulsion, otherwise all are welcome, no matter their affiliation.

Explorers visit and hire locals to lead them on expeditions into vast cave systems in Uisce, searching for ancient Syrneth ruins. Numerous missing dignitaries and runaway power brokers have sought shelter on Shannagary, attracting bounty hunters who risk dragging the Shannagary into their personal conflicts. The islands also serve as the jumping off point for many explorations to the New World or the Atabean Sea.

Those ships heading across the open ocean resupply or take on crew in Port Saoirse, and the towns are known for being the first to see new wonders brought back from the far west. The port is a vibrant, energetic place, full of sailors, merchants, travelers and locals all shouting to be heard over the roaring wind coming from the sea.

New arrivals must climb the stone stairs up from the docks to the town on the rocky land above, where squat buildings huddle together against the chill. By evening, the people huddle inside taverns or large drinking halls to share in stories and celebrate *ceol* with music, storytelling and dancing. The parties in Port Saoirse are raucous, lasting long into the night, but the Shannagary get up early the next morning to face the hard, tough nature of their lives again together.



Banesidhe Shoals

If the Shannagary Islands are full of hardworking, people and privateers trying to survive, then the Banesidhe Shoals are their twisted reflection. Situated off a rock-lined, storm-tossed bay at the very north of the Highland Marches, the Banesidhe Shoals are nightmare islands surrounded by razor rock reefs.

Long considered forbidding and dangerous to Marchers, legends say the island was once a prison used by the Sidhe to hold their worst violators. Legends say that the Sidhe prisoners still live on the island, preying on anyone who dares encroach upon their shores.

Those stories did not keep away the more unscrupulous over the years, however, and pirates and privateers looking for a hideaway settled the island, living in defiance in a place where many fear to tread. What is worse, in recent years, the island has attracted raiders looking for a base from which to launch attacks all along the kingdoms' coasts. These raiders respect no queen or country and deny the sovereignty of Queen Elaine or King James or the O'Bannon.

Separatists have risked life and limb to seek audience with the raiders of the Shoals to help foment further anti-monarch sentiment, with some success. These plots are ironic, considering how deeply treason is ingrained into the legends of the Shoals. Only those raiders who live on the Banesidhe Isle at the center of the shoals know just how real those legends truly are.

The House of the Dead

The only part of the island not under the raiders' control is a small inlet facing the larger western ocean. Though the storms of the Banesidhe Shoals pound the small den set amidst the craggy cliffs, the small house flush against the rock face seems no worse for wear.

Anyone who approaches the hut develops the worst case of vertigo, and many black out before ever going inside. Someone who does enter, describes a place where she may sit and converse with her own deceased loved ones over a friendly dinner, hosted by a lovely Sidhe woman in white. A visitor may stay as long as he likes, but once a piece of food or drink has passed his lips, he lives on borrowed time.

One year to the day of his arrival, no matter where the visitor may roam after leaving the Banesidhe Shoals, a haunting wail finds him and the ghostly form of the hostess comes to claim his life for her own.

Fiddler's Point

Should a ship manage to navigate past the Shoals and the raiders, it would come ashore at Fiddler's Point, named after Shannon Fiddler, the first to land there. The raider queen created a ramshackle port for her troops that grew over time until it became a small raiders' village. The port grew bigger when Captain Fiddler made an alliance with Vestenmennavenjar raider ships launched from Klorhulg to raid their coastline.

The two groups came together to become the largest raiding fleet in Avalon's vicinity, and Fiddler's Point evolved into a more permanent, heavily fortified town. The Vestenmennavenjar leader, Holbrung, cemented the alliance by marrying Fiddler and moving all of his resources to the island.

Stories differ on how they discovered the ancient Sidhe fortress at the heart of the island, however they both agree the wails of a creature seemingly in pain drew them there.

Within the twisted spires of the fortress, they discovered an ancient Sidhe, beautiful and pale as sea foam, chained to the rock floor inside an oubliette. The Sidhe's guardian was a wizened old crone, who told the couple that the storms surrounding the Shoals came from the screams of the trapped Sidhe. The storms would protect anyone who accepted custodianship of the prisoner as long as they do not leave sight of the island.

Fiddler and Holbrung agreed to become the new wardens. Once they struck the bargain, they both fell asleep. When they awoke, the old crone had transformed into a little girl. The raiders returned to the Point with their new Sidhe daughter, Kit, and the knowledge that they are bound to the island until someone else agrees to guard the imprisoned Sidhe.

With the power of storms under their command, the raiding fleet is a devastating force. Raider ships under their command attack without warning, stripping a village bare before melting back into the cover of a storm.

Fiddler's own treasure is rumored to be hidden in a series of caves underneath the town, and a raider who searches there finds herself on the receiving end of a stern lecture by a small, terrifying child, grown now to nearly the age of ten but with the mind of a full adult.



Glamour Sorcery

When one touched by the power of the Graal answers the call and becomes the embodiment of a Knight of Elilodd, she does not know that donning the mantle is just the first step along a greater path. For the Graal has plans for you, and if you choose to continue walking, you will find a road of greater mystery and greater danger than you have ever imagined.

Graal Debt

The Graal is the source of Glamour, and it stands ready to offer even greater power, you have but to ask for it. You may choose to activate a Glamour at a higher Rank than you actually possess. If you do, you acquire Graal Debt. You receive 1 Graal Debt for the first additional Rank, 2 for the second, 3 for the third and so on.

As long as you have Graal Debt, your account with the Sidhe is out of balance. You have accepted a gift from them but have not yet repaid it, and the Goodly Folke never give anything for free.

Sidhe Curses

As your Graal Debt accumulates, the risk of carrying it increases. Before you activate any Glamour, roll 1d10. If the number is equal to or less than your current Graal Debt, reset your Graal Debt to 0 and acquire one of the following Sidhe Curses—GM's choice. Each curse can only be suffered once, but for some, the impact increases as the total number of curses increases.

- **Running Water:** It becomes difficult to cross running water. You cannot do so without spending a Hero Point.
- **Fey Touched:** An aura of otherworldliness becomes increasingly noticeable to those around you. Superstitious folks may avoid crossing your path, make the sign of the horns to ward off your evil eye or even throw salt at you. During any Scene, you must spend an extra Raise on any social Action to persuade, convince or gain their trust unless you spend a Hero Point.
- **Iron Vulnerability:** Like the Sidhe you have become vulnerable to Cold Iron. Cold Iron weapons automatically inflict Dramatic Wounds on you just like the Firearms rule.

COLD IRON

Wrought iron (or iron that has been worked) is the most common form of iron. It is used for everything from horseshoes to nails to basic tools. It is low in carbon and, unlike Finery or Crucible Steel, has never been alloyed or fully melted. Steel, common for high end uses like swords and clock springs, can be hardened by heating and quenching; iron cannot be. But it can be hardened by being hammered repeatedly while cold.

Cold hardened iron is common to everyday tools that any peasant can readily lay her hands on; but no gentle would ever stoop to wield something so base as a weapon.

Even being around a quantity of iron makes you uncomfortable. In every Scene where you are near a quantity of iron (including holding an iron or steel weapon), you suffer 1 automatic Wound for every 2 Sidhe Curses you are under (rounded down).

- **Unsettling Demeanor:** The GM can spend 1 Danger Point to activate. You have a number of Ranks in Unsettling Demeanor equal to the number of Sidhe Curses you are currently under. All Risks made by any non-sorcerer Hero (or ally) in your vicinity loses 1 die for each Rank, similar to Fear. Abilities that mitigate Fear can also mitigate this effect.
- **Diurnal/Nocturnal:** You either have an affinity for or an aversion to direct sunlight depending on what time you acquired the curse. For Diurnal, you grow weary quickly when you are out of the sun. Every Hero Point you spend when not in direct sunlight costs 2 Hero Points. For Nocturnal, direct sunlight is uncomfortable, even painful. Every Hero Point you spend when in direct sunlight also inflicts a Dramatic Wound.
- **Susceptible to Wards:** A garland of marigolds, an iron nail in a pocket and a horseshoe over a door have all been used to ward off lesser Sidhe. Any Risk you make against a person or in an area protected by such a ward requires a total of 15 for a Raise without the GM needing to spend a Danger Point.



Danger Points

Additionally, at the beginning of each session, the GM adds 1 additional Danger Point to his Danger Pool for every Sidhe Curse you are currently under. He may use these in any Scene you are in and against any Hero who is with you.

Using these Danger Points typically accompanies noticeable otherworldly signs: flames blow as if in a strong breeze, milk curdles, nearby animals become spooked, the area becomes several degrees colder, toadstools spring up in your footsteps, the day becomes darker as if a cloud passed over the sun or any variety of similar effects.

Removing Curses

A Hero can remove Sidhe Curses in one of two ways, either by repaying the Sidhe directly through the use of Sidhe Stories or by more fully embracing the embodiment of her Knight.

Sidhe Stories run alongside your ongoing Hero Story and, when completed, removes all the Sidhe Curses you are currently suffering from. The Story Steps are decided by the GM and require 1 Step plus an additional Step for each Sidhe Curse removed. The Steps—and the ultimate Story Goal—are how you repay the Sidhe for what the Graal offered you.

What do the Sidhe want? It could be something completely trivial and capricious, like bringing a wreath of four leaf clovers to a Færie Mound near Cerrwidden Dun. It could be something mysterious like taking an acorn from the oldest oak in the heart of Forest Grumweald and planting it on the green in Carleon. Or it could be dangerous like removing the Siren who haunts Bran Bridge Lake. It could also involve events in the mortal world.

The Sidhe have long had a stake in the welfare of Avalon, although their definition of its welfare may be quite different from that of its residents. They may need a Knight to undertake a dangerous quest deep into the heart of Montaigne or to the far eastern reaches of Sarmatia where their own influence is weak. GMs should decide how such quests dovetail or create tensions with other Stories, as is determining how the Sidhe convey their desire to the Knight.

Embodiment

There is another way to repay the debt owed for borrowing the Graal's power, and that is to become a more perfect avatar of the Knight you embody. You may change your Virtue, your Hubris or one of your Quirks to match that of the Knight whose mantle you wear. The specifics for each Knight are given below. Each time you change an aspect, you remove all current Sidhe Curses you are suffering from and gain a new Gesa. You can only change each aspect once. Once you match all three aspects, you gain access to that Knight's Legendary Glamour as a two-Step Story, as though purchasing a new level of Glamour Sorcery.

Each Legendary Glamour is unique. You are the only Knight to wield its power. Unless otherwise noted, Legendary Glammers are not limited in the number of times they can be activated.

Each transformation binds you more tightly to the Graal. For every aspect change you make, add a tenet to your Knightly Gesa. You carry this additional burden with you forever. You choose the Gesa, but the GM should work with you to determine an appropriate one according to the following guidelines: an appropriate Gesa begins with "Always" or "Never," it cannot grant additional powers or abilities, and how onerous it is to follow should be proportional to the number of Sidhe Curses you just removed. Also, a Gesa should leave room for interpretation and not be overly specific or situational. A Knight must decide for himself exactly what a given tenet requires—but once he makes that decision, he must remain true to it. Some examples:

- Never dine with a man you do not trust.
- Never refuse the honest request of a pure hearted woman.
- Always dress for the occasion.
- Never share a drink with a loyal Montaigne.
- Never allow another to shoulder a burden you are capable of carrying.
- Always be the first person to disembark from a ship.
- Never sleep in a bed alone.
- Always interfere when another abuses an animal.





ÆSC, OF THE FORESTS

Virtue

Wily (Fool)

Hubris

Confusion (Moonless Night)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you eschew an invitation to participate in civilized society and spend the night under the stars instead.

Legendary Glamour

Transformation: Activate this Glamour to take the form of a common woodland mammal (bear, stag, fox, boar, wolf, rabbit or squirrel) for a Scene. You retain all your skills, knowledge and abilities—although they may be limited by the physical capabilities of your new form. If the animal's form is particularly advantageous (such as running great distances in the form of a deer), you gain 2 Bonus Dice. While in this form you may also speak with creatures native to the forests. Unreasonable or difficult requests may require a Risk to convince them, with Consequences that include hostility or requiring the kind of favors only a human can accomplish. If necessary, the animals asked to perform a task can be treated as a Brute Squad.

BEORHTSIGE, SIEGEBREAKER

Virtue

Fortunate (Wheel)

Hubris

Relentless (Coins)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you successfully break into a fortified or secure location or when you defend such a location from enemies.

Legendary Glamour

I Will Not Be Moved: You stand in the breach and none may pass. Activate this Glamour when you make yourself conspicuous during a fight to apply Pressure to all opponents who can see you. They must spend an extra Raise to perform any action other than withdrawing from the fray.

CENHELM, THE KEEN

Virtue

Astute (Devil)

Hubris

Overzealous (Prophet)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you end a discussion, debate or negotiation by drawing steel.

Legendary Glamour

Channel the Blade: The fighting skills of every Knight who has ever embodied Cenhelm, The Keen can be called upon to aid you. Activate this Glamour to obtain the Style Bonus from any Duelist Style for the duration of the Action Sequence. You may use that Style Bonus irrespective of what weapon you are armed with.

CEOLMUND, KNIGHT PROTECTOR

Virtue

Passionate (Lovers)

Hubris

Stubborn (Thrones)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point whenever you go first into the fray so others do not have to, or stand alone as rear guard while others withdraw.

Legendary Glamour

You Won't Die Here: Activate this Glamour to allow one nearby allied Hero to ignore all negative effects from her Dramatic Wounds for the rest of the Action Sequence—the Villain does not gain Bonus Dice from her having 2 Dramatic Wounds, and she does not become Helpless at 4 Dramatic Wounds. Also, from that point on, you may spend your Raises one-for-one on Avoiding Wounds on her behalf.



DUDDA, THE ROUND

Virtue
Glorious (Sun)

Hubris
Underconfident (Road)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you allow yourself to play the fool or be the butt of a joke to defuse a situation or raise another's spirits.

Legendary Glamour

Perpetual Feast: While this Glamour is active, you may consume a nearly endless quantity of food and beverages with no discomfort. Specifically, you have the capacity to eat and drink, in a single setting, equal to the number of people (of your stature) as your Ranks in Brawn + your Ranks in Resolve. Later, you may activate this Glamour to go a number of days without food or drink, effectively surviving off of prior feasts. That number equals your Ranks in Brawn + your Ranks in Resolve.

DUNSTAN, OUTSIDER

Virtue
Friendly (Road)

Hubris
Manipulative (Witch)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you befriend someone others avoid, reject or have cast out.

Legendary Glamour

Fæ Confusion: During any Action or Dramatic Sequence, you can activate this Glamour to throw a number of opponents into a state of confusion. Any Villain targeted by Confusion must spend extra Raises this Round as if every Action he does is Improvised. If your Approach uses the Brawl or Weaponry Skill, the number of opponents equals your Brawn. For all other Approaches, the number equals your Wits. All of the targets must be selected. If there are not enough opponents, you must target allies or even yourself.

EADBURG, THE WEALTHY

Virtue
Altruistic (Hanged Man)

Hubris
Envious (Beggar)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you give away wealth or valuables beyond what you need to survive.

Legendary Glamour

Blessing of the Penitent: Activate this Glamour when you have time to lay your hands on a companion and offer her your blessing. Spend 1 Hero Point per blessed companion. The next time a blessed companion rolls dice this session, any die that rolls equal to or less than your Panache becomes a 10. You cannot bless yourself.

EALDRÆD, THE OLDEST KNIGHT

Virtue
Intuitive (Witch)

Hubris
Unfortunate (Wheel)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point whenever you advise a companion against a course of action he desires or in favor of action he is reluctant to pursue, and he listens to you.

Legendary Glamour

Ancient Sidhe Lore: You must find a place favored by the Sidhe (such as a Fæ Circle, a pristine pool on a moonlit night, a meadow of wild flowers at noon, a candle reflected a million times in a pair of mirrors) and activate this Glamour to ask the Sidhe for aid. You may ask them a number of questions equal to your Wits.

You may ask them:

- To answer a single factual question about the present or the past with a yes or no.
- To tell you the current location of anyone or anything.
- To reveal any bit of lost lore or scrap of ancient knowledge, if you know exactly what to ask for.

FRIDESWIDE, THE KNIGHT OF PEACE

Virtue
Comforting (Thrones)

Hubris
Loyal (War)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point whenever you convince others to take a more difficult peaceful path even though violence would provide an easier solution.

Legendary Glamour

Shocking Disarm: Activating this Glamour causes all metal objects within musket range of you to release a powerful electric shock. A wielder of such an object (an ally or opponent, Hero or Villain) including yourself must immediately drop it or take your Wits in Wounds and roll 1d10. If the roll is greater than her Resolve, she drops the object anyway. Dropped metal retains a lingering charge for up to an hour and requires a number of Raises equal to your Wits to recover it safely—taking 1 Wound for every such Raise not spent.

GODRIC, THE PIOUS

Virtue
Courageous (Hero)

Hubris
Superstitious (Glyph)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you expose a sorcerous, Sidhe or other supernatural influence that had been concealed.

Legendary Glamour

Rebuke the Blasphemer: Sir Godric believed it was his devotion and piety that gave him a potent weapon against sorcerers. He would have been disappointed to learn it was a gift of the Sidhe. Activate this Glamour to curse all Sorcerer Villains you can see. The next time a targeted Sorcerer rolls dice, he cannot use any die that rolls less than your Panache.



HEREWARD, KNIGHT ADVISOR

Virtue
Exemplary (Reunion)

Hubris
Star-Crossed (Lovers)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when someone you have never advised before comes to you for advice, and you consider their problem seriously and advise them appropriately.

Legendary Glamour

Sage Advice: Instruct another Hero on an appropriate course of action. Then activate this Glamour and make a Risk appropriate to the topic at hand (Wits+Warfare for a battle plan, for instance). Give the Raises to her along with specific guidance. At any time until the end of the session, she may spend those Raises towards any Action that follows the guidance.

HILDRÆD, KNIGHT COMMANDER

Virtue
Commanding (Emperor)

Hubris
Curious (Fool)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you establish a battle plan before an engagement and everyone in the engagement has a specific part to play.

Legendary Glamour

Rally of Heroes: Give a rousing shout or battle cry that raises the morale of your allies. Spend a Raise and a Hero Point during an Action Sequence to activate this Glamour. Each Hero who heard the cry count all dice that roll equal to or under his own Skill on his next roll as 10s.

LEOFRIC, THE BELOVED

Virtue
Temperate (Glyph)

Hubris
Arrogant (Tower)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when someone important to you is in trouble, and you stand with them and share their danger.

Legendary Glamour

Illuminate: Activating this Glamour fills the area around you with a magical and perfect ambient light for the Scene, not too dark, not too bright, to a distance of dozens of feet. All Unseelie Sidhe in the area suffer 5 Wounds immediately, and they roll 2 fewer dice for any Risks they make while in the illuminated area.

MILDGYD, THE GENTLE

Virtue
Humble (Tower)

Hubris
Indecisive (Hanged Man)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you show compassion to someone who has no reason to expect it from you.

Legendary Glamour

Strength of Giants: Activate this Glamour to channel the strength of Giants. You become physically larger for the duration of the Scene, as much as 1' in height for each point of Brawn and proportionally broader and heavier. While enlarged and using Brawn as your Approach, you may increase the number on each of your individual dice by your Brawn. The first time you do this is free as part of the initial activation. Each new Brawn Approach costs an additional Hero Point. This stacks with other effects that change the value rolled on the dice.

OSGAR, THE SPEAR KNIGHT

Virtue
Victorious (War)

Hubris
Bitterness (Reunion)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you create problems or tension by acting contrary to social expectations or by sticking up for someone who is acting contrary.

Legendary Glamour

I'll Take It From Here: When an ally is out of Raises during an Action or Dramatic Sequence, activate this Glamour to gain a number of bonus Raises equal to your Finesse. You may only use these Raises towards furthering or completing whatever goal that ally had been working towards, although not necessarily in the same manner.

PÆGA, FORGOTTEN

Virtue
Subtle (Moonless Night)

Hubris
Ambitious (Magician)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you forgo subtlety to claim full credit for your actions or reveal your true intentions that had previously been concealed.

Legendary Glamour

Darkness: When you activate this Glamour you can bring gloom to an area the size of a ballroom or courtyard for a scene. Shadows deepen, and lighting dims subtly.

While within this darkened area, you may use a Raise for any of the following purposes:

- you can stand in a shadow and see and hear anything happening in another shadow in the area
- you can travel between shadows in your line of sight—disappearing from one and reappearing in another
- you may cloak yourself in shadow and become impossible to detect by mundane means
- you can deepen a shadow causing anyone within that shadow to spend an extra Raise to take any action related to sight.



SÆWINE, THE SAILOR

Virtue
Insightful (Beggar)

Hubris
Hot-Headed (Emperor)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when things get more complicated because someone recognizes you from somewhere you have once traveled.

Legendary Glamour

Call the Sea: You can call upon Queen Maab and she answers. For 1 Hero Point, she tells you the direction and approximate distance of any ship sailing on the waters of the same sea as you. Or you can activate this Glamour to intensify or lessen the weather within 10 nautical miles of you. When the noon sun reaches its zenith, normal weather patterns resume. You can turn light rain into a thunderstorm or a ray of sunlight into a clear sky. At sea, you can calm raging waters to make them navigable or cause calm waters to rage and froth. If the new weather would be particularly advantageous (such as for swift sailing or concealing an approach), you gain 2 Bonus Dice.

SUNNGIFU, THE GENEROUS

Virtue
Illuminating (Prophet)

Hubris
Trusting (Devil)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when helping someone would create hardship or a great inconvenience for yourself or set you against your allies, but you choose to do so anyway because it feels right to you.

Legendary Glamour

Carpe Diem: This Glamour allows you to avoid Consequences that others would stumble against and seize Opportunities that others would miss. Activate this Glamour to gain a pool of free Raises equal to your Wits. These Raises do not contribute to action order but can be spent on your Action to reduce Consequences, take advantage of Opportunities or create Opportunities for others.

WILFRITH, THE KNIGHT OF WILL

Virtue
Willful (Magician)

Hubris
Proud (Sun)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you remain true to your word at great personal cost.

Legendary Glamour

Miraculous Recovery: Spend 1 or more Hero Points to activate this Glamour before getting a full night of quality sleep or uninterrupted meditation. When you awaken, heal 1 Dramatic Wound for every Hero Point spent.

WULFNOD, THE BOLD

Virtue
Adaptable (Coins)

Hubris
Foolhardy (Hero)

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when acting first, and thinking later leaves you isolated, alone and facing danger without support.

Legendary Glamour

I'm Not Done Yet: When you are out of Raises in an Action Sequence, activate this Glamour to inflict a number of Wounds on an opponent equal to your Weaponry+Brawn. A Hero who has activated this Glamour once in a Round may activate it again, but each time he does so he takes a Dramatic Wound. This Dramatic Wound cannot be prevented in any way.



Dueling in Avalon

In taverns throughout Inismore, the evening's drinking is incomplete without at least one rendition of "Proud Eithne." The rousing song tells how the maiden Eithne O'Guairé tricked the warrior goddess, Skatha, into instructing her—and all others who asked—in the martial arts. Eithne initiated the practice of dueling in ancient Inismore when she demanded her potential spouses best her in combat. From Skatha, Eithne learned so many *cleasa* (martial tricks and techniques) that none could defeat her. Eventually she married, not to someone who bested her, but the one who rejoiced in her skill and requested lessons.

The Highland Marches have a similar tale. In the Marcher story, Cailean MacCormac, a talented musician, falls in love with a young woman with "hair like the rising sun." He asks to marry the woman, but her father refuses and says that only the greatest warrior in the world could have her hand. Cailean then seeks out Skatha for lessons. He uses his wits to win each challenge Skatha puts before him. Eventually he wins lessons for himself and all others who ask by moving Skatha to tears with his music.

Legends, in both Inismore and Highland Marches, then follow that others sought out Skatha's lessons. Eithne's trickery or Cailean's music ensured Skatha taught any who asked, but not without cost. Skatha placed a *geas* on each of her pupils. Whoever struck the first blow in single combat would lose. Consequently, combatants began insulting one another, attempting to provoke each other into striking first. Goading, as it came to be called, soon spread among those not affected by Skatha's *geas*, becoming a popular element in duels throughout Avalon.

Whether or not these songs and stories are factual, single combat exploded across Avalon. For smaller clans in Inismore, risking one warrior was more prudent than all out battle. For larger clans, single combat provided another way for a warrior to display prowess. In the Highland Marches, single combat was the province of the legal system. A person accused of a crime could request a *cothrom* or a chance to prove his innocence through dueling. If he defeats the plaintiff (or the plaintiff's appointed champion) or holds his own from sunrise to sunset, they declare him innocent.

Cleasa as Dueling

Warriors across Avalon specialized in single combat and explored to find new *cleasa* to use in battle. Collaboration flourished across kingdoms and clans. Stories of fantastic *cleasa*, unreproducible by modern duelists, abounded. A famous example is Jack O'Bannon who could fell one hundred fighters in a single blow with his thunder *cleas*. Many have asked him about learning it, but he has refused to teach his method.

These two traditions—Inish and Marcher—shape modern Avalonian dueling. Both claim to originate the teachings of Skatha, whose style emphasized physical techniques, such as breath control, high jumps, practice dances and juggling, over expertise with any particular weapon. This preference for athleticism and flexibility remains a defining trait of Avalonian dueling to the current day.

A student seeks out new tricks to expand her repertoire. This practice has served to make the Avalonian dueling style a bit magpie in nature. A duelist learns from her enemies and allies alike, making foreign styles her own. Several dueling academies have grown around Avalon, each teaching its own set of *cleasa*. It is not uncommon for a student to study at multiple academies, ultimately creating her own, unique style.

Because of this history and tradition, dueling in Avalon is both a martial and performance art. Duelists perform at festivals and other occasions with both true and exaggerated grievances. For the exaggerations, a duelist choreographs his fight in advance and uses polished sticks in place of swords. These duels show off his best *cleasa*. And an aspiring duelist watches and tries to replicate the movements to enhance her own practice.

For true grievances, duelists begin with a sword dance, followed by goading. Modern goading, rather than provoking action, focuses on submission, allows both sides to revisit their reasons for battle and provides a last chance to end the duel without fighting. After at least one exchange, the combat begins.

In duels fought to settle interclan affairs and grievances, the duelists often end the fight after first blood. This is often after a long show of feints and maneuvers that have the duelists circling each other without attacking.



Sometimes duels can last for almost an hour in this way. When clans fight each other, they sometimes choose clan champions to duel for them. These fights are much shorter, and thereby more brutal, ending only in the death of one combatant or the other.

The close ties between the legal system and dueling in the Highland Marches led to the first recorded set of standards for duels, the Leabhar Chothrom. For example, the document lists a series of outlawed cleasa, though the reasons for many have been lost to time. These standards are significant for two reasons. First, they establish goading as both part of a regular duel and a type of duel on its own. The Marcher style of goading—elaborate, poetic and humorous—is common throughout Avalon. Second, the standards defined who may fight in a cothrom. The duelist must be male and a second or lesser son and must demonstrate proficiency in a sword dance with a composed demonstration of skill. Though now outdated, these standards eased the transition to the Duelist's Guild requirements. The Bonny Swans in the Highland Marches, among the other groups, campaign to update the Leabhar Chothrom to match modern practices.

Skatha's Cleasa

Ancient warriors fought and outwitted many challenges and trials to win the right to learn from the warrior woman, Skatha. Her students practiced running against the river and fighting in its currents. They juggled from day to night tossing bright apples higher and higher, learning the rhythm of their falls. They danced on hot coals until the bottoms of their feet turned black. And each trick increased their strength, endurance, speed, grace and agility.

Duelists also use many of these techniques in battle. This makes for showy duels full of well-timed jumping and unexpected athletic maneuvers. For example, the Over Breath cleas is a loud and explosive breath that increases the power of a strike. The Swordsman's Leap is a well-timed jump to dodge an attack. One of the most famous of Skatha's cleasa, though, is the one sung about in "Proud Eithne"—the Salmon Leap.

LEABHAR CHOTHROM AND THE BONNY SWANS

This ancient set of dueling rules is as old and outdated as anything else the Highland Marches produces. Women trained in the art of dueling, especially those who have mastered multiple cleasa, are, to this day, outlawed from performing in dueling matches. Even the Duelist Guild refuses to accept women. The Bonny Swans point to this as an easy benchmark in their fight for equality. Women swordmasters are every bit as skilled and honorable as their male counterparts, and yet they are still barred entry into the Guild.

Margret Reid, one of the most prominent members of the Bonny Swans, is a master Duelist. She trained in Montaigne, and is a Guild member there, but returned to her home in the Highland Marches to train others. She has requested entry into the Avalonian Dueling Guild, and they are hard pressed to refuse her entry, as she already carries membership in another. Many of those who support the Bonny Swans' movement are all in favor of accepting her, but the more traditional members are afraid she will only be the first of an influx of women wanting to join the Guild.

Reid absolutely intends to train women and has plans to set up a Dueling Academy in Kirkwall, stating she will start her own Dueling Guild if they continue to refuse her admittance. The prospect of a rival Guild has everyone worried about the future of Duelists throughout Avalon.

Style Bonus: Salmon Leap

When able to move freely—your armor is not constrictive and you have vertical clearance—you may perform a special maneuver called the Salmon Leap. The Salmon Leap is a sudden high jump that allows you to leap over or around your target's guard, regardless of your weapon. This maneuver deals Wounds equal to your Ranks in Athletics, and these Wounds cannot be prevented in any way. You may perform the Salmon Leap once per Round.

Legends of Avalon

With the return of the Sidhe and Glamour to the islands of Avalon, creatures of legend are more prevalent than before. Some legends are just that, mere whispers of creatures or events from ages long gone.

Drachen

Many legends have been told throughout Avalon over the years about drachen, but few have been confirmed. Still, there have been enough sightings and recorded historical events that it is of no doubt to anyone who knows Avalon that drachen once existed. The most detailed report of the last sighted drachen comes from *The Historie of Die Kreuzritter*, in a section about their service in Avalon. The book notes that Die Kreuzritter were nearly wiped out by the drachen and only through great bravery, luck and sharp wits did they manage to conquer the beast with a little less than half their numbers still alive.

The book describes the drachen as measuring about ten horses high and over twice as long from the tip of its tail to its long snout-like maw. Scales thicker than plate armor covered its skin and ranged from a deep, muddy green on its back to a more pale lime across its leathery belly. It had lizard-like limbs, short and low to the ground, and claws half a foot long protruded from its paws. The area on the paws just above the claws released a thin layer of highly flammable, poisonous fluid. Combined with its ability to breathe fire, the beast would often swipe at its victim and then set clothing and wounds aflame, the fluid extending the fire's duration. Its tail is prehensile and able to break a person's spine with a single swing. Lastly, a long line of spikes stuck up from its back, starting at the crown of its head and reaching to the end of its tail.

While *Die Kreuzritter* has the most detailed account, other stories speak of drachen in colors other than green—red and yellow seem to be the most popular tales. *The Historie of Die Kreuzritter* does not mention wings, but many oral legends say the beasts can fly. Most of the tales do recount these creatures as protective and territorial; once they have laid claim to something—be it land, lake or even a person—they defend it with deadly violence.

A Resurgence

The recent resurgence of glamour into the lands has brought rumors of the return of drachen. Hunting parties have found small, dense sections of forest inexplicably burnt to the ground around Avalon. Near these burned sections, they discovered footprints of a large, clawed paw over three feet long in the mud.

The prints can be traced for about half a mile and then abruptly disappear. The local peasants are beginning to grow scared and rumors of the drachen are abounding. Die Kreuzritter has plans of mounting hunting parties within the year. They have armed all of their people with extra pages of *The Historie* to study. They are also gathering extra supplies, armor and rations for the long hunt.

Drachen, while rare, are dangerous creatures. They attack any who trespass on their claimed territory. They are Strength 10 Monsters and can have any or all of the following qualities: Fearsome, Powerful, Regenerating and Winged.

The Ghemenii

The Sidhe are well known as magical, whimsical, powerful and often possessive people, therefore it is no surprise that their preferred pets mirror all of those qualities. The Ghemenii are creatures purely of Færie but, much like the Sidhe, are able to live in the world of humans. The most powerful quality of Ghemenii is that they are always born in identical pairs.

They are close in appearance to felines, but are not cats. They range in size from as small as a teacup to as large as a horse—depending on the bloodline. Parents or family usually gift a pair of Ghemenii to a Sidhe child shortly after birth. It is a great honor to receive Ghemenii, and only the most powerful of families can routinely afford them.

The Ghemenii are fiercely loyal to their owner and no others. During a Sidhe's early life, the Ghemenii often watch over the child as guardians. The traditional sculpture of felines guarding an entrance began from the way Ghemenii guard a young Sidhe child's room. Many mischievous Sidhe would never survive childhood if it weren't for the nannying of Ghemenii. A Sidhe can develop her own language with the Ghemenii and, by young adulthood, there is no doubt that the trio can communicate adeptly with each other in this unique code.



The Ghemenii's Power

To remain a pair is not the ultimate goal of the Ghemenii, however. Their true power lies in the ability to communicate across great distances almost instantaneously. When a Sidhe has a loved one traveling far away, courts another or (sometimes) wishes to spy upon her enemies, she gives one of the Ghemenii to that person and keeps the other at her side. This ensures she may easily know what happens to the other part of the pair. It also gives her alerts when the recipient of this gift is in times of high emotion—be it great danger or high excitement.

Of course, with the Sidhe entering mortal society again, this ability to spy is often used for the same purpose but among unknowing mortals. The Sidhe never speak of the Ghemenii's abilities among mortals, but they often give them as gifts to mortal paramours. Mortal society considers these gifts great treasures. Sidhe gift these færie cats as a deep show of love between a Sidhe and a mortal. It is rather clear to mortals that the felines are not things of Terra—their eyes are often too large, they are clearly more intelligent than domestic pets and strange coincidences of luck often happen around them—but these fæ qualities make them even more sought after as pets.

Little does a mortal know that having one of these felines means her Sidhe paramour can watch her at all times. The Sidhe use Ghemenii to monitor mortals for loyalty, but also safety. More than once a Ghemenii has alerted its partner to save the mortal's life. Being the recipient of a Ghemenii is a mixed blessing—as are most gifts—when it comes to the Sidhe.

Ghemenii are Strength 3 Monsters with the Swift Monstrous Quality.

The Restless

Along the small towns that line the shore of the Kilkenny Cliffs, any given local often says he can hear the quiet, mournful howls of the Restless on any too-calm night. At first, it just seems to be the wind, a stray breeze through the caves below the cliffs, but then the listener realizes that the wind sounds far too human and far too pained. The sound of the Restless is one of the most lonely, aching calls in the world, for the Restless are not just longing for other people, but for their lost souls.

The Restless wander the dark roads between the villages of the Kilkenny Cliffs, but more recently there have been several sightings more inland in Inismore. Rumors say it may not be safe to leave one's house late at night, especially when the wind doesn't blow.

Most of the Restless look gaunt and ghost-like—ashen figures in ragged clothing with completely white eyes and black lips. Savvy gossips say that it is unwise to remain long enough to get a good look—the Restless attempt to consume another mortal's soul in their desperate hunger to regain their own. While this consumption does not seem effective, it does drive their victims to madness. Villagers have found many a Restless victim dead, having clawed out his own eyes during the last terrorized beats of his heart. While no one is certain how the Restless began, most are fairly sure it was the doing of those practicing dark magics, most likely the Unseelie or their followers. Rumors say dark magic consumes the very essence of mortal souls, leaving their bodies wandering empty, listless and starving. Many people currently call the Restless a plague magic has unleashed on the land.

The Truth

In truth, the Restless are not færie touched at all. Nor are they sick, dying or soulless. They are the machination of the Realists. In efforts to stir unrest against the use of magics, a small sect of the Realists started the "Haunting Initiative" upon moving to Avalon. By creating a horrible enough issue that slowly spreads through the lands, they intend to spur on hate against magic and the fæ. The Realists leaked rumors into the community about these dark, magic creatures, but quickly realized that rumors are not nearly as effective as actual sightings. So, a new adherent who wishes to prove himself loyal are now required to do "Restless" duty—dressing up as these apparitions and wandering the streets among his small town to scare those out too late at night. While most of these haunting packs don't do anything other than frighten, a few overzealous (and desperate) members of the group have killed those that discovered them in the night. These killings are always done with a very subtle poison, and the bodies are made to look as if they had clawed out their own eyes. The work is gristly, but many of the Realists find it to be necessary for the greater good of the world.



Sylkies

For as long as Inismore has existed, there have been stories of the men and women of the sea who live as seals but can change into humans and walk the land. Most of these stories are romantic tragedies: a woman's seal skin is caught by a man wanting a wife, so she is taken as his bride but constantly longs for the sea; a lady falls in love with a fisherman, only to wed him and find his heart always lies first with the ocean. There was no proof of these tales before færies returned to Avalon. They were nothing but old, sweet stories made into songs sung in sea-front taverns or around bonfires. But every sea town family has a story a touch too unique to simply be handmaiden's tales. Once færies returned to the greater mortal world publicly, however, the Sylkies began to also show themselves more. With most of the land being accepting of fæ and magics, the risk of being hunted down did not seem so awful. So, Sylkies, who had kept their natures hidden from their lovers, began to confess their existence. Others dared venture more often onto the land. Nowadays, the Sylkies are probably one of the most known and loved fæ people other than the Sidhe.



The Truth

While there are numerous rumors and debates over what a Sylkie's actual powers are, she does not have many magical gifts beyond the ability to turn from a seal into a person and vice versa. Each Sylkie is born in human form, often to a Sylkie and a human lover. She spends her early life like any human child, but with an ever-curious longing for the ocean. Sylkie children are always in the water on the first day warm enough to swim and the last child home on evenings spent at the river.

Eventually, though, the Sylkie parent finds a day to give up the sea. The parent hands her seal-coat to her child, allowing him to truly step into his legacy. The seal-coat, when off, generally looks like a large seashell. In the hands of a Sylkie, it twists, stretches and grows until it wraps like a blanket as the child transforms completely into a seal.

The parent teaches the child how to use the new coat, but often no more than one or two demonstrations are needed before it comes as natural as breathing. Once this child has taken to his true heritage, it is nearly impossible to draw him far away from the sea, and he continues building his own story to match the ones of old.

A Sylkie's powers do rest entirely in his coat, and should a human steal it, he is unable to transform until he finds it again. Therefore, seal-coats are jealously guarded. There is a current debate going in the Queen's government about making theft of a seal-coat illegal, as it is considered essential to life for a Sylkie.

Sylkies are rarely dangerous creatures, but may fight if their families, lives or coats are threatened. As long as Sylkies have their coats, they are Strength 4 Monsters with the Shapeshifting Monstrous Quality.

The Dormarch

A skilled hunter needs a good dog; the mix between a canine's ability to track and a human's wits is essential to a proper hunt. The Dormarch, however, take that mix and put it straight into the body of canine-like creature, but far more terrifying. As creatures of Færie, they have a person-like intelligence and the agility of the strongest dogs.

They have supernaturally heightened senses in all areas—scent, hearing, taste, touch and sight. However, their senses go beyond those areas as well. They are able to track magical things and pick up residue that færie magics leave behind the same way some may track a scent. This is likely why the Dormarch resist listening to mortals—because they instinctively know mortals are not empowered, and they consider themselves to be dominant over anything non-magical.

The Dormarch are immensely powerful creatures. Even the smallest runt of the litter stands half a horse high once mature. They have square heads with massive jaws that contain two rows of teeth—one for ripping and the other for chewing. The front half of their body contains a large, muscled chest area and powerful legs. They narrow into a more svelte back half of the body with a slender stomach and long, thin hind legs. Lastly, they have three snake-like tails that have been known to cause lashing injuries.

The Wild Hunt

On occasion, all Dormarch leave their owners and join the Wild Hunt as is their sacred right and duty. Færie myth says that the Dormarch all originated with the Wild Hunt but, one fall, the Huntsman fell in love with a beautiful Sidhe princess. When his Dormarch whelped that spring, he gave her one of the pups as a show of his loyalty.

It became fashionable for all færie nobility to have a Dormarch at their sides as guard and companion. While most nights the Dormarch are fiercely loyal to their owners, the fae accept that every so often it will disappear, returning to its natural roots and hunting with the rest of its brethren. Come the morning sun, it is found slumbering back in its owner's abode, with no evidence of having ever been missing.

Dormarch vary in strength and power, though an average example is a Strength 5 Monster with the Powerful Monstrous Quality.

The Green Man

Once upon a time, a man by the name of Quinn Morgen worked as a farmer along the inland, rural planes of Inismore. He was a remarkably smart man for his work—some said he was too clever for the simple life he led. He worked the fields at day and spent his evenings in the local tavern, spinning great stories over mead to any who would hear them. He created entire worlds in his head as he worked the fields by day and brought them to life at night.

One fall, a Sidhe named Loinseach began to listen to these stories. He fell in love with them—and with the man that told them. Loinseach started spending more time away from Færie...and more time with Quinn. Over several years, the two fell deeply in love. Eventually, Quinn allowed Loinseach to take him into Færie, following the promises of great adventure and strange new lands.

However, Færie is not a safe place. Quinn's mortal mind could not process the strange, terrifying and beautiful things around him. Loinseach quickly realized that Quinn did not belong in Færie. He took Quinn back to the mortal realm, but it was too late. Quinn had fallen to madness, gaining fæ-touched powers—he now seemed immortal, speaking directly with plants and field creatures and predicting the weather weeks in advance. Sadly, for all this power, his previous life was lost to him.

Nowadays

Decades later, most do not even know Quinn's name and simply call him "The Green Man." He is made as much of leaves and grass as he is flesh and bone. He seems to melt out of the fields and trees when he is most needed. Many people claim the Green Man has saved them from dangerous animals, bandits or storms. Yet he kills those who would prey upon the innocent without hesitation and stalks the roads for bandits who try to take advantage of lone travelers. In recent times, it has become a fad for parents to tell cautionary stories to their naughty child about how the Green Man gets her if she tries to sneak out past bedtime. For those who know the truth, the man wishes to do nothing but protect the lands that he tended so dearly for many years, even if his methods are now haunting and alien to the mortal realm in which he never truly belongs again.







Chapter 2

Castille



CASTILLE

“Castillians are stubborn. You can’t get them to do anything they don’t want to do unless you tell them it’s a tradition. Tradition can make a Castillian dance on the back of a horse, fight to the death because of a slight to her sister or give up her neighbor to the Inquisition.”

—Lalo Terrazas, Nahuacan expatriate in Castille

Knowing Castille’s history, you would think the nation would be a fragmented mess. Foreign incursions have pitted its inhabitants against one another—tribe against tribe, ducado (duchy) against ducado, Théan against Crescent, Inquisitor against heretic, Vaticine against Objectivist.

The people’s relationship with their government is similarly divisive. Castille has fallen from a scientific and economic pioneer to a limping, wounded and bankrupted nation. The Inquisition has taken the King and sent many into hiding. Nevertheless, the people cleave together in spirit, faith and identity. They have supported one another through war and loss, worshipped together despite vast differences and said to every other nation: all these things, different as they may seem, are Castille.

In the 13th Century, when the Third Prophet moved the seat of the Vaticine Church to Castille in an explosive conflict with the Crescents called the Moonshadow War, he divided Castille into ducados. He granted noble titles to the officers of the Blazing Blade, his army. Each of the five noble houses which had served the Prophet bravely and loyally became a ducado’s Gran Duque or Gran Duquesa—or simply “Grande.”

Unity is the key to Castille’s recovery. Working together, Castillians will reclaim the safety, security and glory lost over the past hundred years. But Castillian unity is also the key to Cardenal Esteban Verdugo’s plan to subjugate Théah and then the world to his Inquisition. It is up to your Heroes to determine which of these outcomes lies in store for Castille.



The War of the Cross and Modern Castille

Before the War of the Cross, Castille led Théah in science, research and quality of life and spirit. Castille marched into war with Théah's most fearsome army, ready to impose Castillian faith and culture on its unprepared neighbors. By the end of the war, Castille was broke, humiliated and in thrall to Cardenal Verdugo and his tyrannical Inquisition. What could possibly have gone wrong? Ask a down-and-out *tercio*—a Castillian elite war veteran with a destroyed home, none of the salary he was promised and nowhere to go—returning from the war, and you might find out.

The Castillian Army

Until 1618, Castille's *jinete* (cavalry) was its most famous troop type. Mounted on warhorses from Aldana, she could fight as heavy cavalry like Théan knights or as light cavalry like a Crescent lancer and horse archer. The infantry was nothing to speak of.

Enter the *tercios*. Organized and drilled with geometric precision, these new troops consisted of veteran soldiers, hardened as mercenaries abroad or marines in combat on the Widow's Sea. Many battle-scarred former pirate or notorious bandit went inland to take the King's doubloon, attracted by promise of amnesty, a lavish salary and the opportunity for *hidalgo* status. A *tercio's* facility in using many different weapons—long pikes, modern flintlocks, short swords and shields—to support one another devastated Montaigne's cavalry. His efficiency in battle led Eisen and others to adopt similar types of units, though Castille's were always the fiercest and most deadly.

While everyone in Théah feared Castille's front-line soldiers, one of the nation's greatest strengths was almost unknown to anyone outside the army. These were the *galenos*, who drew upon Castille's considerable medical and scientific knowledge as combat medics. This individual used a cross of alchemical and scientific approaches, making her combat medicine the quickest and most efficient in all of Théah.

A Costly Endeavor

The *tercios'* early success bought false hope for Castille. Overconfidence pushed the army further afield into Eisen, and soon the ground forces were stretched thin. Supply trains stretched from Castille into Eisen, but keeping those safe proved both difficult and costly. The longer the war raged, the more resources Castille devoted to the fight. Additionally, Cardenal Verdugo viewed the *tercios'* success as a threat. Many of the trained fighters in the *tercio* units were cutthroats and bandits, turned military soldiers.

During the war, Cardenal Verdugo secretly ordered hundreds of Inquisition agents to sabotage the flow of food, armaments and medical supplies to the front lines. Eisen and Montaigne forces mysteriously obtained maps and battle plans that enabled surgical strikes against baggage trains. Slowly, Verdugo isolated the Castillian army.

Three decades of unproductive war far from home drained Castille's treasury and morale, the nation's early advantage becoming a frustrating deadlock. The Castillian Armada, a massive fleet of warships, was the nation's last hurrah, built largely on credit in hopes that a subjugated Avalon would pay off the debt. It did not. Bad weather and the Sea Dogs sank the ships. Every *tercio* waited for compensation, which never came. When Montaigne invaded, the crown called on *tercios* again, with promises of land and riches for staving off invasion. Some believe Verdugo instigated the invasion, while others credit l'Empereur with enough strategic wit to see that Castille was failing. Either way, as the invasion forces turned away, a *tercio* once again looked towards his nation for payment he knew by now would never come. Many deserted, and had Montaigne known the half of it, it would have never recalled its troops.

Over time, Castille went from the richest, most advanced Théan nation to the most impoverished and indebted. The final added insults to injury were King Salvador Aldana's death and Cardenal Verdugo's removal of King Sandoval to Vaticine City.



A Nation Founded on Tradition

A Castillian is as traditional as he is willful. To understand the person, you must first understand his traditions.

Everything begins with family, and family begins with the mother. The nomadic tribes who first settled Castille could only trace lineage through maternal lines. Paintings on cavern walls show elder matriarchs serving as chieftains, seeking marriage and alliances with other large, well-provisioned tribes. Placing women, especially mothers, on pedestals may seem attractive compared to Castille's misogynistic neighbor Vodacce, but the weight of expectations and preconceived gender roles brings its own headaches.

Castille was the first Vaticine nation in Théah. In the early days of the Vaticine church, when Emperor Corantine's Empire stretched far and wide, the southern reaches of Castille hosted Vaticine churches. While the history of the Empire's occupation of Castille is suspect, no one denies that the people of Castille have been Vaticine since the first Prophet, and the church has always been a large part of their life.

A Castillian who can claim an unbroken lineage to the first Vaticines in Castille never ceases to remind you of the fact. To this day, a Castillian displays public and fervent performance of his faith, to show his solidarity with his neighbors and the Vaticine Church.

To an outsider, one identifies with Castille; to another Castillian, one identifies with one's ducado. The ducados evolved from the five kingdoms that formed when the Old Empire dissolved—Aldana, Torres, Zepeda, Soldana and Odisea. Unwilling to risk their lives in the chaos at hand in Vodacce, soldiers stranded in Castille threw open their *castrum* gates. They comingled with Castillian tribes, and in the south, Ifrian seafarers and settlers.

To the rest of the world, a Castillian is devoted to Castille. But to another Castillian, she is a patriotic Aldanensa, Torreña, Zepedana, Soldanensa or Odisean, proud of her ducado's dialect, history, character and culture. She is perhaps derisive towards neighboring ducados and certainly enjoys the friendly rivalry each area has against the other.

Understanding and controlling these regions' relationships has always been the key to ruling Castille. Let them do as they please, and they fragment into independent countries, each one internally strong but too small to resist outside pressure from larger powers. But, roll them into a single indivisible entity, and the regions' individualistic character and history of autonomy makes them stubborn, restive and rebellious.





Important People in Castille

The Good Kings Sandoval

Historically, the monarch has been Castille's weakest Grande. Tasked with balancing power between Grandes controlling far more land, resources and military force, the King's life was frustrating and stressful. As the Inquisition centralized power behind its cat's-paw throne, the King's ostensible power increased steadily—but, of course, the real power behind the throne is El Concilio de la Razón. Now the King is a new kind of powerless.

Considering this predicament, when Queen Almudena Sandoval bore King Salvador Aldana's child in 1652, they carefully concealed that she bore two children: a boy, Amadeo, and a girl, Rocío. The twins' similar appearance made them indistinguishable to anyone outside San Cristóbal's royal compound, where even the Inquisition could not go. The King and Queen knew whichever child inherited the throne would suffer constant surveillance and manipulation. They needed a subtle way to evade El Concilio and their spies, to discover the world beyond

their throne...or to live with any truth, passion or freedom.

Using Amadeo's name and gender, Amadeo and Rocío have occupied the same identity since long before their father died and their mother retired to Ducado de Aldana in order to draw off some of Verdugo's surveillance. One twin sat on the throne, feigning childish incompetence, while the other went on little adventures in and around the capital, learning what was going on in Castille and gaining life experience. They conferred with their twin by night before trading identities the next day.

But something went wrong. Maybe the Inquisition suspected when the King made just enough correct decisions to keep Montaigne from overrunning Castille. One year ago, El Concilio forcibly relocated King Amadeo Sandoval to Vaticine City for his own safety and protection to stave off the dark forces of heresy abroad in Castille. Rocío—his beloved sister, lifeline and key to piercing the Inquisition's mask—could not come.



Portraying Amadeo Sandoval

The child monarchs had a good thing going before the throne's relocation ruined their plans. Now Amadeo is trapped in Vaticine City. Gaining an official audience requires going through el Concilio or Cardenal Verdugo himself. That isn't to say that clandestine visits can't be arranged.

Story Hooks

- The Inquisition has kept not only the title, but also the physical crown King Sandoval. Under heavy guard from the Inquisition, the crown is now moving from the royal court in San Cristóbal to Vaticine City, where Cardenal Verdugo will presumably lock it away forever. Unless someone steals it on the way.
- Almudena Sandoval has taken sick. The doctors don't know if she is going to recover. In spite of the security risk, Amadeo wants to see his mother again, in case it is the last time. Someone is going to have to help him vacate Vaticine city for a short period of time.

Portraying Rocío Sandoval

Rocío Sandoval is holding up well despite the loss of her brother. She might be young, but she has a plan to save him, but she doesn't share that with just anyone.

When Rocío reveals the truth to the Heroes, what will they do? Sneak Rocío into Vaticine City to renew the grand illusion? Place Rocío on San Cristóbal's empty throne, risking Amadeo's safety to raise up a true Rex Castilium to defy the Inquisition? Or will they appeal to some unknown power—Odisean separatists, Ifrian powers or mysterious figures from the New World who have asserted themselves in Castille—to create a new Castille?

Story Hook

- Rocío was caught sneaking around the palace in San Cristóbal and is being held in the dungeon. Right now, no one recognizes the girl as the monarch, but it's only a matter of time before someone makes a connection. She needs help fast.

Alfonso Sánchez

Don Alfonso Sánchez de Ilurdoz, Conde-duque de Angulema, Capitán de la Guardia de Fronteras y Obispo de Altamira was born during the War of the Cross to a noble family in a small Castilian town. He was raised as a leader, expected to take over his father's role as city leader when his father was too old to do so. The people loved young Alfonso, but the small town life was not enough to satisfy his adventurous soul. As soon as he was old enough, he left home and went to San Cristobal to study.

He enjoyed all subjects from the philosophical to the martial and dabbled in a bit of everything. Yet, he was enamored with the Vaticine Church and their dedication to knowledge and reason, and soon he joined the ranks of not only the students, but the church. His studies sent him from San Cristóbal to Vaticine City, and eventually to Altimira where he served as their Bishop until shortly before the Montaigne invasion. Sánchez heeded Colonel Bihotz's call to arms when she mobilized her cavalry in anticipation of Montaigne troop movements.

He marched south to Barcino, and then to the Montaigne border, where he fought tirelessly to repel Montaigne troops, only to find out too late that Altamira was lost and the rest of the ducado was in retreat. Sánchez earned many distinctions during the war, but like most soldiers, never saw payment for his service. The only thing keeping him afloat was his noble title and the land his family owned. He returned home, but not to heal or lick wounds. Instead, he is raising funds to raise an army to retake Altamira from Montaigne, now that the war is over.

Portraying Alfonso Sánchez

Don Alfonso Sánchez is a man of honor and noble demeanor. He has light brown hair and dark skin and eyes, with plenty of scars from his time fighting along Castille's border. He is a soldier at the moment, but he is still a priest at heart. He is a devout Vaticine, though he holds no grudge over Objectionists, understanding their need to seek information as a path to Theus. Sánchez has plans for Castille, which tend to directly oppose the Inquisition. His attention is currently focused on Altamira, but he is likely to lend aid to anyone working to restore Castille to its former glory.



Octavio Mzabi, the Dark Inquisitor

In 1658, a young Inquisitor named Octavio Mzabi led a raid on a renegade scholar's house in Ciudad de Zepeda. On a whim, he kept one old leather-bound diary instead of burning it, as ordered. It was blank, he assured himself. He could use it for notes or poetry. Yet, it was not blank, and he knew that keeping such an artifact was against regulations.

Inside, he found entries from Inquisitor Aliénor Capdeville, devoted servant of the Second Prophet and skilled investigator, whose day-to-day operations read like an adventure serial. She fought monsters, spied on church officials and rooted out true evil wherever she went.

Inquisitor Mzabi only realized the accounts were factual when he cross-checked them against previously sealed records in the Hierophantic Library. Sure enough, an Inquisition existed well before the Third Prophet, and its purpose was vastly different from the one he knows today.

A week later, when Inquisitor Mzabi went to consult them again, but those records were gone. He was being watched—or the records were. He couldn't be sure.

Since then, Inquisitor Mzabi has stepped lightly, guarding his reputation as a trustworthy Church official. However, he has also recruited discreet and dissatisfied Inquisitors and seminary students into the circles of the Inquisitio Aquila—a new Inquisition with the purpose to root out the evil in Verdugo's organization.

Mzabi's Dark Inquisitors use Inquisition resources to seek out and remove internal threats to the Vaticine Church—the purpose for which the Inquisition was first created. Inquisitor Mzabi's goal is not merely to evade the Castillian Inquisition's notice. He wants to replace it, accumulating power for the Dark Inquisition until it is ready to stage a coup and return the High Chancery to its original purpose.

Portraying Inquisitor Octavio Mzabi

Daring, magnetic, exuberant. Inquisitor Mzabi is a tall, broad-shouldered man with long dreadlocks, an athletic build and gray eyes as inviting as a warm bath on a frosty morning. He is handsome, charismatic and persuasive, and that is part of his problem: he is a natural leader, not a natural spy or detective.

He has gained quite a bit of a following in his endeavor to clean up the Inquisition, and all the work he does makes it easy to trace the organization's roots back to him. He knows he is likely to tip his hand to the wrong Inquisitor or get himself caught if he does not delegate some of his dirty work.

If he suspects that a Hero mistrusts or resents the Inquisition, he invites her to his cause—and asks her help in expanding the Inquisitio Aquila's reach or striking against the Inquisition in ways he cannot.

Story Hooks

- Yet another splinter faction within the Inquisition has appeared, but so far, they are no help to Inquisitor Mzabi. They want the Hierophant's seat returned to Vodacce, which means murdering Cardinal Verdugo and anyone defending him. If they fail, increased scrutiny will fall on the Inquisitio Aquila. If they succeed, the Church will devolve into chaos and people will die. Can the Heroes help Mzabi cut them off at their roots?
- An undead creature in human guise has infiltrated the Dark Inquisition, concealed within Mzabi's infrastructure of secrecy—so efficient that it now works against him. Suddenly he cannot trust anyone near him... which means he needs the Heroes to help him pull off missions and find the culprit.



Azra Uziel

No item is as celebrated a symbol of Castille as the Castillian guitar. No Castillian guitarist is as celebrated as Azra Uziel. She is a scion of a *converso* family of traveling performers of Eclipses—Castillian people with both Yachidic and Dīnic heritage.

Azra's bubbly demeanor and highly danceable compositions drew considerable attention since early childhood. This includes the Inquisition, who have been vying for her, but have a hard time coming up with a good reason to arrest her.

Señorita Uziel's concert tours and sprawling entourage have groups of Eclipses—disguised as cooks, bodyguards and particularly dedicated fans—traveling through Castille towards ports whence they can depart for safety in Ifri or the Crescent. But the Inquisition remains suspicious of her. It is only a matter of time before the Inquisition infiltrates her organization somehow. The Rilasciare courts her to use her fame to overthrow the oppressive Inquisition, but the danger to her family is too high.

Señorita Uziel already has to deal with violently overzealous fans. So far, her bodyguards (and once, El Vagabundo) have managed to keep her alive, but she is looking for more security for her larger concerts. That is how she gets to you—help her out once, and suddenly she is wants you to help her move equipment, save secret lovers from the Inquisition, vet song ideas, hide Eclipses on your ship, be her date at parties...

Portraying Azra Uziel

Uziel is tiny, with long wavy brown hair, brown skin and a mischievous smile. She is the biggest personality in the room, with a voice like a bell and a handshake like a particularly eager terrier's bite.

She keeps a five-course guitar hanging around her neck, and sometimes abruptly turns the last half of a sentence into a song lyric. She takes any excuse to get people dancing, and if you carry an instrument, she annoys you until you agree to play with her.

In public, Azra dodges topics such as religion or politics, feigning ignorance. But if you reveal to her that you are an Eclipse in need, she gets more focused, reaching out to you to allay your fears and promising to use her resources to get you to safety.

Amanda de la Rosa

Amanda de la Rosa grew in San Cristóbal, under the care of various different orphanages. She dedicated her life to the sword. In the home, she played with the other orphans, using sticks as swords. Later, she found it easy to slip away from the orphanage to practice in the empty guard's square. The constant noise and bustle of the orphanage bothered her, and she much preferred solitude.

Once in a while, a guard would teach her a new trick, and she would spend the next month single-mindedly learning the new form, stance, or thrust. Such dedication earned her ridicule from the other orphans, but they were never able to beat her in the yard.

Over the years, Amanda grew hungry for knowledge. She tried university, but her narrow approach to one subject at a time made it difficult. She applied for entry into a dueling school, but her lack of noble title hindered her. Finally, she applied with the city guard. They accepted her, and she rose quickly, eventually earning a place on the royal guard protecting the Good King Sandoval himself.

Amanda's penchant for avoiding large groups led her to discover the Sandoval twins' secret. She noticed Amadeo sneaking into a gathering, one she had known he attended earlier in the evening. His shirt was slightly different, and his hair was wrong. She started watching the boy and quickly realized that there were two children. It was Rocío who decided to bring Amanda into their confidence, making her personal guard to the King. When the Inquisition took Amadeo to Vaticine City, Amanda stayed with Rocío to protect her.

Portraying Amanda de la Rosa

Polite, quite, and a little bit shy, Amanda de la Rosa is anything but meek. She has black hair, olive colored skin and striking green eyes. She is tall for a woman, but remains unimposing by keeping to the corners of rooms.

She is skilled with a sword, but keeps her single-minded approach in combat, making her situation blind with multiple attackers. She learns from her mistakes, and cannot be caught in the same trap twice. She is loyal to Castille and the crown, and is dedicated to returning King Sandoval to San Cristóbal, just as soon as she can figure out a way to get past the Inquisition.





Cardenal Esteban Verdugo

Esteban Verdugo does not talk about his childhood in Ciudad de Zepeda. He dislikes revisiting his memories of a sprawling, well-established hidalgo family tearing itself apart over petty quarrels, which escalated into conflicting accusations of heresy. Ultimately the disputes and accusations lead the Inquisition to arrest everyone but Esteban himself, and sentence them to galley slavery. Esteban thus learned the lesson that defined his adult life: only in unity is survival assured.

The Church relocated Esteban to the Vaticine Orphanage, where he distinguished himself in scholarship. By age 20, he was an accredited doctor of Vaticine law. He could have taken a tenure-track position at any Théan university. Instead, he remained in the church, climbing the ladder to the position of Cardenal. During that time, he joined the secretive Inquisition, eventually gain the title of High Inquisitor.

His leadership metamorphosed the Inquisition from a straightforward investigative and judicial body into a political and military juggernaut. He was bent on consolidating all power under its auspices and replacing all ideologies, all moralities with Cardenal Verdugo's (and therefore Theus') unified dogma.

Verdugo's Inquisition appeals to the Church's lowest common denominator. Like the Third Prophet, he spreads fear with horror stories about sorcerers, Crescents and heretics, then promises to assuage them with the Inquisition's watchful eye and strong hand.

He pushed Castille into the War of the Cross, claiming Objectionist philosophy is anti-Theus and deserves to be eradicated. His enemies even suspect he stood by and allowed Castille to lose so he could blame the monarchy for the failure. This tightened his grip over the Castillian government and robbed the tercios of their victory—one that would have brought money and power to threaten the Inquisition.

The Cardenal does have weaknesses. First, he is old, and needs a successor, but trusts so few people—especially so few young people—that he struggles to find a candidate who meets his standards.

Second, in spite of the Inquisition's uncompromising rhetoric, he does make concessions to get what he wants. He encourages certain hand-picked, high-ranking Inquisitors, to offer secret plea bargains to Inquisition targets who give up fellow heretics.

Finally, in spite of his intellect, decades of single-mindedness have weakened his lateral thinking skills. He no longer expects the unexpected as effectively as he used to.



Portraying Cardenal Esteban Verdugo

Cardenal Esteban Verdugo embodies the Inquisition. His whole being is calculated to advance its ends; even his longtime lover (not husband since they have not the time or inclination to adopt children), a senior lecturer at the Vaticine Seminary, keeps track of dissenting ideas on Verdugo's behalf.

He calibrates every display of emotion to manipulate those around him: he is not actually in a murderous rage, but fakes it so well that only his closest associates know the difference. Cardenal Verdugo is a Villain's Villain—he might be responsible for nearly any nefarious plot that does not yet have a Villain.

Story Hooks

- Inquisitor Estefanía Tapia de Tomás is one of those agents who escaped the knife after the War of the Cross. She is spreading rumors and presenting evidence against Cardenal Verdugo, though few listen to her. Either way, Verdugo has it out for the former Inquisitor, and finding her could be key to gaining leverage against him.
- Cardenal Verdugo's younger brother, Curro, should have died in a ship's galley a long time ago, but he—or someone claiming to be him—has just surfaced in Five Sails. He threatens to spill every secret he remembers about the Cardenal's upbringing unless the Inquisition pays him off.
- The Inquisition has invited Uziel to perform at a banquet honoring Inquisitor Verdugo, and she cannot say no without being accused of heretical leanings. She knows Inquisitors are going to use the opportunity to go through her belongings—and find the Eclipse family hidden among her entourage.

Jentar Soldano de Gallegos

Don Jentar Soldano is one of many cousins to Diego Ruiz de Soldano, the Grande. While his position is not particularly vaunted, and he owns no land of his own, his relation to the Grande makes him recognizable as one of Castille's preeminent courtiers. As a youth, he studied philosophy at the Maxentine Seminary in Vaticine City, majored in physics at the University of Rioja, and trained in the Aldana dueling school in San Crisotobal.

Now, Jentar lives in the port city of San Gustavo. The other nobles of San Gustavo believe Jentar is a layabout with too much idle time. He fosters this notion, but the truth is a different matter entirely. Jentar Soldano is a busy man indeed.

He heads the Mesta, a social organization made up of ranchers, all nobles with a political agenda. The Mesta's membership is no secret, but Jentar strives to keep his role within it as quiet as possible. The group functions to increase Castillian prosperity, and while they do a great job of moving goods, they also move secrets. Jentar's secrets being banned books and educational material. Most of the Mesta have no idea they aid and embed the activities of the Invisible College, and again, Jentar likes to keep it that way.

When he isn't organizing shipments via the Mesta, Jentar is experimenting in his laboratorium. He is a skilled Boticario (apothecary) and spends a great deal of time in pursuit of his art. A great deal of the books Jentar sends through the Mesta are to his brethren across Castille and into other nations. He imports books, information, experiments and new techniques keeping them safe from the Inquisition. He accepts students, but they must prove themselves first—passing tests designed to weed out Inquisition spies.

Portraying Jentar Soldano

Jentar Soldano de Gallegos is a man of impeccable taste and style. He prefers wears purple in some form, from slashes of color in his coat to full purple vests, waistcoats or pants. Most of his funds go towards Alchemia research, but enough of it goes to maintaining his wardrobe that few notice the ink stains on his hands, or the scorch marks on his cuffs.

His attitude as a disinterested, lazy noble is all a front to dislodge suspicion. He has a keen intellectual mind and once he catches wind of a problem, he won't stop thinking about it until he has a solution.



Zoraida Cortiñas de Luzuriaga

Her parents were a Montaigne knight and a Soldanensa army chaplain. The former took the latter hostage during a naval battle in the Doré Bay, then fell in love with her captive and deserted her post, fleeing to San Teodoro. They adopted new identities as a musician and dancer respectively, but when the Inquisition came after them for suspicion of harboring fugitives, they entrusted their daughter to a passing pirate captain. The captain raised her as cabin-girl on a Brotherhood of the Coast ship, which plundered the Atabean for a few years.

After a sea monster swallowed her and her captain and carried them back across the sea to Théah, Zoraida joined the Knights of the Rose & Cross and traveled Théah hunting monsters, defending the innocent against criminals, rescuing and then falling in love with kidnapped nobles and foreign diplomats; all the high adventure that she could throw herself into. She even served as a *tercio* in the King's army during the Montaigne invasion. Finally, she located her parents again in an Inquisitorial prison camp and won their freedom by finding new evidence and speaking in their defense in a court case. She now lives with them and her longtime squire-turned-spouse in San Teodoro, supporting herself with best-selling novels and serials.

Luzuriaga's best-known creation is Baronesa Berezi Batista, a thinly veiled analogue who experiences great childhood hardship, then remakes herself into an intense, dangerous anti-hero driven by vengeance and passion. She originally set out to pen a hero in her own image, but she found writing about a darker world, where good people had to do bad things in order to survive, more interesting.

Her work was controversial. She wrote what she wrote because it seemed more fun than telling her life like it was. But as her popularity grew, Baronesa Batista's misadventures—murdering the unjust, lying to people to protect them, indulging in vice to run from increasingly difficult memories—became the focal point of philosophical discussions everywhere from seedy taverns to university seminar rooms. People debate the ethics of her character and thereby Luzuriaga's own ethics for imagining such a morally grey character.

Some of her fans have taken a fanatical view of the Baronesa's world, believing that their own Castille is represented therein. Real people take vigilante justice into their own hands while dressed as the Baronesa or other characters. Inquisitors assassinated. Courthouses burned to the ground. Personal secrets exposed to the public. And this is just the beginning.

Portraying Zoraida Cortiñas de Luzuriaga

Luzuriaga is Castille's greatest living writer of fiction. Her stories, based on the real Castille but steeped in exaggerated misfortune and sorrow so strong that they turned a good woman into a monster, will be read and studied for centuries hence.

Luzuriaga has retired from the adventuring life; she is happy to recount her adventures or hear new ones from the Heroes, but right now she wants to spend time with her loved ones and write without drawing more Inquisitorial suspicion. She needs the Heroes to do her dirty work for her. But she will be happiest if the Heroes find a way to talk sense into a Baronesa mimic instead of just beating her up—otherwise, the Heroes risk validating the mimic's pessimistic, over-serious worldview.

Story Hooks

- If these copycat crimes keep up, the Inquisition—which already has its eye on Luzuriaga—might decide to crack down on any Baronesa Batista fan, no matter how harmless, as well as Luzuriaga's family.
- Luzuriaga suffers from writer's block, but her publishers are pressing for another novel. She needs some new inspiration from the most reliable source: Heroes undergoing a great adventure! She is looking to hire some adventurers and willing to pay handsomely.





André Miguel da Fonte

André Miguel da Fonte was born in San Felipe as a hidalgo and a sailor's son. Unlike other Castellians, for which noble title is an important aspect of life, Fonte never cared much for claiming nobility. The title gave him nothing but grief, and it was easier to live as a peasant than in disgrace as a poor noble. That, and his penchant for getting into tricky situations never sat well with his family, who summarily disowned him by the time he was a teen.

That adventurous spirit led Fonte to join more than one disreputable ship's crew. He sailed in and out of San Felipe's ports, sometimes in the employ of honest sailors, but often in the employ of pirates. André gained a reputation as a pirate for hire, and eventually landed a position on the *Lady's Grace*. The ship sailed under writ from Uxía Serafin, Odiseo's Grande, and often carried her letters and correspondences to far off places, when not stealing from merchants in her name.

It was through the ship's courier services that Fonte met and charmed the Grande, leading to a secret love affair that has lasted for over a year. Of course, Serafin is not Fonte's only lover, but she is his most important, as her good graces keep his crew's writ up to date and the government off their backs. When Fonte learned of an Inquisition plot to kill Serafin to finally remove her influence from Odiseo, he knew he had to act to save her.

Knowing that a pirate could do little to help her, he turned to Los Vagabundos for aid. His introduction to the Society was as clandestine as they ever are; he dropped a note in an ally and a mask showed up in his ship's quarters the next day. Donning the mask, he thwarted the Inquisition's plan at just the last moment. Since then, Fonte has donned the mask two other times, each time in efforts to save various nobles and leaders throughout Castille.

Portraying André da Fonte

Adventurous, flirty, mischievous. Andre da Fonte appears to be just shy of 30, with long dark hair he keeps tied in a neat tail at the nape of his neck. He is muscular and tanned from long days spent at sea. He is quick of wit and action, often acting before thinking, which gets him into more trouble than he would care to recount. He is a polite man when necessary, but he always has a glint of mischief in his eye, or flirtation, depending on if he has taken a fancy.

El Concilio de la Razón

El Concilio de la Razón is the highest governmental power in all of Castille. Eight cardenales sit on El Concilio: one from each ducado, one from the “Ducado de Ultramar” (the Castillian colonies in the New World), one from the Sandoval family and one representing Vaticine City. Members of the Concilio are a mix of Heroes and Villains and may show up to help or hinder Heroes moving through Castille.

El Cardenal de Ciudad Vaticinia

Nagore Loyola represents Vaticine City. Mentored in the Maxentine Seminary by the Cardenal’s lover, Inquisitor Loyola is the closest thing Cardenal Verdugo has to a protégée. She replaced him as Vaticine city’s representative after the Hierophant died.

She has one major weakness: she genuinely likes King Sandoval. She doesn’t just make decisions for him; she ensures that he understands what she does and why. It is only a matter of time before someone goes above her head and reports her actions to her mentors, and she prepares for that by gathering as many allies as possible.

El Cardenal del Ducado de Ultramar

Itzamatul of Tzak K’an represents the New World, a position which requires him to keep up with many different countries and a great deal of information. An ardent convert and a talented writer, he is an extreme rarity in the Vaticine world, a popular Cardenal. The people genuinely like him, opening up to him where they might hide from other Church officials.

On those rare occasions when the Inquisition needs to defuse a situation with grace, Itzamatul is the best man for the job...if he can find time in his schedule.

El Cardenal del Ducado de Torres

The youngest member of El Concilio, Emilio Crespo de Torres has led the Inquisition’s new campaign to syncretize pagan figures with Vaticine saints. When Torres stubbornly resisted the Inquisition’s efforts to eliminate Castillian paganism, Crespo suggested a softer approach. He decided to convince Torreños that the old gods and their favorite saints are one and the same. The work is slow, but Emilio seems to enjoy roaming the Castillian countryside looking for converts.

El Cardenal del Ducado de Zepeda

Jafet Moreno de Zepeda is the most violent and extreme of the Inquisitors. A reformed pirate, he led the Prophet’s Sword—the militant branch of the Inquisition—in violent raids on the Inquisition’s most feared enemies until he lost the use of his legs in combat with a bruja.

A quiet man with glowering eyes, which never seem to blink, he is always quick to remind El Concilio that the only sure way to eliminate a threat is to see it die before you. He is not one to tangle with and is likely to cause problems for Heroes who attempt to move against the Inquisition.

El Cardenal del Ducado de Aldana

Pastora Losa de Aldana, a respected judge in the Prophet’s Hourglass, who has sent many a heretic to a fate harsher than he deserved, intends to retire within the year, with Cardenal Verdugo’s blessing.

She served the Inquisition faithfully for seventy years and wishes to spend her remaining years with her grandchildren and her hobbies (painting pewter soldiers, mostly). With her seniority, she could appoint anyone she pleases to her vacated seat. She does not have anyone in mind, and she is looking for the right bribe to make her final decision.

El Cardenal del Ducado de Soldano

Patricia Abana de Soldano is the Cardenal most concerned with temporal matters. She comes from a family that has maintained the same gorgeous hacienda and bountiful fields since the beginning of Castillian history. She is one of the few members of el Concilio who is not a member of the Inquisition. A fact that chafes on Cardenal Verdugo, but he is loath to remove her when the people respond so well to her.

She maintains that the best way to earn the people’s loyalty is to make the Church indispensable to their daily lives—an approach made particularly effective by distributing food or medical care in these trying times. Someone with her ear could certainly direct aid to places in the most need.



El Cardenal del Ducado de Gallegos

Fátima Campos de Gallegos is the newest appointment to El Concilio. She was a Bishop when Cardenal Verdugo hand-picked her over outrage from the Archbishops from her region. He was more interested in her ability as a spy, having worked for King Aldana in Gallegos. Verdugo's move did little to placate the already volatile ducado, and Fátima walks a fine line with church officials from her home.

Fátima's instinct is never to trust anyone—an approach that has transitioned poorly to politics. She hasn't quite gotten the hang of making potent connections or reaching across the aisle in the much more complicated political climate of Vaticine City.

However, she has assembled secret dossiers on all the other members of El Concilio “just in case.” She might not be sympathetic to King Sandoval's position, but she is loyal. She could be a potent ally in bringing down the Inquisition, if she had enough motivation.

El Cardenal de Familia Sandoval

Modesto Mejía de Sandoval is an eccentric from the Sandoval Forest, with a shrub-like hairdo and beard and a rustic manner of dress. He once belonged to an obscure and small religious order, but after it disbanded, he entered the Inquisition...or, at least, that is what he tells people. The truth is that Inquisitor Mejía is a *busgosu*—a goat man. Under his messy hair are two short horns, and under his voluminous robe are goat legs.

As a youth, like many *busgosus*, he loved to play cruel pranks on humans, the last of which involved dressing up as a priest and preaching a false gospel to unsuspecting Vaticines. To his great surprise, he proved a prodigy at sermonizing, inadvertently converting not only many humans, but also himself. Like Itzamatul, he is a well-liked Inquisitor, though more of a speaker than a writer. While he hides in plain sight, he has gotten in way over his head and fears discovery. He would happily abdicate his position if someone could help him escape without notice.

INTERACTING WITH EL CONCILIO

El Concilio de la Razon serves ostensibly as a group of advisors to the king of Castille. The King appoints these Cardenals and the Hierophant approves them. They serve separately from the council of Cardinals, and were created as way to circumvent Vodacce influence over Castillian matters. The only member who serves on both councils is Cardenal Esteban Verdugo. In recent years, Cardenal Verdugo has warped el Concilio's original purpose to gain a stranglehold on the nation. They may disagree with him, and even argue points, but in the end, they bend to his will.

Generally, members of el Concilio serve until death, though one or two have retired of their own volition. Under Verdugo's rule, members can only retire with his blessing, otherwise he replaces seats the traditional way, with a death.

Some of the Cardenals are sympathetic to King Sandoval's plight, but all of them believe el Concilio is better served to rule while the king is still a youth. While individually the members may seem temperate, and even personable, together they pose a formidable threat to Heroes seeking to stamp out the Inquisition in Castille.

No matter how much Nagore Loyola cares about the king, she is still a proponent of the Inquisition and Cardenal Verdugo's protegee. Modesto Mejia may have a secret he wishes to keep hidden, but it just means he follows Verdugo's direction to the letter to prevent raising suspicion. Fátima Campos may not trust anyone, but it only means she is unlikely to trust the Heroes without sufficient cause.

When deciding to use el Concilio in a game, consider how the Heroes gain access to them, and how they can gain information on which ones are likely to help them. The Heroes may find allies among el Concilio, but these people help at a great danger to themselves. A few are even happy to finally have support for their plans in deposing Verdugo. No matter what, stories involving el Concilio should be rife with danger, betrayal and daring escapades.



The Grandes Ducados

While the term Grande refers to any landed noble in Castille, the most important are those who are the leaders of the ducados. For the longest time, these people reigned as the kings and queens of their lands and are still treated that way by the people. They live in palatial estates and dictate laws and justice for their people, as long as they do not interfere with King Sandoval's order or the Inquisition's plans. Heroes are likely to interact with Grandes in their own lands or as a consequence for overstepping bounds.

The five ducados are **Torres** in the northwest, **Soldano** in the northeast, **Zepeda** in the east, **Aldana** in the south and **Gallegos**—better known as **Odiseo**—in the far south and southeast.

Almudena Oquendo de Sandoval, mother of the King, controls Ducado de Aldana. She herself is actually a Sandoval by birth. The Sandoval family descends from Lord Ramón Sandoval, also known as Rimun ibn Basiti al-Sayyid. A minor noble with a Castillian father and a Crescent mother, al-Sayyid fought on both the Blazing Blade and Crescent sides during the Moonshadow War. His complicated employment history is little understood and much debated.

The family has most frequently occupied the Castillian throne, shoring up their weaker position with aggressive political marriages to everyone powerful. Almudena has not shed her mourning clothes since her husband, Salvador Aldana, died four years ago. She is shy, retiring, polite and probably one of the most talented political minds active in Castille today. Her subtle social maneuvering has ensured Good King Sandoval's survival and the retention of a little political power from the Inquisition. Currently she has retired to her family compound in Ciudad de Aldana, in order to draw off the Inquisitorial agents spying on her and her offspring.

The elderly **Colonel Bihotz Arrigorriagakoa de Torres** is the reason her line has survived the wars. Bihotz was a third daughter who, knowing she was destined for the military, spent her entire life preparing for it. Her ruthless pragmatism during the Castillian army's fighting retreat from her own lands was both derided as an evil and ugly sacrifice and lauded as the only reason Castille bounced back from defeat.

She has seen everything that raised up her family burn and bleed around her, but retains a sense of humor nonetheless. She now spends a great deal of her time traveling around Castille, imploring Grandes of more means than herself to send troops, in case l'Empereur happens to remember he is supposed to be prosecuting a war of conquest.

Diego Ruiz de Soldano has seen his star rise as Ducado de Torres' has fallen. He controls the most productive vineyards and olive plantations in all of Castille; with the fertile soil of Ducado de Torres now salted with blood, his ducado's products are in high demand indeed. Bihotz Arrigorriagakoa de Torres, who once had no time for Diego, now begs him to commit resources to the war effort. The Grandes of Soldano, contemptuous of the Torres family from long familiarity, may be inclined to let her stew.

As of just last week, **Llorenç Grec de Zepeda** stews in an Inquisitorial holding cell. At the end of a long nocturnal chase through Ciudad de Zepeda, the Inquisition found El Vagabundo hiding in Llorenç de Zepeda's own manor house. Llorenç denied any knowledge of the infamous criminal's presence in town.

A scandalous scene awoke all Zepeda as the eldest Grande in all Castille was dragged in his bedclothes through town and jailed. Since El Vagabundo escaped the Inquisitors by distracting them with a cloud of bats within the attic, it is now Llorenç's word against El Vagabundo's presence. Was he framed, or does he a truly support El Vagabundo in spite of his protestations to the contrary?

Ducado de Gallegos is the only ducado whose Grande is not recognized by the crown. The King appointed **Governor Carlos Pérez** to rule the ducado in an attempt to quell movements towards independence. While the removal of the Grande's power impacted the movement in the short term, many of the ducado's residents ignore Pérez's right to rule.

Try as he might, he even has trouble getting the people to stop referring to themselves as Odiseans, much less abide by his laws. The true power in Odiseo is the previous Grande, Uxía Serafin, who continues to push against Castillian rule, despite her lessened status.





Secret Societies

Knights of the Rose & Cross

Castillian Grandes' financial difficulties have graced the Rose & Cross with too many Knight candidates and not nearly enough Benefactors. Many disgruntled tercios, now soldiers of fortune wandering Castille, number among those candidates. Established Knights frequently hire tercios as squires, aides or bodyguards, recognizing these warriors' discipline, versatility and teamwork.

Knights in Castille occupy a precarious position since the clashing factions in Castille—religious, political and otherwise—are eager to obtain their aid. Rose & Cross higher-ups have directed Knights to be careful not to publically endorse one faction or another. Complicating the matter, many individual Knights already have strong opinions about which causes they do and do not support—and the wealthy members are even more opinionated.

Angry letters flood in, threatening the Rose & Cross' leaders to cut financial support if the Knights back Odisean independence, oppose Odisean independence, help the Inquisition hunt Eclipses, stop the Inquisition from hunting Eclipses...you get the idea.

Favor in Castille

A Hero who belongs to the Knights of the Rose & Cross can earn Favor while in Castille in the following way:

- In Castille, finding a suitable Benefactor is worth 6 Favor, as finding a suitable Benefactor is more important and difficult than ever.

Die Kreuzritter

The Castille–Montaigne war, like all wars, fostered and attracted monsters the way a wound fosters infection and attracts maggots. Wars mass-produce ghosts and wights, attract ghouls and provide cover for murderous monsters such as werewolves. During the war, leaders on both sides hired Kreuzritter contractors to keep military camps and battlefields free of the living dead. Both sides pledged not to target Kreuzritter agents among their enemies, though some still became casualties when soldiers failed to distinguish their identities. The armies have receded, but many of the monsters have not, especially wights.

Inquisitio Aquila

The Inquisition's continent-wide intelligence network, dedicated staff and treasury of information make it one of the most powerful international players in Théah. Yet all its resources point towards evil ends, enforcing a party line that grew from the seed of faith but remade in the Third Prophet's image.

Although the Third Prophet claimed to have invented it, there has been an Inquisition nearly as long as there has been a Vaticine Church.

The First Prophet's followers lacked the modern Hieros' power, privilege and clout. Politically powerful polytheists hunted, persecuted and executed them. Spies, agitators and monsters in human guise infiltrated congregations and clerical hierarchies, betraying their compatriots to the Church's enemies. Priests



who designated themselves Inquisitors were the guards and detectives who rooted out and confronted these threats.

As the Vaticine Church grew more important, as temporal authorities became invested in the Church's welfare, as "Vaticine" became synonymous with "good citizen," the Inquisition lost importance and necessity. When news leaked to the rest of the Church in the mid-twelfth century of an Inquisitor who abused his power to seize Stern, the Inquisition lost its remaining support. When the Third Prophet ascended, he researched Church history in pursuit of a means to accomplish his goal of bringing everyone, everywhere, into unity with his dogma. The Church needed one indivisible truth. Such a truth demanded exhaustive self-reflection as well as a robust intelligence network to find threats. The records he found of the Inquisition's early operations showed him the way.

Inquisitor Octavio Mzabi found these same records and vowed to reinstate the Inquisition's original purpose, rooting out real monsters, actual evil wizards and other hidden threats to the Hieros. He sought help from Die Kreuzritter agents, who had more knowledge of real monsters than anyone else Mzabi could imagine. Through them, he realized that he could not reinstate the Inquisition's original purpose without first removing the cancer which had become Verdugo's Inquisition. Die Kreuzritter offered training and support, and Mzabi's Inquisitio Aquila serves as a subsidiary of the Secret Society, hoping to eventually reform the Inquisition from within and return it to its forgotten original purpose.

The Inquisitio Aquila lurks within the existing Vaticine and Inquisitorial organization, but also outside it in lay people. The Inquisitio Aquila recruits sympathizers everywhere—from the town baker who eavesdrops on gossip to find out who plans to inform on whom to the Cardinal's manservant who overhears his boss discussing the next book to ban.

Inquisitio Aquila safe houses dot Castille, mostly in hard-to-find places: abandoned catacombs, mountain caves, hidden coves. There, Dark Inquisitors converse, plan or hide persons of interest and seditious books. The Inquisition has found and destroyed several of these hiding places, although so far Inquisitors blame the Invisible College for their existence. Still, it is only

a matter of time before they come across such a hiding place with a Dark Inquisitor in residence.

Like the conventional Inquisition, the Inquisitio Aquila's business largely involves disposing of those who are deemed a threat to the Hieros. It seeks out information and secrets on each member of the Inquisition, hoping to derail her plans or convert her where possible. Inquisitio Aquila must act with caution; the loss of too many key members could clue Verdugo in to its actions and bring the whole organization toppling before it gets a chance to truly act.

Unlike Die Kreuzritter, from whom it takes a great deal of direction, the Inquisitio Aquila has a harder time rooting out evil, corrupt and monstrous people within its ranks. The job is big enough for more than just one actor, but the matter is delicate to handle. Killing people is not its way, but removing an Inquisitor from office or causing the populous to rise up in rebellion against her is within its code of conduct.

Earning Favor with Inquisitio Aquila

A Hero who belongs to the Inquisitio Aquila can earn Favor in the following ways:

- Gathering information on Inquisition movements gains 3 Favor, if the information makes it to the Inquisitio Aquila without the Inquisition's agents finding out about it.
- Deposing an important Inquisitor—by removing her from her office, convincing her to abdicate, or replacing her with a member of the Dark Inquisition—is worth 5 Favor.

A Hero who belongs to the Inquisitio Aquila can call upon them for aid in the following ways:

- Securing a hiding place within one of the Inquisitio Aquila's strongholds costs 2 Favor. The Society is always willing to protect someone targeted by the Inquisition, as long as he is willing to aid the Society while he is in their care.
- Requesting aid from a Dark Inquisitor costs 3 Favor. A Dark Inquisitor is martially trained and has a Strength of 8. She also has the Ordained Advantage and can have either the University or Miracle Worker Advantage.



The Explorer's Society

The Explorer's Society, founded in Odiseo, remains popular and powerful throughout Castille. The Inquisition dislikes the Society's open support for scientific research, university education and Castillian anthropology, but Inquisitors have bigger fish to fry most of the time.

Society members, such as the war veterans Celeste and Milo de Villenc, are concerned with preserving sites of archæological interest in war-torn Ducado de Torres before conflict flares up again and destroys them.

The Invisible College

Ah, there is no place more exciting for an Invisible College member than Castille. World-renowned universities! Alchemical research! Legions of Inquisitors on their home territory who would like nothing better than to string you up as an example to all your friends! Maybe excitement is overrated.

The Invisible College has to the most to do in Castille, but it is also the most dangerous nation to operate in. The libraries in Vaticine City are ground zero for the work they do, as they copy, hide and disguise texts now deemed heretical by the church.

Society agents move carefully all over the nation, using dedicated smuggling rings that move and shift to evade Inquisition notice. The penalty for such activity is death, making recruitment within Castille difficult.

Los Vagabundos

Both Inquisitors and Vagabundos are on their home turf in Castille. The game of cat and mouse continues apace with Los Vagabundos always a step ahead, leaving the Inquisition just enough clues that the Inquisitors ignore Eclipses and waste time chasing the masks.

Still, the risk of capture so close to the Vaticine headquarters has many Vagabundos considering relocating their base of power. Could Odisean independence give them someplace nearby to hide from the Inquisition?

Močiutės Skara

Močiutės Skara arrived in Castille as relief workers for an impoverished populace. The Church welcomes their help distributing food, clothing and medicine to the needy, redistributing surplus in one region to others who need it most.

Little does the Church know Močiutės Skara has worked with Tamatama—nomadic groups from far to the East who traditionally adhered either to al-Din or to obscure Eastern religions—to establish a clandestine network of safe houses and sympathizers. The Shawl moves Inquisition targets from city to city or from Castillian ports to safety abroad.

Favor in Castille

A Hero who belongs to the Močiutės Skara can earn Favor while in Castille in the following way:

- Helping to smuggle marginalized groups out of Castille is worth 4 Favor. These can be ethnic or religious minorities, sorcerers from other nations living in Castille or any other group targeted by the Inquisition.

Rilasciare/Sophia's Daughters

As per the Society's mandate that the Rilasciare never congregate in large numbers, most members outside Sophia's Daughters have dispersed from Castille in order to diffuse suspicion. Those who remain work closely with their Vodacce "sisters." Easily accessible by ship from Vodacce, Castille is an ideal destination for Fate Witches fleeing the country. Even their outfits fit in, resembling Castillian mourning garb.

Merchant Princes Vestini and Lucani, whose capitals are most vulnerable to Sophia's Daughters absconding with their precious Fate Witches, have signed an agreement to figure out how to stop the disappearances. To this end, they have partnered with Inquisitors in Castille who promise to screen incoming Vodacce on Castille's Eastern coast.





Places

Vaticine City

The Vaticine Island has been inhabited since well before the Numanari Empire invaded and controlled Castille. High, rocky cliffs characterize most of its coastline, occasionally punctuated with viable harbors. The cliffs are easily defensible against approaching ships, making the Vaticine Island a choice prize in conflicts between coastal peoples.

It changed hands between Numa, the Crescent Empire, Castille and Vodacce every few years of its history until the Third Prophet settled there during the Moonshadow War. The island proved a choice location to launch a war across all of Théah.

The tribes inhabiting the Vaticine Island raised sheep and farmed wheat, supplementing those staples with oats, barley, olives and grapes. Artisanal cheeses made from local sheep's milk and sold off the island at an appalling markup—primarily in Vodacce, Ifri and Castille—are one of the island's most famous exports.

Founding a City

Fabio Dimas de Bello's ancestors fled from Zepeda to northern Vodacce in the Crescent Empire's early days. For five hundred years, the family accumulated power and influence but never quite reached Merchant Prince rank. Fabio, the man history knows as the Third Prophet, kindled fires in Vaticine hearts, as hot as the flames, which engulfed his sword. He accused Théah's nobles of corruption, diabolism and worst of all witchcraft.

The purer Church he promised, with zero tolerance for imperfection and a clear path to salvation, attracted a vast following in Vodacce from all social classes. His horde seized control of the Vaticine Church from the aristocratic cardinals. They devoured the Merchant Princes' resources and ignored their authority. The Princes exiled Fabio to the Vaticine Island to rid themselves of extremists. From his new base of operations, the Third Prophet's army, under the standard of the Blazing Blade, began



the Moonshadow War to drive the interlopers out of Castille and remake it into a paradise of faith.

From those beginnings, Vaticine Island has grown in wealth and influence. The Hieros, the whole of the Prophet's Church, looks to the Island for direction. Its coastal fortifications are always manned. The Church carefully controls its inland resources to keep it self-sufficient in case of war. The Church supplements its fortunes by selling locally made wine, cheese, olive oil and other luxuries, which endear the City to its customers as well as generate profit.

The City itself has grown as well, layers built atop existing layers like a giant mound of coral. In its center is the Hierophantic Basilica, a towering maze of chapels, churches and cathedrals built on top of one another, with the Hierophant's Office high in the sky at its peak. The Basilica seen from afar is frankly a disturbing sight: the patchwork of architectural styles and geometries from generations of builders make it look like a surrealist painting, shaped like a growing quartz crystal.

The Hierophantic Basilica hosts most Church business, both sacred and secular. Rings of residential and commercial buildings expand outward from the Basilica's base, housing the many workers who keep the Basilica and the Vaticine Church operational. Amidst these rings are the national embassies. Far out on the western and eastern edges of the city are the newly fortified High Chancery of the Inquisition and the Maxentine Seminary's sprawling compound, respectively.

The Embassies

Every nation in Théah, and quite a few nations without, have embassies scattered throughout Vaticine City, carefully positioned as far from one another as possible since you never know when war will break out at home. The largest and best appointed are Vodacce's, Rzeczpospolita's (now the Sarmatian Commonwealth), the Crescent Empire's and Montaigne's, though Montaigne's embassy is an odd place to be right now.

The Montaigne Embassy has grown into a large expatriate community, full of deeply religious Montaigne nobles who did not feel safe returning home after l'Empereur's ascent. L'Empereur has happily let it go to seed; he has no desire to keep up relations with Vaticine City after the excommunication.

The Hierophant's Office

A now-defunct religious order dedicated to devotional architecture built Vaticine City's highest point during the heyday of Church research. The Hierophant's Office surmounts the spiraling tower that is the Hierophantic Basilica.

The Office has two floors. The lower chambers contain offices, apartments, kitchens and other organs necessary for the Hierophant to live, work and worship without ever having to leave the Office—in fact, towards the end of their lives, many Hierophants have done just that. The upper chambers, a grand panopticon with crystal-glass walls, let the Hierophant observe the entire Vaticine Island.

The Cathedral Hierophantic is a cathedral in the original sense of the term: a throne upon which the Hierophant traditionally sat while presiding over official functions. The Cathedral is an almost-comfortable leather chair set into a mechanized armillary sphere. The sphere's adornments represent the traditional cosmology of Terra and its surroundings as imagined by ancient Vaticine scientists.

The mechanisms also include miraculous speaking tubes and spyglasses, which permit the Cathedral's occupant to see and speak to the far reaches of the city. The sphere rises and falls smoothly (if noisily) on an elevator system that can lift it to the Office's highest peak, far above the audience hall, or lower it to any floor of the Basilica.

For the past year, the King of Castille's person and household have occupied the Hierophant's Office. King Sandoval lives as a prisoner here, under guard by the Prophet's Sword, "for his own good."

The Maxentine Seminary

One of Théah's largest universities, the Seminary accepts students from all over the world. First-year students may be as young as twelve. The seminary has a number of feeder schools on its grounds, which prepare students for admittance.

Operating right under the Inquisition's nose, you would expect the Seminary to churn out endless ranks of students with ideas in lockstep with Cardenal Verdugo's views. You would be wrong. Since widespread theological debate led Hierophant Maxentius to found it, the Seminary has always loved a good



argument. Students and faculty here espouse myriad theological and political viewpoints on the nature of Theus and religion, the role of the Vaticine Church in personal and political life and the Inquisition itself. Indeed, the Inquisition's most fierce and vocal critics are here at the Seminary; the institution's age-old commitment to diversity of viewpoints (and endless debate) keeps them safe from a frustrated Cardinal Verdugo's wrath. A student at the Seminary stereotypically espouses extreme versions of the views she settles into later in life and priesthood...unless, of course, she becomes a professor.

Dueling Academies

The Church frowns on bloodshed in the Vaticine streets—it is hard to clean up and frightens the pilgrims. Accordingly, all the dueling academies on the Vaticine Island lie outside the city proper, on farmsteads near one another. The hard labor of agriculture and husbandry strengthens aspiring duelists, while fields and woods provide a gorgeous backdrop for impassioned single combat.

Most major Théan dueling schools are represented here, including the signature Vaticine style, Rossini. This style teaches the use of heavy polearms, especially the halberd. A Rossini duelist learns to fight in close formation, his halberd's blade arching and thrusting at his foes while miraculously missing allies standing mere centimeters from his flank. He also wears short Numanari-style *gladius*, to run through enemies who bypass his halberd's head. The school's current headmistress is Gabriela Rossini, retired Captain of the Hierophant's Guard and matriarch of the Rossini family, which has headed their school since its inception in ninth-century Vodacce. The Hierophant's assassination has troubled Rossini, as it happened under the watch of some of her finest, most reliable students—all of whom died with the Hierophant, presumably defending her. Gabriela's advanced age and her responsibilities as Rossini headmistress keep her from investigating it herself, but she pays handsomely for any information which may lead to the Hierophant's murderer.

The Hall of Orders

A walled enclave at the edge of town, to represent its distinction from the Vaticine hierarchy, houses the Hall of Orders. The Hall liaises between the Hierophantic Basilica and the numerous Vaticine sects—cloistered, military and others—which serve the Vaticine Church, but remains formally separated from the organizational pyramid of Hierophant down to priest. Monks and nuns visiting the Vaticine Island may stay in the dormitories here, work in the offices or pray at the chapel.

Each religious order maintains its own idiosyncratic organization, which might mirror the main body of the Church exactly or might operate on some other model like democracy. The prototypical religious order germinates around a small body of individuals whose devotion to Theus takes the form of some special practice. The simplest are the cloistered orders, who live apart from lay Théans in monasteries or convents, to dedicate lives to Theus without distraction. Others might be a gyrovague, ordained as a novice in a monastery or apprenticed to a senior monk before she wanders the world, teaching or preaching or healing those she meets and living off charitable donations. Artistic or artisan orders seek Theus in song, viticulture, architecture or other pursuits. Many orders restrict membership by gender; for example, the venerable Budorigan Order of Rzeczpospolita, which breeds warhorses for the Inquisition and the military orders (see below), only accepts members who identify as neither men nor women.

Monks from Military orders live in fortress-monasteries (commanderies), studying martial arts in order to defend the faith. The oldest surviving order, les Paladins de Cluny, formed in the ninth century to defend the Montaigne coast near Dechaine and Lierie from Vesten raiders. Many more formed during the Moonshadow War. One notorious order developed into Die Kreuzritter.

The Orders generally disdain Vaticine politics. Historically, orders that took sides in disputes within the Hieros met with sudden droughts of money and recruits.



The High Chancery

Historically, the High Chancery was the supreme court of Vaticine law. It still is, actually, but over the past four hundred years it has also become the Inquisition's home base. Early in his tenure as Grand High Inquisitor, Cardenal Verdugo commissioned a Vodacce architect to rebuild the Chancery as a fearsome star fort in the Vodacce style. Verdugo then filled its interior with extravagant decor, priceless artworks and suites of new offices for the Inquisition's use. The High Chancery's fortifications point in all directions—both inward into Vaticine City and out towards the sea.

Vaticine courts deployed the original Inquisition, a department of internal affairs investigators and sometime witch hunters, to gather information or eliminate threats from within. The implication of Eisen's highest-ranking Inquisitor in the Stern scandal (**CORE RULEBOOK**, page 261) decimated the Inquisition's support within the Vaticine Church. It was essentially nonexistent by 1157.

The Third Prophet's Castillian Inquisition focused on external threats and heresy rather than monsters and priestly misconduct. Inquisitors were priests in the normal Vaticine hierarchy, albeit with special training and a special mission to root out Crescent sympathizers, secret sorcerers and other threats to Hieros unity. But these Inquisitors secretly answered to a Grand High Inquisitor hidden amongst the cardinals.

After the Third Prophet's mysterious death in 1268, the Inquisition embodied his political and theocratic will. When he took control of the Inquisition, Cardenal Verdugo restructured it into three parts, each of which headquarters in the High Chancery somewhere.

Prophet's Staff

The Prophet's Staff gathers information and investigates crimes against religious law. The Staff's operations hew most closely to the original Inquisition's mission statement—but Verdugo has also ordered surveillance campaigns against nearly every political power in Théah.

Prophet's Sword

The Prophet's Sword is the smallest arm of the Inquisition. Formed from Vaticine City's elite professional guards, traditionally recruited in western Eisen, the Sword has enforced the Inquisition's will since the end of the Moonshadow War, including performing arrests. The Sword wears distinctive orange-and-purple outfits and carry halberds as their primary weapon when on guard duty. When arresting heretics, they prefer short swords, clubs and pistols. Unlike the other branches of the Inquisition, which are organized from priest to cardinal the same way the rest of the Hieros is, the Prophet's Sword has a military organization that goes from private to general officer.

Prophet's Hourglass

The Prophet's Hourglass is the judiciary branch of the Inquisition, often referred to metonymically as “the High Chancery” (the way Americans might refer to their Executive Branch as “the White House”). Ever since the Vaticine organization was founded, an arm dedicated to jurisprudence has tried offenders within the Vaticine organization and offered legal opinions on Church actions. The judicial branch has also processed heretics turned over to the Church's justice. The judiciary has expanded extensively under Cardenal Verdugo's watch, with the Cardenal himself sitting in judgment over the highest-profile crimes.

Recruitment

The Inquisition recruits adult professionals who have demonstrated distinctive skill to join its various branches, but at least half its ranks are educated in-house from youth. The Inquisitorial Academy lies within the walls of the High Chancery. Individuals can apply to join at any year, usually at the encouragement of their local priest; many of its students are orphans who have wound up on the Vaticine Island. In the Academy, students lead a rigorous and secluded life, pure and uncorrupted by the outer world.

While the Sword and the Hourglass are the most obvious (and feared) arms, the Prophet's Staff is larger than the other two departments combined. The Staff maintains Théah's largest repository of information and records. All of its personnel, physical manufacture and resources are devoted to gathering, collating



ECLIPSES

While the Vaticine religion is the most populous in Théah, many other Theus worshippers still exist alongside them. The most notable are the Yachidi and Dīnist practitioners. The Yachidi people's beliefs predate the First Prophet. Though they believe in Theus, they also recognize the magic in and around Terra and view lesser gods and spirits as servants of Theus. Yachidi can be found in pockets all across Théah, but primarily in areas closer to the Crescent Empire.

The al-Dīn religion is closer to that of the Vaticine, and they follow the teachings of the Second Prophet, believing the Third Prophet was not a true Prophet. They primarily reside in the Crescent Empire, though many either never converted after the Third Prophet's invasion of Castille or migrated into other parts of Théah.

The Tamatama come from the east and are generally Dīnists, though they may follow other obscure religions.

Generally, the nations of Théah accept these groups, though these worshippers often find themselves at odds with Inquisition goals. Castillians call these groups Eclipses, as a catch-all term for marginalized groups who may fall under Inquisition suspicion.

and processing information, which the Sword uses to evaluate and move in on threats and the Hourglass uses to deliver judgments. But although the Staff's information is meant to be used only to fight threats to the Hieros, practically speaking it has far more diverse utility.

Armed with athenaeum after athenaeum of analysts and archives, Ésteban Verdugo excels at recognizing not only overt and subtle threats to the Hieros, but also political fronts or ideological movements which could obstruct Inquisitorial duties or grant him opportunities. By analyzing guard rotation schedules from Charouse, crop prices from the Atabeau or folk songs from Avalon, Verdugo has discovered l'Empereur's latest love affairs, slave revolts in the Atabeau and the Sidhe's latest misbehaviors. He has that much information and that much help picking through it—and he is that good at what he does.

Operations of the Inquisition

While the Inquisition can technically declare anyone a heretic for any sin, witches are public enemy number one. Cardenal Verdugo particularly reviles *brujas* (practitioners of indigenous magic derived from Castillian paganism). The Inquisition has never really managed to stamp out Castillian paganism.

While Alquimia (see page 93) is science, not sorcery, the Inquisition formally opposes scientific research these days. Boticarios should be wary about practicing in the open or near the Inquisition's spies. Alquimia's association with the upper classes and Crescents—the Third Prophet's favorite targets—leads the Inquisition to string many apothecaries up as witches pretending to be alchemists, regardless of the truth.

Objectionists are Vaticine, but are traitors to Castille according to the Inquisition. Despite the amount of rhetoric allowed within the walls of the universities in Vaticine City, Objectionists found outside the island are likely to become targets.

A royal decree in 1385, exactly a year before plague mysteriously struck down the entire royal family, decriminalized the Yachidi and al-Dīn heresies. Their long presence in Castillian culture has won them much support.

However, Castillians still heap social prestige on families who have followed the Third Prophet the longest, and grand public acts of Vaticine faith, which sometimes excuse Inquisitorial targets, are not exactly an option for a Yachidi or Dīnist suspect (unless, of course, she wants to convert). The Tamatama ethnic minority has been converting in large numbers because of their particular vulnerability to the Inquisition.

Of course, under Cardenal Verdugo, the Inquisition is a political organization as much as a religious one. Any threat to his sovereignty attracts scrutiny. No matter how pure you are, Cardenal Verdugo can find some evidence of heresy...or make some.



Saintly Aedicules

Vaticine saints are historical figures who demonstrated devotion to Theus above and beyond the line of duty. Before 1257, saints largely emerged from folklore: oral tradition grew to describe the Prophets' most storied followers as saints, especially martyrs for their faith or miracle-workers. The Third Prophet ruled that only a council of cardinals could canonize saints, outlawing direct adoration of specific saints as idolatry. While the difference between veneration and worship is difficult to delineate, the Vaticine Church does encourage dedicating individual shrines (called aedicules) or churches to formally canonized saints (or informally canonized saints so popular they were grandfathered in). Most major intersections in Vaticine City have a saintly aedicule in their center, always featuring impressive statuary, sometimes with a built-in fountain. If a person asks you to come see him in Vaticine City, he will usually tell you "meet me at the Aedicule of Saint whichever."

Church Politics

The Vaticine Church's formal organization is a simple pyramid of regional authority. The Hierophant of the entire Hieros is chosen from and governs the Archbishops. (Cardinals are Archbishops assigned to special councils to advise a ruler such as the High King of Castille or the Hierophant.) Each Archbishop of an Archdiocese governs ten Bishops, each Bishop of a Diocese governs ten Monsignors and each Monsignor of a Parish governs ten High Priests, each of whom governs the Priests of their own church. Practically speaking, though, the clergy's political and personal allegiances have nothing to do with geography or rank and everything to do with theological, political or networking constructs which may or may not match their regional ones.

The system of patrons and clients forms the core of this arrangement. In the Church, informal but significant networks of patrons and clients spider web across the entire Hieros. Patrons and clients link up sometime during education and maintain close correspondence even across countries, which has only become easier due to the advent of the printing press. Patrons and matrons, of course, are clients to still older patrons and matrons; and so the Hieros has a practical and social hierarchy to match its formal one.

It is a matter both convenient and inconvenient. Client networks allow reassigned priests, or those who travel to unfamiliar countries, to transition into new duties with support and safety. They can help a priest uncomfortable with her superiors, or unsure what to do with difficult flocks, to seek guidance safely. But these networks can also feature stressful jockeying for attention and favor, pressuring an introverted priest to engage in social endeavors he finds unpleasant or scary. In recent times, the rise of Objectionism and the religious wars wracking Théah have stressed this system. It is easy enough to make war on priests from another nation whom you do not know; but these conflicts often pitted patrons and clients against one another. Patrons' and clients' anxiety about their networks' safety generated much early support for the Močiutės Skara during the War of the Cross.

Unsurprisingly, when an influential patron develops political opinions, her clients grow into political parties. Particularly in the Maxentine Seminary, these kinds of ideas cause a great deal of grief for Inquisitorial agents who want to advance Cardenal Verdugo's party line. The four largest factions are the most likely to put forth a viable candidate for Hierophant. Even Cardenal Verdugo acknowledges Nature abhors the vacuum the Hierophant's death has left. He cannot leave his own post to become Hierophant himself, and his backing on the Vaticine Island itself is actually far weaker than across the water in Castille. He cannot stall the cardinals' inevitable meeting to choose a Hierophant more than another year or so. It is time for these factions to start hunting allies.

- The **Conservatives** want to see a return to the pre-Reform Church. They appreciate opulent old-school art and architecture, which they see as more authentic as well as aesthetically superior. Conservatives warn that, despite their intent, the new reforms pollute and dilute the Church's true message. Their enemies joke that rather than commissioning a beautiful statue, the Conservatives would rather see a simple, ugly icon next to a giant pile of gold.



- ✦ The **Reformers** lead the charge to reorganize and update the Church in response to the threat of Objectionism. They are behind the shift towards propaganda in Church art and music, following new styles and new orders meant to keep the sights and sounds broadly accessible but undeniably pure of sin. They have also spearheaded the sudden explosion of newly founded religious orders, which operate without tapping into the primary Vaticine budget. The Reformers' adamant opposition to traditional Castillian dances is a source of endless hilarity to other political parties, who sometimes taunt Reformers when they pass them in the hallways with capering dance steps. You would be surprised at how many undignified brawls occur in the Basilica or Seminary halls.
- ✦ The **Reconcilers** believe that schisms within the church are the greatest threat facing the modern Hieros. Within this faction, there is a great deal of debate as to which worshippers of the Prophets are beyond help or which need to be reincorporated as quickly as possible. Objectionists and followers of the First or Second Prophets are frequently cited as lost sheep who have to be brought back into the fold.
- ✦ The **Extremists** aren't called Extremists anymore because they have become the dominant political faction. Based on an odd interpretation of some ancient Numanari political theory, Extremists advocate a monolithic Church, united under a perfect and charismatic Hierophant and expressing a single, specific ideology with no place for dissent against its dogmatic totalitarianism. Cardinal Verdugo has adopted this view, with one small change: there is no Hierophant, and he takes care of that job. For now.

Ducado de Soldano

Ducado de Soldano is Castille's largest ducado, and the agricultural heartland of the country. Soldano was the last of the old Castillian kingdoms to acquiesce to Crescent interlopers, but has always resisted Crescent influence. In fact, many nobles from elsewhere in Castille, fleeing Crescents, resettled in northern Soldano or Torres until the Third Prophet. When the Blazing Blade swept in, they conquered Soldano first, even though it was farther from the Third Prophet's home base than others. Soldano's enthusiastic military support led the Prophet to ennoble many locals, such that four out of every five Soldanensa are hidalgos.

Haciendas, Castillian versions of the Vodacce *villa rustica*, appeared in Soldano and then spread throughout Castille. These expansive, self-sufficient agricultural estates produce olive oil, wine, cereals and livestock. Most have at least one workshop for a carpenter, blacksmith or similar. Farther from cities, they may also have chapels, warehouses, even mines in the highlands.

Vodacce influence on Castillian architecture persists in the *atrio*, an enclosed yard within a residential building, which features herb gardens, decorative plants, fountains of water, and open spaces for parties or duels to the death. Within this peaceful, decorated space, expatriates used to pretend they still lived at home in Vodacce.

It was on Ducado de Soldano land that Castille's army finally halted the Montaigne advance. Montaigne sustained heavy losses trying to cross the heavily defended Sophie du Lac River, then wasted still more resources chasing Castillian guerrillas into the northern forest. When l'Empereur finally sounded the retreat, his armies fled to transport ships on the western coast rather than pulling back through Ducado de Torres. Soldano has become a symbol for Castillian defense—a fact which smarts to many Torreña, who gave so much so that Soldano could have a victory.

Proximity to Eisen has made Soldano a natural haven for Castillian Objectionists. The local Grande, Diego Ruiz, has publicly declared his opposition to such Objectionists and pledged that the Inquisition has the full cooperation of his government in rooting them out. Practically speaking, he has neither the inclination nor the ability to distinguish local Objectionists from Eisen-influenced Castillians.



San Gustavo

The port of San Gustavo, whence goods from Soldano head out towards the Vaticine Island or Vodacce, is named after Gustavo al-Hamid. Legend has it this notorious, rich corsair captured the Second Prophet at sea. While walking the plank, the Prophet spoke unto Gustavo a few lines of improvised sacred poetry that so moved Gustavo he converted immediately and dove into the sea to rescue the Prophet.

Cathedral of San Gustavo

The Cathedral of San Gustavo is Castille's only row-in cathedral, though terrestrial access is also available. A pirate or sailor from the Vaticine Gulf can visit there for religious ceremonies, setting aside her predations and quarrels while she remains in the cathedral's asylum. She usually rows a ship's boat into the Cathedral to worship, then departs through the islands, moving a safe distance away to resume robbing and murdering.

To beseech the saints to preserve him at sea, a sailor whittles a small wooden votive ship in his own ship's likeness, which the cathedral's priests hang from the ceiling. The Cathedral presents the Inquisition with a frustrating paradox. Pirates are anathema to crown and miter both, yet they founded San Gustavo and built its famous cathedral, attracting pilgrims. If the Inquisition closes it to pirates, it loses its most famous draw. If the Inquisition leaves the cathedral open, it allows criminals to cavort under their noses. What to do?

The cathedral's roof hosts Inquisitor Octavio Mzabi's office. From this vantage point, the Dark Inquisitor can look out over the city, but no one on the ground can see him. Since San Gustavo is the terminus of many routes for moving herds across Castille and has an excellent harbor full of colorful characters, it has a lot of traffic, which suits him well: when he send a courier to other Dark Inquisitors, she is hard to find amidst the bustling crowds.

The Mesta

In Castille and its colonies, a *cofradía* is a social club of lay Vaticines who usually pursue some similar craft—something between a guild and a Vaticine religious order. The Mesta, a powerful *cofradía* of ranchers, is headquartered in San Gustavo. They treat not only with the Castillian government, but also with foreign governments; their clever negotiations with Eisen, Montaigne and Vodacce allowed Castillian ranchers to move herds along Soldano's roads even during wartime.

Almost everyone in and around Soldano is some kind of noble, most with too much honor and not enough money. The farmlands around Soldano have the most fertile soil in Castille, though they require extensive irrigation. Since war despoiled Ducado de Torres, the vineyards north of Soldano have become Castille's most productive.

Hamid's Prayer

The islands off the shore of San Gustavo are lousy with pirate hideouts and fortresses, the oldest of which belongs to the Brotherhood of the Coast. The island called Hamid's Prayer, rocky and forbidding, lies exactly halfway between San Gustavo and Five Sails by sea. Doctor Ainhoa Extandi, a galeno who joined the Brotherhood after the War of the Cross to escape Inquisitorial persecution, runs Hamid's Prayer.

A local who lost a limb sometimes sticks it out without a prosthetic in hopes that the genius surgeon might graft him a new limb. The island also operates a kind of "ship exchange": a local pirate can temporarily "trade" his galley for longer-range galleons if he needs to make a long journey for some reason, and a foreigner in a tall ship can do the same if she has local business for which a galley would be more convenient. Unfortunately for the Brotherhood, their secret island is no longer a secret; the Castillian and Vodacce governments both know exactly where Hamid's Prayer is. As with Barcino in Ducado de Torres, each government tries to bait the other into making the first move to clear out the malcontents (but neither wants to commit any resources to the endeavor).





Ducado de Aldana

Aldana's bountiful coastline and warm weather made it Castille's first settled region. In 1257, the Third Prophet installed the northwestern *Casa de Aldana* to replace the Crescent-friendly former Grandes. Abounding in open terrain and good harbors, Aldana is the capital of the Castillian equestrian tradition and the most economically stable in a financially troubled country. Horses, decorated horse-drawn *calesas* and fine leather saddles from Aldana used to be in great demand, back when more Castillians had the money for that kind of transportation. These days, the *calesas* are not so colorful anymore, since they are often full of Inquisitors.

In addition to Castillians, Crescents and Ifrians, Tamatama nomads are more populous in Ducado de Aldana than in other regions. The Tamatama originated as a caste of traveling entertainers on a subcontinent far to Théah's southeast, spreading across Crescent territory and into Théah over the course of centuries. They make a reliable living traveling from festival to festival and noble court to noble court, learning local songs and dances before performing them at their next stop.

San Cristóbal

San Cristóbal is one of Castille's oldest cities. When the Crescent Empire took it over early in its conquest of Castille, it was already a bustling fishing village with a picturesque harbor, the River Sandoval heading into the interior and plenty of good eating and quality farmland. It was the perfect place for a capital.

The trouble is that it is not the most defensible of locations. With wide, open plains and a large natural harbor, holding off invaders had always been a problem for the fishing village. The use of short stone walls to cover archers and cavalry units proved effective for most purposes, as well as the use of strategically placed battlements around the harbor with cannons inside. Only coordinated land and water attacks have any chance of taking the city, leading to the majority of Castille's fleet calling San Cristóbal's harbor their home.

With the royal palace inside, the place is a bustling hub of both political and social activity. Nobles of all stripes, both landed and not, make their home there, hoping to gain royal favor.

El Alcázar

Until a year ago, Good King Sandoval reigned from within el Alcázar, a soaring structure of Crescent design, replete with domes, towers and columns. The Amazigh architect Abd al-Majid al-Mzabi, ancestor of Inquisitor Octavio Mzabi, originally named it "al-Qasr" after the castrum on which he built it. Now called simply "el Alcázar," it underwent incessant renovation throughout the Crescent period, the fortifications becoming more ornate and high-tech with every century, but has been frozen in time since 1257.

The palace was built with a relatively open plan, the better to allow a relatively small number of guards to survey the whole building and easily see threats coming. There aren't many corners to hide behind,



and quiet sounds echo through the grand halls. While the King was in residence, an endless series of academic lecturers and cultural performers cycled through the Palace. Every night brought something new—ballet dancers from Vodacce and Montaigne, the early pioneers of that art form, performed alongside Vesten skalds. Lecturers in political philosophy come from as far away as Cathay.

The sudden disappearance of King Sandoval, his court and his wake of nosy Inquisitors has created a convenient power vacuum in San Cristóbal and, therefore, Ducado de Aldana in general. The local high-society scene has no desire whatsoever to follow the boy king to Vaticine City, and many of the ballet dancers and guest lecturers have not taken San Cristóbal off their itineraries in spite of the absent King.

The palace, now devoid of its royal, has exploded as a social locus, with people vying for power and control over the city's social scene. The castle now finds itself hosting less than reputable characters, alongside the old crowd of nobles, with lots of title and little holdings. Crime bosses, disgraced expatriates and merchants from the Nahuacan Alliance and Amazigh who may or may not be surveying the place in anticipation of a hostile takeover have flooded into el Alcázar, like suitors into the home of a Numanari king returned too late from war. The dinner parties and balls have gotten far less polite and far more interesting.

El Alcázar's campus also hosts Castille's most exclusive military academy and stables, as the Aldana countryside is famous in all of Castille for horse husbandry and horsemanship. The Aldana fencing school headquartered here bases its dance-like motions not on humans, but on the dancing gait of Aldanensa horses, from whose backs many local swordmasters prefer to fight.

Basílica of Matamoros

When the Third Prophet reconquered San Cristóbal, his rhetoric frequently mentioned plans to wreck the Imperial Mosque in San Cristóbal. But when the conquering army swept into San Cristóbal and saw the Mosque, they halted—as it was the most beautiful building they had ever seen. The geometry of stones and bricks set into its walls spider webbed across in a hypnotic pattern. Marble columns were inlaid with golden calligraphy spiraling down around them like

vines climbing a tree. Even the shapes of the windows were perfect, patterned after leaves, aligned where the sun gleaming through them would highlight focal points in the art along the floors and walls. In the end, the army harmed not a single brick of the Mosque; instead, they reconsecrated the whole structure to the Vaticine Church as the Basílica of Matamoros.

The Basílica is beautiful, the site where citizens of every class go to worship. Now that most of the Inquisition has retreated to Vaticine City with the King, a skeleton crew of the devout minds the rectory—all of whom just happen to be schoolmates of Inquisitor Octavio Mzabi, making the Basílica of Matamoros the Inquisitio Aquila's only real storefront.

So far Mzabi and his Dark Inquisitors have just been collating information there and figuring out how to convince the locals they are the scary Inquisitors and not the sympathetic do-gooders they truly are. Paradoxically, the Basílica is still—and was, even during Inquisitor Loyola's tenure—an important pilgrimage site for followers of the Second Prophet. Many Eclipses come here to worship quietly and secretly amidst the bustle and activity of a major Vaticine cathedral.

The Market

San Cristóbal's market square is vast, occupying an enormous forum, built by the Crescent Empire when it took over the city. Here, you can get cheap, low quality everything. Crime abounds, guards are few and the stalls and booths are all temporary—if you want to get the upscale version of something you see in the market, you generally have to indicate your interest to the merchant and then meet him at a more permanent location where the good stuff hides. Street performers appear in droves in the avenues of the market square, drawing large crowds...and lots of pickpockets, swindlers, forgers and fences, often forming guilds large enough to pay off the city guard.

The buildings ringing the square include a guard station (large, but not nearly large enough for the district), various expensive restaurants (each with a rotating cast of dancers and musicians), taverns, stores and dueling schools. All the major dueling styles are represented here as well as a number of lesser-known ones. Fencing matches in public view are common, with each day bringing a new series of duels, shifting allegiances and rivalries.



Ducado de Torres

Bordering Montaigne to the west, Eisen to the north and el Ducado de Soldano to the southeast, the northwestern region (once called Bagaudak until about forty years ago) features high mountains on the Montaigne border and the coast near San Juan, with light forest everywhere else. The locals were shepherds, ranchers, vintners, fishers and foresters, with close cultural ties to Montaigne. But the War of the Cross and the Montaigne invasion devastated the region. Mountain citadels, the origin of the name "Torres," replaced picturesque highland villages, hastily constructed and just as hastily cast down. The sleepy countryside became battlefields salted with the blood of people forced to fight whether they wanted to or not. Divided loyalties tore families apart as some rushed to defend Castille and others refused to fight Montaigne soldiers they considered to be their own blood. The once-large family of the Grande de Torres in particular has been decimated. Many of their noble sons and daughters launched into combat before they were ready, willing or able.

Ducado de Torres proves particularly hospitable to society's personae non gratae. Théans without the means to book passage to Aragosta or Fort Freedom can venture into the warzone that is Ducado de Torres, in order to avoid whomever is looking for them. There, they become petty warlords, ruling over ruined towers. Barcino is the best known and best reputed of these citadels, but many others dot the war-torn wastelands.

Barcino

The Third Prophet's northern allies built the mountain fortress of Barcino at the beginning of the Moonshadow War as a stronghold to which they could fall back in case of retreat. It saw a little action during the War, but the Crescent Empire generally left it alone, rightly wary of attacking a fortified location in the mountains with a mostly-mounted army. Overlooking a fertile valley nestled among the peaks southeast of Altamira, Barcino was mostly abandoned after hostilities ceased. Too remote to attract nobles besides the family which historically lived there, it was forgotten by all except that family and the farmers and shepherds working the valley, who were both Castillian (Torreño) and Montaigne.

Independence

When the War of the Cross began, no one was more disturbed than the people of the mountains which divide Montaigne and Castille. Most of the families had mixed heritage between the two countries, speaking both languages as well as a distinctive local dialect.

The locals avoided getting involved, desperately trying (and frequently failing) to keep their homes and fields safe from marauding armies, which they saw as easy sources of food or shelter, outlets for their aggression or anything else they needed. The War of the Cross' end was a glimmer of hope at the end of thirty years of privation...and then Montaigne and Castille went to war yet again.

L'Empereur ordered Marshal Eulàlia Madariaga to lead an expeditionary force into the mountains, which she knew well from having grown up there during the War of the Cross, and secure the area for Montaigne. She agreed, so long as she could handpick a force of locals.

Marshal Madariaga and her force marched to a largely empty Barcino, secured the location and then announced, to Montaigne's shock and horror, their defection from the Montaigne army. But not to Castille. No, they declared Barcino an independent city-state. Marshal Madariaga wrote an impassioned open letter to l'Empereur declaring his war a cruel abomination that ignored the feelings, histories and safety of the border region's mixed families. Barcino would remain a safe haven for anyone who hated the war until a force dislodged her and her troops.

The letter also outlined all possible avenues of attack on Barcino's fortifications, making it clear that any Castillian or Montaigne army attempting to besiege Barcino would indeed win, but only after a long and painful siege demanding more resources than Marshal Madariaga's tiny force was worth. Rumor has it l'Empereur went into a week-long temper tantrum after getting the letter, which was fine because his actual military officers got to assume direct control during that period and actually make some progress in conquering Ducado de Torres.



Work with the ATC

Barcino gets financial and material support from, of all places, the Atabean Trading Company. When George Rourke, Company President, read Marshal Madariaga's declaration of independence from the Montaigne and Castillian crowns, he identified Barcino as a symbol of his own anti-government philosophy which he could co-opt to disseminate his own ideas.

The Company sent agents up the Barcino River into the highlands, exploring the mountains until they found a way into Barcino. They now operate a secret tunnel route from the shore to the city through which they move food, water and Company-branded supplies into Barcino. If you attack Barcino and you get shot with an arrow, you can bet the arrowhead has the Company logo stamped on it.

Political Asylum

Barcino has attracted political asylum-seekers throughout the known world. Eclipses, Objectionists, Church-supporting Montaigne, anti-revolutionary Numanari and agitators from the pirate nations who made too many enemies are all here in small numbers. There is even a printing press, which churns out seditious broadsheets the Atabean Trading Company gleefully scatters throughout Théah. General Madariaga would disagree with many of their causes if you pressed her; but given Barcino's mission, she will not turn them away.

When foreign governments determine a person of interest has hidden in Barcino, they cannot exactly attack them directly. Eisen, Castille and Montaigne are all geographically close enough to besiege Barcino, but each one hopes one of the other two loses patience and commits the resources first.

Many governments, infuriated at the treason and embarrassment Barcino represents, have started going after the families of those holed up in Barcino. General Madariaga's family had to disperse from their ancestral homeland near Altamira as Montaigne kill-teams hunted them down.

Other families might not even know they have a relative in Barcino. The city-state's inhabitants now need contact and help from the outside world in order to keep their loved ones safe far away from its walls. You would be surprised how many Heroes have relatives they didn't know about in Barcino.

The City and the Land

Very little of the land surrounding Barcino is arable, but that little land is spectacularly productive. Soon after explorers brought tobacco back from the New World, the locals built elaborate irrigation systems and planted tobacco. Trading it for food got Barcino more to eat than trying to raise crops themselves. Nowadays, all that tobacco goes to the Atabean Trading Company in exchange for food. Sheep farming is also an important occupation here, as it is in much of the surrounding countryside. Locals also raise cattle and goats.

The caves, tunnels and subterranean streams underneath and around Barcino were not originally connected into a vast subterranean network, but the Syrneath evidently changed that. They sank tunnels and galleries deep into the mountains, shafts descending deep into zones that look like abandoned mines sitting on top of filled-in deep holes. The reinforced metal and ceramic roof structures atop these tunnels, which seem unnecessary given the thick stone above them, have led explorers to speculate that these tunnels' purpose was not originally transport so much as shelter. But what were the Syrneath afraid of that could hurt them even through hundreds of meters of stone?

The Xana Cult

If anyone knew the answer, it would have been the Xana Cult of Barcino. In the midst of the War of the Cross, the Inquisition received word that a diabolical cult met regularly in these tunnels, worshipping a figure variously described as a devil, a deity or a saint, with magical influence over weather and fertility. The most common Torreño term for her was "xana."

A midnight raid allowed the Inquisition to trap hundreds of people inside. Many died fighting, some with actual sorcerous (or perhaps alchemical) means. The Church never found the alleged xana, though the Inquisitor leading the raid claimed to see a woman disappear into an ancient cave painting. This began of a witch hunt throughout Ducado de Torres that claimed seven thousand lives. The incident is still the centerpiece of any argument over whether Castillian folk magic is pure wickedness or a positive part of Castillian culture. Barcino's flag now features the painting into which the mystery woman disappeared.



Ducado de Zepeda

At a glance, Zepeda is not much to look at. The picturesque islands in the northeast would be lovely places to build sumptuous estates or fish were they not swarming with pirate galleys.

The mountains in the heartland are forbidding and barren. The Vagabundo Swamps in the south were actually named not for the masked vigilante, but for the traveling riverboat folk who pole from one end to the other keeping bees and catching fish, snails, shellfish and frogs—though the depths of the swamp are rumored to hide El Vagabundo about as often as Sandoval Forest.

Yet these mountains are the jewel in Castille's crown. Some of Théah's finest iron short of drachen-eisen comes from these highlands. Zepeda is one of the most modern and technologically advanced of the ducados, with Rioja and the mountains nearby rumored to be lousy with secret Invisible College laboratories. A Zepedana engineer can find work anywhere in Castille, renowned for her work ethic, forthright sense of humor and knack for jury-rigging ingenious devices.

Rioja

Rioja is a cliff top city full of clockwork, glass and brass. It features some of Théah's tallest buildings, constructed during the Church's technological heyday in the early thirteenth century. Its advanced machinery and engineering libraries now lie dormant, controlled by the Inquisition.

Verdugo does not want anyone using the machines, but is afraid to destroy them in case he needs to turn them on a besieging force again. However, his Inquisitors have not been able to stop the steady disappearance of a few of the smaller devices each month, or the mysterious re-activation of certain large public machines, such as clocks, for short and unexpected periods of time. Are there ghosts in the machines? Or is the Invisible College somehow evading their notice?



University of Rioja

Originally founded as a Yachidi *yeshiva*, the University of Rioja was one of Castille's first universities. It doesn't really have a single campus; its ivory towers are scattered throughout Rioja, originally connected by a system of cable cars. Its science and engineering programs were the envy of the entire Castillian educational system. But when the Inquisition replaced its headmaster, everyone in the hard sciences was abruptly and unceremoniously dismissed. Now, Verdugo-approved theology, philosophy and criminal justice classes dominate the university. The old hard science departments still exist, but they now offer classes in secret in crowded pubs and dusty basements, pretending to be parties, book clubs or calisthenics classes should the Inquisition show up. The Invisible College is not the only invisible college in town.

Every explorer dreams of finding the secret laboratory of Professor Artemio Durante de Bessarion, the half-Castillian, half-Vodacce inventor responsible for many splendid devices in Rioja and Vaticine City. An angry mob drove Professor Durante from his tenured seat at the Royal University of Rioja because they tired of his contraptions exploding near them all the time. He built his new laboratory into a half-flooded cave at the base of a seaside cliff just north of town, but it is only visible or accessible at low tide. Inside are dazzling wonders guarded by automata with crossbows: steam-powered galleys, advanced water purification systems and submersible ships and machines.

Guild Houses

As befits a city with the most impressive craftwork in Castille, the *cofradías* each have important Guild Houses here. The best-known, the Cofradía of Bladesmiths, specializes in fine folding single-edged knives better suited to Rioja's narrow streets and close quarters than the heavier blades favored in the rest of Castille. A Castillian with no other valuables to his name may still carry a high-quality folding *navaja* from the armories here. Once a year, for the Feast of Saint Arabella of Rioja, each *cofradía* puts together a parade float that proceeds down Main Street (the only level street in the entire town). The guild with the best float receives, for the duration of the year, a special appointment to create items for El Concilio de la Razón.

Odiseo (Ducado de Gallegos)

The march of history brought most of Castille closer together with every passing era; but the southern peninsula of Odiseo just grows stranger and stranger. The Castillian crown has always coveted the revenue and resources from Odiseo's dense highland forests and extensive coastline replete with natural harbors. While the other kingdoms of Castille have put aside their differences, subordinating their individual characters in the greater Castillian identity, Odiseo remains an outlier. Welcome to the land where the only natives are foreigners.

Odiseo's seafaring tradition is Théah's most robust. The country is mostly coastline, and the inland hills are densely forested with diverse species of chestnut, oak and pine. Odiseo has always been at the forefront of nautical technology: as soon as anyone built any kind of ship anywhere else, some damn fool Odisean started thinking about how he could get his own. The port cities in Odiseo (which is all of them) abound in foreign goods and foreign faces; if you brave the pickpockets and the press of the crowd, you can find Cathayan silk, Nahuacan feather work and Khemetic cotton, along with some pretty great stories about how they got here.

The power struggles that have washed over Castille have affected Odiseo somewhat differently. While the other four Kingdoms of Castille resisted alliance with the Crescent Empire, King Fúlvio V of Odiseo married an Amazigh princess and invited her to rule alongside him. His nation did not mind, and Princess Tajeddigt was good at her job. She and her successors built up enough goodwill that when the Third Prophet marched into Odiseo, the locals were resistant—the Prophet ordered them to bring out anyone who did not believe in him, but they refused. The Prophet stormed home, empty-handed.

World travel has made the Odisean into an adaptable and mannerly person; yet his nation-within-a-nation has always existed on the edge of independence, even in the periods of greatest Castillian unity. Northern Castille's greater military might and greater supply of iron ore would damn Odiseo in any kind of land war—at least, now that the ducado has no Crescent support. During the War of the Cross, the



Rex Castilium increased taxes and commandeered ships for an Armada, which Odiseo advised against. A new independence movement caught fire in Odiseo, one which advocated reaching out to Ifrian powers for help against a Castillian army, busy in the far north.

Officially, Odiseo's seat of government is Lisso, on the northern coast, a city that covers a pair of peninsulas, which point towards Ducado de Aldana's southern shore. The ineffectual Governor Carlos Pérez rules here, though few Odiseans seem to have noticed. To Odiseans, the real capital is San Felipe.

Odiseo's Grande, Uxía Serafin, no longer has political power like the other Grandes. When the Odisean independence movement gained enough traction to scare the late King Aldana, he appointed Governor Carlos Pérez to rule Odiseo. Mostly, everyone ignores him, and Serafin does as she pleases in San Felipe. With Cardenal Verdugo centralizing more power around his Inquisition, she has become Castille's most powerful regional leader. A noted wit and polyglot whose letters and essays appear in Katabanic, Castillian, Odisean and occasionally even Numanari, she entertains a bevy of eager suitors from all corners of the Widow's Sea, from Numanari senators to Vendel financiers. If you are a gambler, the odds right now favor the highborn Amazigh adventurer Ihsan al-Ibādi, the rumored heir to a notable emirate in North Ifri. Such a match would have significant implications for Odiseo's relationship with North Ifri and Castille.

San Felipe

The southernmost point of Castille is San Felipe. When the Numanari Empire collapsed, Odiseo was an independent nation, speaking its own language, resisting the drive to unify all Castille. When the Castillian king invaded, Odiseo's comparative lack of mining resources made resisting the Castillian military a difficult prospect. So, Odiseo came under the heel of the Castillian throne.

San Felipe is once again a hotbed of dissent, trouble and headaches for the Inquisition. Castillians who need to get out of Castille for politically pressing reasons probably have to exit through San Felipe. The Inquisition has its share of Inquisitors there—but its job is nigh-impossible, since the entire population of

San Felipe seems united in the pastime of making Inquisitors' lives as difficult as possible.

For every reason, the Inquisition views Odisean independence as a catastrophic threat to its goals and its control over Castille. An independent Odiseo would only aggravate the Inquisition's difficulties on the peninsula. The Prophet's Sword is tough, but it is more police than army; and since Cardenal Verdugo betrayed the tercios, Castille lacks the military threat that used to keep Odiseo in line. Its only reprieve comes from the fact that the Odisean independence movement lacks central leadership. It is a grassroots front made of opinionated people without anyone to direct their energy. The Grande comes close, but at least until she finds a suitable candidate for a husband, she is tied up managing foreign affairs. So, the Inquisition cannot take out the leadership with a surgical strike, because there isn't any...but the movement stagnates nonetheless.

Explorer's Society Chapterhouse

While Leandra Souza founded the Explorer's Society in Lisso, the chapterhouse here in San Felipe is actually larger and busier. It overlooks the harbor and sits atop a well-appointed museum, which displays some of the Society's most impressive relics (replicas, of course, since the real things hide in reliquaries accessible only to Explorers). Leandra's son Nelinho is in charge here, though he frequently travels to Lisso to visit his mother, still active in the Society's local affairs at age 92. Upstairs, the Society has meeting rooms, hotel rooms common and luxurious, and a combination bar and library. Technically, they forbid drinking near the really good stuff, but Explorers tend to develop a talent for drinking carefully and responsibly around expensive tomes.

Restaurante Salazar

The Restaurante Salazar is the real seat of government in Odiseo. Since its founding hundreds of years ago, the place has never stopped serving food and drink; not even for a moment. When war washed over San Felipe, the Restaurante kept operating, even if that meant mostly feeding soldiers on their way through. The Restaurante occupies all four corners at a major intersection between the port and the marketplace, with skyways connecting the individual buildings.



There, amidst the crowds, Grande Uxía Serafin meets with her wide-ranging spies, entertains foreign diplomats and numerous suitors. The social climbing and political maneuvering, which would normally happen in the ducal palace's ballrooms, happens at the bar or amidst the whirling circles on the dance floor. As a result, a visiting noble must brave something his normal life might never face him with: ordinary people. The King's officers keep trying to force their way in to figure out what the Gran Duquesa is plotting, but they can never get a reservation and a mob of random drunks just happens to crash into them every time they try to get in line for the door.

San Felipe Harbor

San Felipe Harbor is one of the largest and most active in Théah. The Odiseans have always been a seafaring people, and no part of Odiseo exemplifies that history better than San Felipe Harbor. Here, a giant shipyard, one of the largest on the continent, employs a full third of San Felipe's population—more if you count the shops, taverns, doctors' offices and other businesses, which serve the shipyard and the harbor exclusively. In addition to building new ships, San Felipe has the distinction of being the cheapest place in all Théah to get repairs done. The draw of cheap repairs brings many a sea captain well out of his way to get fixed up in San Felipe, generating a great deal of revenue for the city as the ship's crew kills time and wastes money in the tourist attractions onshore.

In addition to the grand, modern sailing vessels that have become popular throughout most of Théah, San Felipe still hosts many galleys. Based on a design now hundreds of years old, these smaller craft, rising lower out of the water and inappropriate for deep-sea travel, are the favored transport of Numa, the Crescent and many North Ifrians who primarily travel around the Numanari Approach. They move on oar power, occasionally unfurling sails for a burst of speed. While a modern sailing ship outclasses a galley, there are a lot of old, cheap galleys sitting around. Galleys are also remarkably useful multipurpose ships: they can fire cannon at enemy craft, deliver a boarding party or move troops or cargo easily amongst the shorelines and islands of the Numanari Approach.

The Flower Quarter

The Flower Quarter houses an expatriate community from the New World, primarily Rahuri and Nahuaca. Gonzalo "Lalo" Terrazas, a Nahuacan merchant, administers it. An outer wall built in the Nahuacan style surrounds this sector of the city. The busiest area of the Flower Quarter is the ball court, as large as one from a major city in the Nahuacan Alliance or Tzak K'an. The local Òllamaztli team, the Jaguars, is the winningest team in Théah, but some other Castillian teams are quickly catching up. On nights when they do not play, the court hosts markets, dances or wrestling matches. The Flower Quarter is one of the only places in Théah with authentic Nahuacan food, including insects lovingly and meticulously husbanded by chefs who brought them across the sea. The Nahuaca people have also eked out a niche for themselves as lawyers. After the rigor of law school in the Nahuacan Alliance, many find learning Castillian law a small price to pay for the relative lack of competition in Théah.

Lalo frequently journeys out through Théah from his sumptuous home in the Flower Quarter, visiting foreign cities as far away as Kirk and Iskandar. Few Théans suspect Lalo has been sending coded missives back to the Nahuacan leadership via unsuspecting trading vessels.

Dueling Schools

San Felipe hosts many Théan dueling schools and a couple from the New World and Ifri. It is the modern home of Siqueira, a martial art developed (according to legend) by Odisean shepherds who sought to fight off wolves and robbers. Siqueira teaches the use of clubs, canes, quarterstaves and other cudgels, taking advantage of a stick's versatility and range to fight off multiple enemy fighters. A Siqueira duelist is expected to practice standing, walking, seated in a chair, seated on the ground and even lying supine while attacks rain down on her from multiple sources.

The Gallegos fencing school also has an outpost here, as do two styles from the New World. The elderly Mestre Gavião, who spends most of his time in the Restaurante Salazar, is the only Jogo de Dentro—a fighting style which fuses combat and dance—teacher in Théah. Bring him a drink of his favorite *ginjinha*, and he might show you a thing or two.



Alquimia

The Castellians—mainly thanks to the efforts of the Vaticine Church—are unique in Théah by not having any tradition of Sorcery. Instead, endless generations of their most brilliant minds have dedicated their lives to the pursuit and study of various other subjects, from anthropology to medicine, always producing the most radical and innovative advances in their field.

There is a secret knowledge, though, once considered simply inappropriate, but now could cost your life if the Inquisition even suspects you are one of its followers. Even though its marvelous effects can be compared to Sorcery, it does not require any supernatural quality to be performed. On the contrary, Alquimia (alchemy) is the child of reason, equal parts philosophy and practical experimentation.

Although dangerous to its practitioners, the Great Art is not only still explored today, but thrives. In the shadows of Castille, a closed, underground network of *Boticarios* (practitioners of Alquimia) protects each other and continues with this ancient tradition. They connect mentors with prospective apprentices and pass down a thousands-year-old knowledge to worthy Castellians.

The basis of Alquimia is the idea of perfection. Although Boticarios explain the notion differently throughout the millennia, the basic concept is that every part of reality is both ordered and interconnected, from its rawest materials to its most elaborated combinations in one continuous flow of existence. In this sense, a Boticario carefully ponders different reactions that allows her to transform one basic substance into a more complex version, effectively deciphering the unseen connection between an imperfect form and its corresponding perfected version.

The fundamental theoretical framework for this experimentation is the understanding that all things in reality are formed, primarily, by the combination of four qualities—hotness, coldness, dryness and moistness—corresponding to the four elements most easily observable in reality—fire, air, earth and water. These terrestrial qualities are, in turn, balanced by the heavenly *aether*, a substance that exists only in a minor quantity in Théah, but fulfills an essential role in major alchemical reactions.

THE SACRED SCIENCE

Despite having the most advanced experimental procedures of all sciences, what really distinguishes Alquimia from the other studies is its mystical dimension. Whereas archæology can help you connect with other cultures, past and present, and engineering can provide you with a practical orientation to problem solving, Alquimia is—at its core—an all-encompassing worldview with practical applications.

This means that even though a Boticario's particular goal may seem trivial or mainly materialistic, the reality behind it entails a transformation that affects her as much as the substance involved. In this sense, Alquimia's quest for perfection is both an objective, physical goal and a transcendental one. In other words, perfection is to be found both from without and from within.

This aspect of Alquimia grew out of Castille's relationship to the Vaticine Church. A Boticario tends to develop an increasingly religious approach to her studies, to the point that many alchemical treatises clearly state the study's main goal is to clear a path to Theus. She hopes to develop a science that allows people to understand the world, Theus and herself at the same time.

How It Works

Though not a Sorcery in the same way as others (and a Boticario is not considered a Sorcerer in regards to in-game effects), Alquimia is purchased through the Sorcery Advantage (**CORE RULEBOOK**, page 150). Each time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, you gain access to one of the five *Juvenilia*. Additionally, each level of Alquimia after the first improves the *laboratorium*, allowing you to bypass requirements to create specific *Juvenilia*. You choose a single item or concoction from a *Juvenilia* your Hero knows that she can create in her *laboratorium* without any requirements.

The Laboratorium

All (often dangerous) Alquimia experiments must be undertaken in a safe, controlled environment. As a result, a Boticario possess a laboratorium, a carefully lit, well-ventilated underground facility where he can conduct his research away from probing eyes. These places usually include expensive, modified equipment, hard-to-acquire metals and other chemical substances, as well as voluminous, hand-written and mostly ciphered tomes where a Boticarios can record his inquiries and results.

To the uninitiated, a laboratorium may appear disorganized and messy. Of course, these apparently chaotic, senseless arrangements are purposefully so. This is yet another layer of secrecy that a Boticario uses, not only to protect his work, but to ensure that untrained eyes cannot discern the mysteries of his sacred science.

The Opera

The fruits of hundreds of years of study and experimentation are the *Opera*, the “Works” that distinguish Alquimia as the crown achievement of scientific explorations. These are the most secretly guarded mysteries of The Order, a group of Boticarios who oversee the initiation and training of new apprentices. As such, the uninitiated cannot duplicate these mysteries except under very special circumstances. But, what are they?

It depends on each Boticario.

Alquimia is, above all, a *personal* endeavor. Although a Boticario belongs to an Order and follows both a common philosophy and a method, his own findings are profoundly individual. Whereas one Boticario may be obsessed with the secret to immortality, another may try as many combinations as he can to turn lead into gold.

The result of this highly idiosyncratic science is that one can only talk about the Opera in general terms—the Juvenilia (minor work) and the *Magnum Opus* (major work).

Juvenilia

Juvenilia, or “minor works,” are frequently temporary effects that last only for a short time (usually a Round or Scene). Each effect requires the user to spend a Raise during an Action Sequence or a Dramatic Sequence to activate.

Creating an alchemical item requires the expenditure of a Hero Point and the use of a laboratorium. Certain effects may call for one or more requirements, determined by the Game Master. A Boticario may try to create an effect from Juvenilia he is not trained in, but doing so requires an additional requirement to prepare correctly. Most requirements can be accomplished as a Risk or a Story Step.

The following is a list of common requirements. Unless explicitly stated, each requirement can only be called for once in any given preparation.

- ♦ A rare, hard-to-come-by component. *Can be chosen more than once.*
- ♦ The help of an assistant that you have to hire. *Can be chosen more than once.*
- ♦ A vast amount of raw materials (effectively costs 1 Wealth Point).
- ♦ Endangering you and your assistant(s).
- ♦ The guide of a mentor.
- ♦ Acquiring a specific Alquimia treatise on the matter.
- ♦ Several failed attempts before it works (effectively increasing the time required to complete the compound to the next level: minutes > hours > days > weeks). *Can be chosen more than once.*
- ♦ A process that creates an unstable compound (effectively requiring an extra Raise in order to function as intended).

A Boticario may store two alchemical items in his laboratory for each time he has purchased the Sorcery Advantage. He can carry one alchemical item on his person for each time he has purchased the Sorcery Advantage. If a Boticario carries more items, the GM can spend 1 Danger Point to create an appropriate inconvenience, such as the alchemical compounds exploding or one activating in an untimely fashion.



Wai Dan

The “External Elixir” Juvenilia focuses mainly on the purification of one’s spirit and body. This is achieved through the consumption and use of various concoctions known as elixirs made from substances found outside the body, each of which has a different purpose.

Example elixirs include:

- **Longevity.** Drinking this elixir allows you to withstand damage that would kill lesser people. Until the end of the Scene, you are no longer Helpless when you have 4 Dramatic Wounds. Instead, when you have four Dramatic Wounds, any Villain who takes a Risk against you gains 3 Bonus Dice (rather than 2). You gain an additional tier of Wounds. When you have taken your fifth Dramatic Wound, you become Helpless. Preparing this elixir takes 1 Requirement.
- **Memory.** Drinking this elixir allows you to enhance your memory greatly. For a Scene, you remember everything you see and hear with perfect detail, allowing you to memorize documents, faces and conversations in the blink of an eye. Preparing this elixir takes 1 Requirement.
- **Intelligence.** Drinking this elixir allows you to unlock the most powerful mind processes. You gain 1 Rank in Wits for a Scene. Preparing this elixir takes 2 Requirements.
- **Youthfulness.** Drinking this elixir allows you to restore the perfect adaptability of days gone by—or still to come. You can immediately change your Approach without penalty. Preparing this elixir takes 1 Requirement.
- **Excellence of luster.** Drinking this elixir allows you to display your inner beauty for everyone to see. You gain the Fascinate Advantage for a Scene, without requiring a Hero Point to activate it.

Rasāyana

The “Path of Essence” Juvenilia focuses mainly on the preparation of essential salts, alloys, inks and powders, generally designated as “compounds.”

Example compounds include:

- **Light without Heat Salt.** You prepare a compound that produces enough light to illuminate a room for a Scene without any combustion and/or heat.
- **Unbreakable alloy.** You prepare a compound that transforms even the most base metal into an unbreakable material. One inorganic object becomes effectively unbreakable for the rest of the Scene unless under special—i.e., Sorcery-related—circumstances. Preparing this compound takes 1 Requirement.
- **Soporific Ink.** You prepare a special ink that puts a victim under a powerful, unnaturally deep sleep if she comes in contact with the ink. When a target comes into contact with the ink, she becomes Helpless for one scene, or until some outside circumstance awakens her (such as another character vigorously shaking her, suffering Wounds, an explosion, etc.). Preparing this compound takes 2 Requirements.
- **Anesthetic Powder.** You prepare a compound that makes the target immune to all physical pain. Until the end of the Scene, the character can spend a Hero Point to ignore all negative effects from Dramatic Wounds—the Villain does not gain Bonus Dice if you have 2 Dramatic Wounds, and you do not become Helpless at 4 Dramatic Wounds. Preparing this compound takes 1 Requirement.
- **Essential Lodestone Salt.** You prepare a compound that, when poured in a zone, creates a magnetic field that functions as a force field, deflecting any foreign object and force for 1 Round. Anyone attempting to fire a projectile at the user of essential lodestone salt must spend an additional Raise to overcome the magnetic field.



Chymistry

This Juvenilia includes all studies focused in analyzing, synthesizing, transforming and producing material substances.

These preparations include, but are not limited to:

- **Boticario's Cement.** This preparation is able to join two otherwise disparate objects. Breaking this union costs an additional Raise beyond what it would cost if it used an ordinary glue. Usually, this means that breaking the bond requires 2 Raises, rather than 1.
- **Light as a Feather.** This preparation reduces an inorganic object's weight by half, while still preserving its other properties. This makes it easier to carry (carrying the object requires no additional Raises), but worsens its accuracy (throwing the object costs an additional Raise).
- **Water to Ice.** This preparation crystallizes up to 1,000 cubic feet of water in 1 Round until a proper solvent is applied to the frozen water. Preparing this substance takes 1 Requirement.
- **Positive Universal Solvent.** This preparation can dissolve living organisms, severely damaging them. Any organic material that comes into contact with it (through touch, ingestion or splash) suffers 1 Wound each Action spent in contact. A character who has this solvent thrown onto him can spend one Action to remove the effect. Preparing this substance takes 1 Requirement.
- **True Lead.** This preparation makes any one inorganic object immune to any Sorcery-related effects for a Scene, as lead efficiently hampers the flow of magical energies.

Spagyrics

Spagyrics is one of the most recent developments in Alquimia and it focuses on herbal medicines produced by alchemical procedures. These procedures involve fermentation, distillation and the extraction of mineral components from different plants, each of them specifically suited to treat a particular disease.

Some extracts include:

- **Amaranth.** This extract is used to treat blood diseases, as well as to stop hemorrhages. The target regains 1 Dramatic Wound after drinking the extract and spending 1 Hero Point.
- **Betony.** This extract imbues whomever drinks it with an unnatural strength. The target gains 1 Rank in Brawn for a Scene. Preparing this extract takes 2 Requirements.
- **Celandine.** This extract makes anyone who drinks it unable to fight or resort to violence. Until the end of the Scene, the target is under Pressure to perform any aggressive actions, such as causing Wounds to another character.
- **Euphorbia.** This extract grants its drinker the boldness and determination of the Heroes of old. For a Scene, the character who drinks this extract is immune to Fear, and any Action using an Intimidate Approach against this character requires 2 Raises to succeed. Preparing this extract takes 1 Requirement.
- **Sunflower.** This extract affects the target's sense of judgment, making her unable to conceal her true intentions and forcing her to answer all questions as truthfully as possible. A character who drinks Sunflower cannot lie for a Scene. Preparing this extract takes 1 Requirement.





Takwin

This Juvenilia refers to the creation of synthetic life in the laboratory, up to and including human life, as well as different mechanisms that imitate movement, sensory organs and other functions typical of living organisms. Such devices function properly for a Scene unless otherwise noted. After that they require maintenance equal to 1 Requirement to function again (2 Requirements if Takwin is not a known Juvenilia).

Examples include:

- ♦ **Long-Distance Amplifying Lenses.** This device allows its wearer to perceive otherwise unnoticeable details and irregularities. As long as you have a clear line of sight, you can see perfectly out to a distance of one mile. If you make a Risk that relies heavily on your vision, you gain 1 Bonus Die if you use this device.
- ♦ **Underwater Breathing Apparatus.** This device mimics the functions of respiratory organs, allowing you to breathe underwater as if you were in air for a Scene.
- ♦ **Night Vision Detector.** This device, an imitation of some animals' night vision apparatuses, allows the wearer to detect solid objects in his vicinity, up to 60 feet in any direction no matter how much light is present.
- ♦ **Mechanical Arm.** This device functions in the same way as a human arm. The device straps to the Boticario and can hold any one object with its hand indefinitely. This use does not require a Raise to activate. Additionally it can perform other reasonable functions an arm could, such as wielding a sword or shaking a hand. You may take a single Action using this arm as if you had spent one Raise, but the arm then ceases to function. Preparing this device takes 1 Requirement.
- ♦ **Simple Construct.** This device imitates the movement and behavior of one small creature. The construct can perform any of the following commands: attack, carry, defend, fetch, follow, guard, go to and seek. If the construct performs an Action that would require a Risk, it rolls 4 dice. If the construct suffers 4 Wounds, it is damaged and requires repairs before it can function again. Preparing this device takes 2 Requirements.



Magna Opera

Even though the alchemical processes gathered under the *Juvenilia* are quite powerful, most Boticarios consider them to be mere diversions from the true aim of the Great Art. In this sense, all these effects pale when compared with the *Magna Opera* (singular, *Magnum Opus*), the “Great Works” that all practitioners of Alquimia aspire to achieve.

Completing a *Magnum Opus* requires a five-Step Hero Story as described in **CORE RULEBOOK**, pages 159 through 163. In this case, the Reward depends on your Hero’s particular vision of the ultimate goal of Alquimia. This could be any range of effects, but in general, the effect supersedes what could be created with *Juvenilia*. Some examples include the creation of a unique alchemical reagent that embodies (or violates) the natural laws, allowing you to use effects in a *Juvenilia* without spending a Raise; the distillation of an alchemical mixture that is not subject to the normal carrying rules of *Juvenilia*; the creation of an alchemical item that is permanent and does not require further maintenance; the discovery of a new prime element that leads to the creation of a sixth *Juvenilia*.

What follows are some examples of *Magna Opera* taken from the legends told among Boticarios.

Chrysopoeia

The ultimate goal of Alquimia is to perfect any substance, even allowing something as base and worthless as lead to reveal its true value and final iteration as gold. As a result, a Boticario dedicates his life to see the perfection where others only observe defects.

Example endings include:

- My Hero discovers the philosopher’s stone, but the cost of creating it means he can only ever use it once.
- My Hero fails at his search, but instead finds a new alchemical material, which has properties never before researched.
- My Hero is able to discover the true secret of perfection, one that embraces reality as it is instead of trying to change it.

Panacea

The ultimate goal of Alquimia is connected to life and existence in general. According to the Boticario’s understanding, nothing is more important than to preserve life, the greatest Work of them all. As such, she focuses her studies on prolonging the existence of living creatures, especially against sickness and death.

Some example endings may include the following:

- My Hero discovers the cure to a great number of diseases but, in the process, creates a terrible, incurable sickness.
- My Hero grants herself, accidentally, everlasting life. She has now become a legend—sought out both by those who want her blessing, and those who would kill her to take it for themselves.
- My Hero finally unravels the mystery of the panacea, the cure to all sickness and the fountain of never-ending life and youth, but must decide how to keep it from falling into the wrong hands.

Alkahest

The ultimate goal of Alquimia is to find the alkahest, the universal solvent capable of dissolving every other substance. Such a revolutionary discovery would prove invaluable not only for Boticarios, but for all manner of experimental scientists. Apart from that, the alkahest could reveal the components *prima materia*, the origin of all material existence.

Example endings can include the following:

- My Hero suffers a terrible accident while trying to find the alkahest, one that permanently disfigures her.
- My Hero distills the alkahest, the universal solvent, but an apprentice steals it, together with the corresponding research annotations—and the final formula.
- My Hero fails to distil the alkahest, but finds a dissolvent more powerful than *sal alkali*, earning him fame and fortune.



Dueling in Castille

Dueling in Castille has always been a spectacle, from fencing in the streets (even if the Vatican prohibits it) to dueling at San Cristóbal's Market Square. Sometimes for sport, or sometimes to settle a dispute, Castillian duelists have a sense of showmanship. It is no wonder that every year Castille holds *el Festival de la Espada* (the Festival of the Sword), more commonly called *el Baile* (the Dance).

El Baile is celebrated in Odiseo, along the southern Castille coast, and travelers far and wide come to watch and participate. *El Baile* takes place in *O Castelo no Penhasco* (The Castle on the Cliff), an old castle that sits above the shore on a dark grey stone cliff. For many days out of the year, the castle goes unused, but during *el Festival de la Espada*, it lights up like something from a *færie* tale.

Day One

El Festival de la Espada is a five-day festival. The first day is just a gathering; "a stranger is simply a friend that you haven't yet met" is a common turn of phrase in Odiseo. There are no events scheduled, but attendees make it a point to meet others, speaking with anyone they think might be interesting.

No dueling is permitted on the first day for any reason—breaking this rule results in expulsion from the festival. Travelers arrive on the first day, and meet and greet in the many wine shops surrounding the castle. While shops are not yet open on the first day, there's plenty of food and drink to go around. This is when duelists meet each other and make boasts of their prowess, leading to storytelling that lasts long into the night.

Day Two

The second day, *el Baile* is nearly indistinguishable from any traditional festival. Vendors and merchants set up booths with various sundries from all over Castille and beyond. You can find a wide variety of foods, as well as some of the best blades ever made. A duelist comes to the festival to show a new style she has been perfecting or to seek a master or pupil, and exhibitions are common. Master sword crafters come from all over to show off their wares during the market.

A crafter brings her finest wares, sometimes spending an entire year making a single blade to display and sell at *el Baile*. A duelist can find some of the most astounding blades on the second day, and many come to the festival for the sole purpose of buying a weapon. These often never even participate in the festivities on subsequent days.

Day Three

At the start of the third day, the festival masters give nineteen favor tokens to last year's champion. The rest of the day is an open exhibition, and the champion is free to give a token to any duelist. Receiving a token means that you must now defend it—those who hold a token are expected to answer any challenge, risking their token as the ante. The terms of the duel are always to first blood, sometimes causing a token holder to lose on purpose to allow an ally to enter the tournament instead.

Losing your token is not a complete failure, as they hand out many awards on this day. They include *la Joven Promesa* (best newcomer), *el más Bravo* (most courageous), *el más Cortés* (most gracious, given to the duelist who shows the greatest hospitality regardless of victory or defeat) and *el Noble* (most knightly, typically given to a crowd favorite, someone who cuts a particularly striking figure or otherwise makes a splash on this day). Once day three reaches a close, the duelists who still hold a token enter into the tournament.

Day Four

On the fourth day, the tournament begins. The nineteen favor holders and last year's champion begin a very structured tournament. The last person standing that day is named *la Espada de Castille* (the Sword of Castille). This person has the honor of opening the tournament on day four of the next year, receiving tokens to pass out. The crowd carries to the throne room the new champion while showered with multi-colored rose petals. Once they reach the throne room, the winner is crowned. For the rest of the day, the champion is treated like royalty.



Day Five

Finally, on the last day of el Baile, a unique ceremony called el Baile del Toro (literally “the dance of the bull”) is held. Despite the rest of the tournament focusing on sword duels, *this* is where the festival gained its unofficial name. In the courtyard, a bull is released and three *toreros*, bull dancers, display the mastery of their art. Each is equipped with a *vara* (a quarterstaff or cudgel) and wears elaborate, ornate costumes.

The *vara* is a stick roughly two foot long and cylindrical, ornately carved and decorated with jewels, traditionally painted red and gold. The *toreros* take turns using their *vara* to grab a horn of the bull and flip around it. The *toreros* dance with the bull until it is exhausted, and many train year-round to master their technique. Injuries are not uncommon, but if the *toreros* cannot complete their dance, the bull has earned its freedom. Once the dance finishes, the exhausted bull is placed on a large pillow and festival-goers shower the bull with affection, treats and praise as thanks for the dance. The town officials then take the bull to a butcher in the castle, who cook it for the feast at the end of the day. Legend says that this bull meat provides virility and long life to all that consume it.

Siqueira

A *torero* is trained in Siqueira to gracefully control a bull while performing her dance. Some say the style originated from techniques used by shepherds to fight off wolves and robbers. Using a *vara*, the duelist controls her target by first getting him angry.

A Siqueira duelist tries to anger her opponent, typically by poking him with the end of her weapon or sometimes even insulting him. Once enraged, she coaxes the target into charging at her. During the charge, the duelist moves to the side and hits her target in the flank, then quickly creates distance again. The goal is to keep your opponent away from you and make him come to you, so you can always dictate the terms of the duel.

Style Bonus: Tomar al Toro Por las Astas

While wielding a quarterstaff or large cudgel, you gain a special Maneuver called Tomar al Toro Por las Astas. When you perform this Maneuver, you apply Pressure to your target—if the target wishes to do anything other than attack you (causing Wounds to you by any means at his disposal), he must spend 2 Raises instead of 1 for that Action. If your target chooses to attack you, you deal him Wounds equal to your Ranks in Finesse. A Hero may only perform this Maneuver once per Round.



Leyendas of Castille

Although Castille and the Vatican Church seem almost synonymous, since time immemorial the Castellians have been a *very* superstitious people—to say the least. The mix of beliefs, stories and languages due to the various invasions, wars and occupations of the nation has resulted in a rich and diverse folklore, one that permeates everyday life. Because of this, almost every place in Castille—from the smallest *villa* (hamlet) to the largest city—has at least one legend (if not more) associated with it.

In fact, it would be impossible to summarize the vast array of *leyendas* (legends) that a Hero can encounter if he traverses the land. Instead, these examples—some of the most well-known and widespread—give you a glimpse of the Castilian mindset and worldview when it comes to the supernatural.

Maestre de Campo

According to the *leyenda*, there was once a powerful warrior who fought in a number of wars to defend her Grande's territory. Her prowess on the battlefield and the art of war was so great that both allies and enemies alike respected her and gave her many honorific nicknames. The most famous of them all that of Maestre de Campo, which in the tongue of the Old Empire means "the Battlefield Master." As a result of the Maestre de Campo's loyal defense, the Grande not only retained his territory but enlarged it through an enduring peace and a most fruitful reign.

After many years, the Grande died, and his daughter succeeded him. She was a petty young woman, however, and had envied the Maestre de Campo ever since she had come into the service of her father. As a result, her first edict as the new Grande was to strip the mighty warrior of her lands and titles, sending her into exile under penalty of death if she ever chose to return. Many whispered their concern for the well-being of the kingdom and the new ruler, but the Maestre de Campo behaved as honorably as her

legend, leaving the court without muttering even a word of protest.

When news broke about this incident, the old enemies arose again against the new Grande. This time, though, there was no Battlefield Master to defend the people, and the kingdom was on the brink of being defeated. The new ruler, having learned a painful lesson of humility after losing her husband in the conflict, offered not only a full pardon but a bountiful reward for the Maestre de Campo if she chose to return home and defend her kingdom. She did so, although she refused the reward and left the land as soon as the people were safe.

To this day, the stories have condemned the fool Grande to oblivion—not even remembering her name—and have preserved the nickname and deeds of the Battlefield Master.

Nowadays

The *leyenda* of the Maestre de Campo is a cautionary tale about envying the qualities of others instead of valuing them. Apart from that, the Battlefield Master has become a source of inspiration for all people in difficult times. In this sense, people consider her the embodiment of all the qualities that Castilian people admire: loyalty, honor and resolve.

Besides this common wisdom, however, there is a supernatural dimension to the Maestre de Campo. Some tell tales of nearly lost battles turned around by a figure dressed in black from head to toe, one who fought with the grace and will of times long past. Others declare a mysterious figure saved them from bandits and outlaws, defending them when no one else dared to.

Finally, some say the fabled El Vagabundo is, in fact, inspired by and founded on the tradition of the Maestre de Campo, as a way to ensure people's protection against those who abuse their power.



Anjanas

Most settlements established near any body of water—especially rivers—have one or more stories about the anjanas, the beings that dwell everywhere there is pure water. These creatures are usually slender and delicate and are often seen walking—some would say floating—through the forest paths or resting on the bank shores.

People describe them as female, probably due to their generally willowy appearances rather than to any feminine feature, since they are almost universally acknowledged as being from out of this world. Other tales depict them as miniscule winged creatures, as fragile as a flower.

The stories about the anjanas, accordingly, are as contradictory and confusing as any attempt to describe them. One person tells of watery maidens who rescued him from the direst of dangers, while another complains that these creatures have stolen her money and other valuables—or even her children! Yet another says people cannot touch them, while still another affirms he can and has engendered children with one. A person claims they saved her from drowning, while another insists the anjanas were responsible for the watery deaths of his loved ones.

The stories are as conflicted as their are varied. Nearly everyone knows someone who had encountered one of these creatures, a friend or a cousin, though the veracity of those claims is suspect. Someone who says he has met one of these creatures himself swears on his honor that his accounting is true and accurate, no matter how disparate from the generally accepted stories of his region.

The truth of the matter is difficult to discern, but the consensus is that the anjanas are dangerous enough to avoid rather than encounter. Of course, not all heed this popular wisdom, and the most naive—or desperate—risk their lives by trying to spy on these enigmatic creatures. Some even try to capture one, hoping it might bestow good fortune on them. Few people tell tales of capture though.

Nowadays

As expected in these cases, the truth about the anjanas encompasses all the aforementioned stories. Although this seems to defy all logic, there is actually a very simple explanation to these apparent contradictions.

The term anjanas describes *two* different types of creatures; namely, the anjanas and their sworn enemies, the *ojáncanas*. The former are the ones responsible for all the good and fortuitous encounters. They are the ones that save mortals from drowning, help them when they are in need and even offer them wealth when they need it.

The *ojáncanas*, on the other hand, are the ones from whom all the misfortunes arise. They cause trouble and mischief. They consider mortals to be playthings and are more than willing to use their charm to abuse them at any and all times, even going so far as killing if it suits their whims.

They do not consider such acts as torture or murder, however, because they are the descendants of those anjanas who were, in turn, used and abused by mortals. As when an anjanas uses its magic in an abusive way, it transforms into an *ojáncanas*.

The result is that most anjanas treat a mortal fairly, especially if he is honest and truthful. Sadly, a mortal can still trick an anjanas into using its powers to his benefit, corrupting the innocent spirit of the anjanas and turning it into *ojáncanas*. This only bolsters the ranks of the hateful creatures who go to any extreme in order to avenge this ancestral grudge against their kind.

While anjanas are unlikely to attack people, they defend themselves if someone attempts to capture or abuse them. They are Strength 5 Monsters with the Shape-shifting and Winged Qualities.

Ojáncanas are Strength 5 Monsters with the Fearsome and Winged Qualities.



Estantigua

The Estantigua (Ancient Host), more than a leyenda, is a common belief observed in most parts of Castille. The Estantigua is different in every villa and city, but there are some generalities shared by most manifestations of it.

According to the belief, the Ancient Host is indeed a procession of the souls of the dead (some say souls in torment) that crosses a village at midnight, guided by a living man or woman cursed with that task. Many argue the purpose of the Estantigua. Some say it is a way of ensuring the final rest to the souls of the dead, while others claim that the Host marks the houses of those about to join their ranks.

When asked, the living leader of the Estantigua has no recollection of his nightly activities. In fact, some say that if a person leads the Host for too long, he becomes more dead than alive, reflected by his paleness and sickly complexion. Others affirm that the curse only passes on to another living person while leading the dead. In this case, an unexpected cauldron appears in the new leader's bedchamber, marking her as the one in charge of leading the Host from now on.



Nowadays

An unintended result of the Estantigua belief is that most people in Castille avoid going out at night, especially after midnight. Anyone forced to do so, however, resorts to a number of practices in order to avoid the curse of leading the Host. Some of these include lying face-down while the Estantigua passes by, drawing a protective circle with chalk or salt around oneself or performing various warding gestures, the most famous of all these being the horn gesture, by extending the index and little fingers while putting the rest under the thumb.

The problem, however, is that apart from the leader, the rest of the Host cannot be seen or heard and can only be perceived by a sudden shiver or shudder when they approach. Other signs of their passing include an abrupt silence, a distant sound of bell tolling and the desperate howling of dogs. Considering these, most people who have to go out at night in Castille do so in numbers and avoid any lonely figures, fearful of receiving the curse of crossing their path unaware.

Afterwards, people shun the houses that receive the Estantigua and consider their inhabitants marked by the dead as one of their own. The mark of such visits is the living leader—and the invisible procession—circling around the house three times, from west to east. After someone in the household dies, though, the people are free from the mark and welcomed back in the community.

The Estantigua count as a Strength 10 Monster Squad with the Unliving Quality. Their leader is a normal person, enthralled by the group and under their direction. Until the end of the night or if the Host is destroyed, the leader does not respond to physical or social stimuli.



Brujería

In Castille, *brujería* (witchcraft) is often considered the primary cause of any misfortune or malady—and the one that is, more likely than not, false.

According to conventional wisdom, a *bruja* (witch) is a woman who has exchanged her virtue and soul for a transcendental power that allows her to perform wicked of deeds. The source of that power varies from place to place and legend to legend, but Castellians all agree that *brujas* are to be feared and avoided at all costs. The result is that people shun and circumvent any place identified as the residence or gathering site of *brujas* at all costs.

Regarding their powers, most *lendas* distinguish at least two broad categories: *mal de ojo* (curses) and *amuletos* (blessings). The former relates to what most people imagine what magic is like: spells, incantations, the brewing of potions and unguents, shape-shifting into animals and the like. Out of all this, the most commonly feared practice is that of *aojar* or *mal de ojo*, roughly translated as “to put the evil eye on”. This type of curse especially affects babies or children related to someone who has incurred the *bruja*’s wrath. As a result, most newborns in Castille wear at least one piece of red clothing, their underwear inside out or both; popular belief considers these customs as powerful ways of protecting oneself against the *brujas*’ powers.

Fetichismo, on the other hand, relates to good *brujería*, otherwise referred to as “white” witchcraft. These are mostly amulets or talismans created by *brujas* to protect somebody from any kind of *brujería*. As such, these objects are expensive and highly valued, passed down from generation to generation as heirlooms and protective items. These *amuletos* can be anything, from collars to earrings and even weapons and armor, and can only be used effectively by those who acquired them in the first place—or those who received one as a true gift from their original owner.

Nowadays

Whereas currently in most parts of Castille, a woman who lives alone—especially an old widower or unmarried woman—is considered a *bruja*, most of them are simply lonely people with tragic pasts and a bad temper. She lives in isolation and hardly ever leaves her residence, but she has stricken no pact with the

supernatural nor has any special power. In fact, nine out of ten stories about *brujas* and their wicked deeds are just that: stories told by someone to entertain—or by mothers to put fear in the hearts of their children.

Brujería, however, is very real—and very dangerous, particularly for those in the receiving end of it.

Although no one can say for certain, one thing is true: *brujas* do indeed obtain certain unearthly powers in exchange for a service to an otherworldly being. What those services entail vary from master to master, but all of them involve the *bruja* submitting her will and existence to carry out her master’s designs. A real *bruja*, however, is not only aware of the folklore about her, but profits from it. Every time someone accuses another of being a *bruja*, those in the know almost always suspect the accuser rather than the accused, especially if the accusers are men.

This is so because, in reality, *brujería* can be practiced by both men and women. Indeed, the only real requirement to become a *bruja* is the submission of one’s will to that of a creature beyond this world.

Regarding their powers, a real *bruja* tends to have an unnaturally long life (if undiscovered), can indeed shape-shift into animals and even other people and subtly wreaks havoc wherever he goes. As a result, he is one of the most formidable and challenging Villains any Hero (or group of Heroes) can encounter. The most difficult part about defeating him, however, is not his otherworldly powers, but his guile and subtlety when it comes to facing a threat.

A *bruja* avoids revealing himself—by using his powers—under any and all circumstances, barring a life or death situation. Instead, he lies, tricks and tries to seduce a Hero to mislead her if possible and, if that does not work, he resorts to turning the community against the Hero before even attempting to use his “gifts” to solve the problem.

A *bruja* is always a Villain. He varies in strength and power and always has the Sorcery Advantage. The powers given to him by the creature he works with can mimic any of the following Sorceries: Glamour, Mother’s Touch or Sanderis. He conscripts monsters from his demonic allies and can have any number of monster minions whose total Strength is equal to twice his Influence rating.



The Aquelarres

Why does a real bruja go to such lengths in order to avoid detection? The truth is that her ability to communicate and receive blessings from her masters is bound to specific geographical locations, the so-called *aquejarres* (covens). This term translates roughly as “meadow of the male goat,” as one of the most common supernatural beings associated with *brujería* is that of the male goat (as the material incarnation of powerful primordial beings).

Aquelarre, then, makes reference to both the gathering of brujas in one place of power, as well as the place of power in and of itself. Although popular belief points to a number of places as *aquejarres*, the truth is that real *aquejarres* are unholy places protected by powerful incantations and, as such, are very hard to locate for non-brujas. This, then, is the main reason why a bruja goes to any lengths in order to protect her secret. Once revealed, she has to leave not only her residence, abandoning a place secured by many supernatural protections, but has to find a new *aquejarre* from which to communicate with her masters. This often entails striking a bargain with another bruja, as each of them is as protective and jealous of his *aquejarres* as his own secrets.

The Burlador

There was once a man, the stories go, who had no soul and cared not for any mortal rules and considerations. Some say that he was not of this world, while others claim that he was a child stolen by some evil creature.

Be as it may, the stories about the Burlador (Mocker) composed a *leyenda* that most Théans have a difficult time believing, but is common wisdom among Castillians. The tale tells of a terrible man putting various people under his spell, forcing a faithful wife to sin against her husband, a maiden to surrender her virginity and a chaste man to forget his vows and responsibilities—just to name a few examples of his foul deeds. Although all his victims assumed he bedazzled them with *brujería*, the truth is that the Mocker had no supernatural abilities, but simply a way of seducing and sweet-talking people into ruin.

For too long this creature disturbed honest men and women with impunity. So long that when a lord confronted him about his wicked actions, the man simply smiled and answered mockingly, “When Death comes to dine with me, to her I’ll ask for forgiveness.” And so, She did.

When Death came, as a stony figure demanding payment for the Burlador’s deeds, the man first tried to seduce Her. When Death declined his affections, the Burlador knew fear for the first time in his existence and tried to force Her out of his house. When Death refused, the Mocker knew that the end was near and there was no ruse he could work on Her. At long last, he asked for forgiveness for his wicked deeds and to have some more time on his life to atone for everything he had done. Finally, it was Death’s turn to smile.

“No,” She said and took the Burlador with Her to the afterlife.

Nowadays

Yet another morality tale, the Burlador story is one that has become progressively more relevant in today’s Castille. After decades of war, ambitious Grandes squabbling for every ounce of power they can get their hands on and a Church (especially the Inquisition) increasingly more interested in expanding their own influence instead of serving Theus, most common folk believe that it is payback time.

That is why a Castillian endures difficulties and injustices with a tenacity that few other Théans can muster: he knows that, sooner or later, Death comes for us all. She cares not about last minute confessions or pardons. She does Her job and takes with Her any and all sinners, judging them on their lives’ actions.

Nowadays, many disdain this story as mere folklore. Those who have lived longer—and grown wiser—know that it is not prudent to dismiss a story as old and true as this one. But, as per usual, youngsters tend to laugh and ignore the warnings...until Death Herself comes to visit them.







Chapter 3

Montaigne



MONTAIGNE

“The rest of Théah is shockingly ignorant and wrong about Montaigne. It isn’t surprising considering how primitive the languages other than Montaigne are. They are so crude, so inelegant! Save for Vodacce perhaps, which, in a fashion, is a bastardized version of our own. You see, we do not refer to ourselves as Montaigne at all. We are Montaignois and Montaignoise. If you cannot make this simplest of distinctions in your rhetoric when addressing a Montaignois diplomat, you have absolutely no future in La Court Montaignoise, my dear boy!”

*—Colette de Lioncourt, Duchesse d’Arcy,
advising an Avalonian diplomat*

From the outside looking in, Montaigne is a hub of culture, fashion, art and high society. Indeed, the Montaigne courts hold the highest standard for fashion and art and produce some of the most noteworthy rumors, scandals and fashion trends all across Théah. Yet, the Montaigne courts only account for a very small percentage of the population. The rest of the Nation—those dispossessed lesser nobles and the masses of impoverished peasantry—are the backbone of Montaigne, and that backbone is crumbling.

Despite the Nation’s hardships, the nobles continue to live the high life, concentrating more on courtly intrigue and gaining l’Empereur’s favor—a noble with no land, only titles, seeks something concrete to separate him from the peasantry. Meanwhile, a peasant, tired of war, emotionally exhausted and abused, now lives in a land excommunicated from the Church. She verges on an uprising, and it seems as though the nobility would rather turn a blind eye to the needs of the people, rather than upset l’Empereur.



Corruption runs rampant in Montaigne, the nobility demanding more and more from a peasantry incapable of producing. The latest campaign in Castille—a catastrophic failure—is continuously lauded in public as a grand endeavor by l'Empereur. Yet, the number of young men and women lost to the war is enough to cause a national population crisis in the next ten years. War weary, hungry and despondent, the people of Montaigne are at a breaking point. In places, the cracks already show, and it will only take word of defiance to open the floodgates of revolution.

A Montaignois looks for succor in any way he can. He sneaks Vaticine relics and religious symbols into his home and holds a secret mass in a secluded area. She looks at nations like the Sarmatian Commonwealth and dreams of equal representation. He sees the damage in Eisen and the lack of leadership and wonder if he too could get along without it. She envies the way the Ussurans elect their leaders, wishing that even that small pleasure could lead to a better tomorrow. Oh yes, Montaigne is a grand nation full of art, culture and fashion, all corrupted by the greed of the wealthy and a thin veneer covering the suffering of the poor.

A Nation at War

In the past few years, war has ravaged Montaigne. Peasants and nobles alike have seen their children die in the costly war against Castille. The reason for the invasion is uncertain, though a few people in the know speculate that l'Empereur has arms deals with the Vendel League, giving his interests a sizable kickback. The League certainly sold arms and ammunition to both nations during the conflict, and if Montaigne invested in such commerce, it could prove rather profitable. This would certainly explain l'Empereur's plans to invade Ussura, including publicly sending his son-in-law to lead forces there.

Despite any increases in Montaigne's wealth, these conflicts have taken their toll on the nation. The constant state of war and the Church's excommunication has pushed the peasantry to their limits. Corruption in the noble houses runs rampant, and even minor nobles sympathize with the common people. The poor are nearly destitute, starving and barely making do with feeble crops and the leftovers of the nobility. The nobles are also in dire straits, not having enough of a labor force to keep up their own land as their children have died in the war. The nation suffers from a population crisis, despite being the wealthiest it has been in years.

l'Empereur has started offering bonus incentives for joining the military, granting noble title to any who would serve for at least two years. The nobles, unsure of how to take this new information, watch peasants give up their workload to gain a little taste of nobility. Without workers, a noble has to work his own fields to produce enough food to feed the nation. Yet, he too seeks glory in war, and many fields across the nation have fallen fallow due to lack of use. Food shortages are only the beginning of the nightmare that an Ussuran invasion could cause, and the nation feels the weight of l'Empereur's excesses now more than ever.





Important People in Montaigne

Léon Alexandre de Montaigne

L'Empereur du Monde, Roi de Montaigne, Léon Alexandre XIV, Soleil de Montaigne. The last male heir of the Montaigne line, and ruler of Montaigne for the past fifty years.

The man, a master of narcissism, embodies all that is wrong with the nobility Montaignoise. He is opulent, extravagant, ever self-serving, egotistical and decadent. When not meeting with the Dukes of Montaigne or his Ministers and Councilors, he enjoys the constant parade of galas, endless parties and favored guests of the royal court in his Château du Soleil.

A jaded ruler, he seeks constant gratification and distraction. Yet he has no qualms about getting rid of a person he does not like, preferring to have her sent away rather than kill her, although he knows the importance of a strategically timed execution. He sometimes gets upset and flies into a rage for no apparent reason. None are ever safe should they raise his ire, except his wife and daughters, so everyone carefully tries not to offend.

While trying to impress him, the nobles constantly walk on eggshells to avoid a troubling subject or offensive comment. The only pattern that can be drawn from these fits is that he cannot tolerate incompetence or disappointment. His erratic behavior has led to some people calling him “mad” behind his back. He does not mind. He allows them to criticize and underestimate him. Unpredictability and misdirection are tools he uses to surprise his enemies.

He does not consider any of his daughters fit to succeed him and while he cares for them deeply, he hopes that another heir will be born to them soon. He's holding out hope that he can produce a Porté sorcier to inherit the throne of Montaigne, like himself and his parents before him.

His youngest daughter, Dominique, is by far his favorite. Yet, long ago he promised Louise, his oldest, she could have his throne if she would but marry a Porté sorcier or have one as a child. A task she has



yet to fulfill. So far, he is the last of the Montaigne bloodline to carry Porté, and even his own mastery of the magic has been waning.

While he makes all decisions about the whole of Montaigne, he relies entirely on his skill of delegation to deal with the day-to-day needs of his kingdom. Whenever a complication or national issue arises, he gives *carte blanche* to those he deems skilled enough to deal with it. The *carte blanche* itself is a thick white parchment with his seal, his signature and enough space for the delegates to write in any expense, policy or ruling that may aid in dealing with the problem. A delegate who abuses the *carte blanche* pays for it, sometimes with her life.

He makes decisions based on what others report to him, which has led many Dukes to omit some of the difficult situations they face, in hopes of dealing with it before l'Empereur involves himself in their affairs. Lately, the false reports of a plague outbreak in Dechaine have served to cover-up the very dangerous and violent uprising of the peasantry. The King already knows of the forgery by the Duke of the region as well as the uprising, thanks to his network of spies and informants. He is also interested to see how far the Duke will go to deal with this inconvenience.

Léon Alexandre's goals are simple: continue to rule Montaigne and elevate it above all other nations. In order to rule Montaigne, he must have a hand in every decision that affects Montaigne as a whole; he stays informed of all that occurs, as long as it should be of interest to him. At his age, he wants to ensure that his legacy is complete and his bloodline remains on the throne.

L'Empereur was once a powerful Porté sorcier, but his power has waned over the years. Marquise Jeannette de Claire, intent on winning his favor, attempts to reinvigorate his powers by secretly feeding him the blood of Porté sorciers. The rest of the court is simultaneously intrigued and horrified. No one dares tell l'Empereur, but nearly everyone wants it to stop.

Portraying l'Empereur

A true Villain hides behind the caricature, and conveying that is crucial to making Léon Alexandre come to life at your game table. He is a man of many moods, all of them extreme. Use a loud voice, jovial, yet threatening. He is likely to only meet the Heroes in a court setting, as he rarely hosts private audiences for anyone he is not intimately familiar with.

At parties, he loves meeting new people and always seeks capable individuals to delegate his problems to. He parades around as though he is a god among mortals. He rewards those who reinforce that feeling, those who bow the lowest and compliment him, those who worship and adore him. He also socially destroys those who do not propagate these ideas readily.

In serious settings, among his advisers and ministers for instance, he drops the polite niceties and playful banter. He becomes a sharp, calculating mastermind and orders any course of action that he thinks get results. If he is ever disappointed or insulted, he flies into a rage.

Story Hooks

- ♦ Pierre le Clerc comes to the Heroes seeking assistance. His ward, Marquise Adalie de Toille, is missing and he believes other Porté sorciers took her, but has no evidence. All he has is a small trinket with her Blood Mark, but he cannot figure out how to use it to track her. Can the Heroes find her in time to save her from a terrible fate?
- ♦ L'Empereur's son-in-law, Montègue, is in Ussura, beginning a new campaign after the failed attempt in Castille. At least, that is what everyone believes. L'Empereur knows better, but to keep up his charade, he has put out a call to all willing knights to join Montègue in his noble crusade. Will the Heroes heed the call or discover Montègue has been missing for quite some time?



Morella Alouse Giacinni

L'Empereur's third wife is a Sorte *Strega*, a Vodacce Fate Witch. She is the most polite, sincere and proper lady of Léon's court, though few trust her because of her power. She is subtle in her manipulations, pulling the strings of the power players in Montaigne's court without any fear of repercussion.

She curses and poisons her husband's enemies, when a public execution and a show of force from Léon Alexandre are not appropriate. She takes an interest and pulls the strings of fate to aid her husband and his protégés, always. Those in the King's favor find their fates favorable as well. She does not fear repercussions because her goals are to assist l'Empereur in all things.

She is perfectly suited to be his wicked wife, and even though they each play with secret lovers, they also deeply love one another. Morella knows her husband and knows him well. Léon can equally make claim of what his wife's next move will be. They work in tandem and yet they never seem to be comparing notes or spending much time with one another. She always rests in her cottage or her gardens while he appears to run things and enjoy his parties.

She seems uninterested in the intrigues of high court, and yet she is informed about the ongoings of even the minor nobles. Some whisper that she has spies all over the palace, which would explain how she knows even what the servants are doing. If she does have spies, they are fiercely loyal, as no one claims that honor, nor have any been caught in the act.

Without fail, and to the knowledge of only their closest servant and handmaiden, they exchange love letters on a daily basis. Many times, the Rilasciare and other entities have attempted to decode the poetry and the double entendres to no avail.

They have decided that the code they use is simply too complex to decipher, yet the truth of the matter is that there is no code. There is no cipher. They share their feelings for one another and express nothing beyond passion and admiration in these daily exchanges. This is how the most powerful couple in Montaigne functions.

Portraying Morella Giacinni

Polite, sweet, manipulative. Giacinni is a kind and soft-spoken woman, the apparent opposite of her husband. Her face is always half-veiled; "the shame of not being born a Montaignois," her husband says in jest. Her skin is pale, her lips full and red and her movements graceful and slow when not sitting stiffly. She may seem mysterious and otherworldly to those not used to her.

She typically does not attend the many parties, balls and galas of the court other than for a few minutes to make an official appearance and get an impression of the new faces at court. The Heroes can find her in her cottage, and she gladly receives visitors that Léon Alexandre sends.

In conversation, she makes vague statements or answers questions with more elusive questions, which allows her to always speak the truth. If she wants something from the Heroes though, she is specific to prevent confusion.

Story Hooks

- Morella loves her husband, but her first love is to Vodacce. Her marriage to l'Empereur is not a fluke, and she sends regular reports on his activities back to her family. If a Hero were to intercept her messages, he could gain an insider look at everything going on in Montaigne.
- Duke Maxime Bernard believes he received a curse from Morella Giacinni the last time they had a meeting. He had a spate of bad luck after a trip through her menagerie and a parting kiss, but he has no idea what he could have done to gain l'Empereur's ire. He asks the Heroes to investigate what people say in court, to find out if someone has spread a hurtful rumor or two.



Dominique de Montaigne

Dominique is the only child resulting from the pairing of Léon Alexandre and Morella Giacinni. She is the youngest of nine daughters, each one a disappointment to l'Empereur. She, just like her sisters, has shown no affinity for Porté. Upon Dominique's birth, her father pinned his last hopes on her being the one who would finally inherit his sorcier blood. He coddled her, doted on her and gave her everything she could have ever wanted. Yet in the end, she failed her father, just like her sisters.

Nothing in Montaigne prevents women from inheriting a noble title or land, and yet l'Empereur has refused to name any of his daughters as heir. He seeks at least one to show signs of nobility through Porté, but as he gets older, his chances of such a succession grow distant. Most of Dominique's sisters have no interest in the Montaigne throne, having either settled in Castille, the homeland of their mother, or happily retired to manage their own piece of land in rural Montaigne.

Her oldest sister, Louise de Montaigne, is the only one who actively seeks the throne, despite their father's constant refusal. Morella Giacinni wishes to see her own daughter on the throne and actively works towards that end; yet she refuses to move behind her husband's back, hoping he will name Dominique as heir at Giacinni's behest.

Dominique's relationship with her father has become strained, at best. The man who used to clearly love her dearly has distanced himself from her, treating her with cool indifference, leaving her heartbroken. Her relationship with her mother conversely fares much better, for they share a secret.

While Dominique may not show any affinity for Porté, through her mother's secret tutelage, she has become an adept Sorte *Strega*. She does not wear the veil of a *Strega*, and none, save her mother and her husband, Montègue, know of her powers.

Portraying Dominique de Montaigne

Dominique is intelligent, cunning and kind—despite her parentage. She has time and again shown true concern for the people of Montaigne, and this has gained her the love and loyalty of peasants and nobles alike.

No stranger to Montaigne's unique form of politics, she plays the game of subtle innuendo and unspoken threats as well as anyone. She uses Sorte to bolster the fate of someone she finds worthy and curses one whom she feels oversteps his bounds. Despite the fact that l'Empereur has tried his hardest to estrange her, she is one of the only people who can get under his skin and push him to action.

Story Hooks

- ♦ Louise de Montaigne is a vile woman who has pushed every single one of her sisters out of court favor one by one. She views Dominique as a threat to her inevitable inheritance of the Montaigne throne. She plots to remove her sister from Montaigne, but first wants to destroy her politically in case she ever comes back. She is spreading rumors about Dominique in an attempt to turn the nobles against her. Dominique cannot suppress all the rumors herself and needs help dealing with her sister.
- ♦ Dominique loves her nation, but fears the idea of inheriting the throne and the mess of a fractured people. She instead tries to heal the nation from the ground level and has taken to traveling in disguise to small towns to give aid to the peasantry. The efforts of a single woman are not enough, and she seeks Heroes to help her with her cause.





Louise de Beaufort

Louise Marie-Françoise de Beaufort was appointed Chief Administrator of the Château de la Vie as an insult for a slight against the King. L'Empereur expected her to retire to the position cowed and peaceful, just as everyone else before her. To his surprise, she rose to the challenge and brought more change in the past year than the academy has seen in over three decades.

She works closely with the former administrator, Colonel François de Chambord, who helps her expand her circle of influence. She is close friends with the Captains and instructors of the Musketeer Academy, and is informed of any operation the group undertakes.

She has final say on royal pardons or punishments ruled on by the corrupt Montaigne judges, and in that regard only l'Empereur's direct authority surpasses hers. That said, she steers clear of l'Empereur's court. She does not wish to bring any undue attention to herself or the changes she has made in Château de la Vie.

She wishes to save Montaigne from itself. She has seen the signs of strife building and decided to put herself in the best place to deal with it. First and foremost, she wants to overhaul the corrupt judicial system. Secondly, she wishes to increase the power, efficacy and influence that the Musketeers hold.

This means limiting operations meant to oppress the common folk, as well as increasing the Musketeers' involvement in upholding justice. She is young and intends to outlast the corruption of the Government, while laying the foundations for a new nobility of character rather than of birthright and privilege.

Portraying Louise de Beaufort

Louise de Beaufort is pleasant and polite. Her fashion style is clean cut, masculine and practical—she is ready for action if needed. She has wavy black hair and soft features that betray her youth. A great judge of character, she can spot a lie when she hears one. Although she rarely calls someone out for it, she instead masterfully works him into a corner forcing him to expose the lie.

She is patient in all things; however, when she decides a course of action, she does not hesitate and carries through. Resourceful, she has nearly unlimited access to money and personnel via the Musketeers.

Story Hooks

- Louise has embraced the revolutionary ideals of Liberté, Égalité et Fraternité, yet she needs to avoid strife in achieving these goals. She wants to set up a safe haven for members of the Sparrow's Bravery, but cannot do most of the work herself. She needs someone to help her send missives and order supplies without any of it showing up on official records.
- She has heard rumors that l'Empereur is sending a contingent of Musketeers on a secret mission. No matter how hard she tries, she has yet to uncover any more intelligence than that. Anyone bringing her information may be rewarded handsomely.



Maurice de Thoulieu and the Ministry of Culture

One aspect of the irreproachable and incorruptible government is the Ministry of Culture. It is responsible for all arts, music and publications that arise from the Montaignois elite. In other words, it controls all for the sake of propaganda and censorship. The *Ministre de la Culture*, Maurice de Thoulieu, leads the organization with a firm hand. He is a small, witty man with unmistakable taste for the progressive nature of art in all forms.

He and his administration, which includes specially trained squadrons of soldiers, carefully control all art and performances produced and expressed within Montaigne in regards to *l'Empereur* and his reputation. Artists must apply for a permit to perform or display works within the multitude of playhouses and galleries all across Théah. Even street performers need a permit, and those without would do well to watch out for ministry representatives out on sting operations.

Anything that could remotely constitute an insult or intellectual injury to his Majesty's reputation is dealt with swiftly and fairly. Orders of imprisonment for first-time offenders often come without warning, but are always well-founded. Maurice has it no other way and only hires loyal and devoted lieutenants and assistants. He may seem like a monster, but Thoulieu is an honest man with a devout loyalty to his ruler.

The organization has proven incorruptible by any other than *l'Empereur* himself. No amount of money could serve to bribe the Ministry into falsely accusing an innocent victim or allowing a perpetrator to avoid a sentence. He takes his work seriously and does all he can to promote *l'Empereur*'s version of culture. Sometimes that means endorsing and elevating an artist allowing her to play in the highest courts around Théah. Sometimes, it means executing someone who entertains others without showing his King the respect he so clearly deserves.

Portraying Maurice de Thoulieu

Stern, incorruptible, haughty. Thoulieu has very distinct features. He is on the short side, pot-bellied and thin-limbed. A very cultured man, he looks down upon the uneducated masses with a disdain that fuels his frustrations. He wears the latest fashion, always, and is a beacon of avant-garde for men's fashion. He will not openly chastise someone's fashion faux pas and imperfections, but he does have a tendency to mutter his discontent. He rarely smiles.

Beyond judging a person for her fashion sense—or lack thereof—he carefully judges her for her choice of words and speech patterns. Through his powers of deduction alone, he can positively declare where a Hero hails from and the nature of her past, in spite of any disguises or parts she may be playing at the time. He can generally tell if someone lies to him. He is also an erudite historian and scholar of all things related to his beloved Nation. He thinks himself superior to everyone, except of course *l'Empereur* and his family. As such, he looks down on everyone else.

Story Hook

- An acting troupe has made a new play portraying *l'Empereur*'s life. Maurice approved the playbill, but the players have taken liberties with their portrayals. They are doing well in the playhouses, but if the Ministry finds out about their changes, they could all hang. They could use someone to help them distract Maurice until the play's run ends.
- The Ministry of Culture investigates and charges the Heroes with treason and seditious acts against *l'Empereur*. The Heroes just arrived in town and could not possibly be the culprits, but Thoulieu refuses to listen. Can the Heroes find out who framed them and convince the *Ministre* to let them go?



Yvonne de Gineston, Marquise of Bâtonnier

Yvonne de Gineston has been the Marquise of Bâtonnier since the end of the War of the Cross. The city is only a little smaller than Buché and was the ancestral capital of Valdoc before l'Empereur decided to hand it to Buché as a reward for something or other during the War of the Cross. The other Marquises praised the swap, but Gineston never forgave l'Empereur. Yvonne has been working ever since to restore Bâtonnier as the seat of Valdoc, but doing so has not been easy as the Council of Marquises has blocked her petitions. This has not stopped her political plans, only pushed them in a different direction.

Raymond de Taulose is the current Duke of Valdoc, but due to an obscure law, the Marquises in the area vote every five years for a new Duke. L'Empereur has the final say, but allows the tradition to continue because it amuses him. Gineston vies for the position this election season and currently campaigns against Taulose the only way she knows how, with deceit.

Yvonne knows Taulose has been promising the Marquises various favors in the form of bribes and trade deals to secure his position as Duke. Every step of the way she has undermined him, discovering his promises and arranging for them to fail or for him to fall short. She has approached the other Marquises and made her case for the title to change hands, promising them her own riches in exchange for their vote. She has approached Léon Alexandre and has made a good impression on him. She makes sure that Taulose knows this: the more he views her as a threat to his power, the better.

Eventually, she hopes to replace Taulose as Marquise of Buché as well, giving her a majority vote in the Council of Marquises and sealing her leadership over Valdoc. Raymond has lost two sons in the last decade with his youngest his only heir. Although no evidence was found, Yvonne has had a hand in both their deaths. She has allowed Raymond's youngest son to live, because he would make a good husband to further her plans for domination. Yvonne considers l'Empereur a fool and hopes to split southern Montaigne from northern Montaigne, with herself as the ruler of the north. Having control of Valdoc is the first step in that plan.

Portraying Yvonne de Gineston

She wears her long, black hair up and dresses in the fashion of Valdoc and ancient Montaigne. Her features are sharp, her eyes dark, her nose aquiline. Her style suggests simplicity such as the comfortable, autumn-colored velour dresses, coats and hats, with white silk garments, all of these without the arrogance of modern, ostentatious styles.

She puts on severe airs, appearing upright upon first meeting. In the privacy of her own home, or behind closed walls she lets her proverbial hair down, becoming more affable and kind. Of course, this too is a bit of a lie, as she is anything but truly kind.

Yvonne is powerful in her home region of Bâtonnier, but is not well known beyond the eastern regions of Montaigne. She mostly deals with other nobles and rich merchants in her day-to-day life and is out of place in other social settings. Weary of those close to l'Empereur, she openly rebukes Raymond de Taulose, the current Duke of Valdoc.

Story Hooks

- Yvonne has been riling people up against the Sun King in the hopes of inciting a revolution. She seeks to use the peasantry against the King, but she does not realize that her efforts only add fuel to an already burning fire, which could explode in her face. Her latest effort to rile up a mob may end up with riots across the city. How will the Heroes act to ensure the safety of the town? Will they confront Yvonne about her plans, or allow the possibility of a civil war?
- Raymond de Taulose's two oldest sons have died due to mysterious circumstances. He believes Gineston is responsible, but he does not have proof. He doesn't want her to know he suspects her and asks the Heroes to investigate on his behalf.



Marquise Sidonie du Carré

This middle-aged woman is a tyrant, cruel and controlling. She oversees the Montaigne administration in Altamira, a Castillian city still controlled by Montaigne forces. Based on Carré's wishes and orders, her advisors and officers carefully orchestrate every aspect of Altamira in the name of safety and security. She is upfront about her plans and intentions, to ensure and protect Montaigne interests in Castille. Right now, this means rescuing the troops cut off from Montaigne supply lines—which is no small task.

Beyond being a straightforward, no-nonsense ruler of Altamira, Sidonie is impossibly flawed. Her cruelty goes beyond what her goals should prescribe, and she takes pride in making everyone around her as miserable as possible. She cannot abide by those who defy her and orders her right-hand man, Maréchal Pointu, to execute any who dare.

The aging Grande of Altamira, his daughters and sole remaining son, Gabriel, are prisoners in their own home. Marquise du Carré treats the family with polite indifference at best and petty cruelty at worst. Unbeknownst to the Marquise, Gabriel has been trying to make contact with the outside, risking his life to get the message out that he and his family are in dire need of help. Gabriel would love to help his father and sisters escape, but he has seen what disobedience looks like under the Marquise's regime—suffering and death.

Sidonie hates Castille and Castillians, and yet she loves Altamira, mostly because it has become her favorite playground. In spite of being a Marquise and having a great deal of power over others, she never received such complete control over them as she has now in Altamira. Keeping the family of the Grande of Altamira hostage, controlling their every move and generally terrorizing them and their people is just icing on the cake. In order to do that, she needs Maréchal Pointu. Laurent Pointu is a tall, thin man with long features and a stern stare. He leads her troops in Altamira and enacts her cruelties without question or hesitation. Without him, her tiny empire would fall apart quickly, and she knows it.

Portraying Marquise Sidonie du Carré

Carré has fine features, piercing blue eyes and wears her long, dark hair up. She is pleasant and polite when in the company of important Montaigne dignitaries and nobles. She gladly gives them tours of the Altamira estate, mostly so that she can show off her achievements and control over the people here.

In her eyes, everyone else falls into one of two categories: undesirable or useless. She has no patience for either, and usually lets the Maréchal deal with such problematic people. Castillians nobles often fall into that category, even though she has come under fire for treating them poorly.

Whenever things go wrong, the Marquise becomes petty, incessantly unhappy and displeased with everyone else's behavior. Other times, she is calm and composed. As long as her superiority and control are not threatened, she almost seems nice and approachable.

Story Hooks

- ♦ Gabriel's gambit is near completion. He sneaks into Sidonie's briefing rooms and takes note of planned troop movements. He bribed the Castillian gardeners to help him sneak out of the estate at night. He has drawn a rough map of the estate, pointing out where guards are posted, their shift changes and where the hostages are kept after curfew. He has not yet found a capable crew willing to risk the ire of the Marquise, but it is only a matter of time.
- ♦ Altamiran natives have poisoned supplies intended for Montaigne troops still returning from Castille. Some of them have had a change of heart, but are afraid to tell authorities of the sabotage, as they are sure to get punished along with everyone else. Can the Heroes deal with the poisoned supplies without letting Marquise du Carré and her goons find out?



François DeGaulle

François DeGaulle is a favorite at l'Empereur's court. He is the first son of a powerful Duke and reportedly a second cousin to Léon Alexander himself. DeGaulle stands to inherit a sizable duchy, and some even say that l'Empereur is considering naming him heir to the throne. The veracity of such rumors is suspect, but he is a skilled Porté Sorcier, making him a better candidate in l'Empereur's mind than Dominique.

For his part, DeGaulle has little interest in ruling over Montaigne, and attempts to stymie those rumors whenever he can. It doesn't help that he has a slight love affair with Dominique and is trying his hardest to help her inherit the throne. An affair he must balance as her husband is his best friend, Montégué, who DeGaulle is sure is not where l'Empereur says he is. He's sure there's some romantic gesture to be found in getting into l'Empereur's good graces, marrying his daughter, inheriting the throne, etc. That would be all fine and good if he was not so busy roaming the catacombs of Charouse and chasing after the slightest indication of some occult artifact elsewhere in Théah.

When DeGaulle is not charming the court and setting the latest fashion trends, he tends to stand knee deep in whatever ruin or tomb he thinks may hold untold stories of ancient magic. And if he isn't on a chase for an artifact, he is pouring through every book and tome he can get his hands on describing Porté and the space in between worlds. Of course, he keeps all this rather secret, with the only person who knows the extent of his knowledge being Montégué. Montégué, who is married to his lover, who is missing and who has somehow shed the Blood Mark DeGaulle put on him years ago.

Portraying François DeGaulle

François DeGaulle is an even tempered man, always dressed in the most current court fashions, often setting trends with his dress. He keeps his long brown hair covered in either a stylish purple hat, or a stylish powdered wig, then covered in a purple hat.

While DeGaulle is personable enough, his secretive nature causes him to come off disinterested or distracted. Getting him alone is also a difficult prospect, as many courtiers fancy his favor in court. He is a likely source of information on the royal family, as his connections keep him in the know about their activities.

Ève Lafrisée

Ève Lafrisée is the preeminent assassin in the Charouse underground. Her humble beginnings as a jenny in the rough streets of Charouse a mere fifteen years ago may not have led to her current position without the help of Arnault, her brother.

Arnault was always sickly, and she worked to earn enough to pay for his costly medicine. For the most part, it was fine, but many jenny houses did not like hangabouts who didn't work, and Ève bounced from job to job trying to feed herself and keep Arnault safe.

In the last house she worked in, a particularly drunk and abusive customer murdered Arnault. In her rage, she overpowered the man, tortured and killed him. She realized then that her true calling was never to be a jenny, but instead to kill.

The business of killing was, and continues to be, much more lucrative than entertaining the sons and daughters of rich merchants. After setting up a crew and undermining every lowly assassin she could find, she established herself as the best assassin in Charouse—her reputation increasing with each successful job.

She is now an unstoppable force, and masterminds the majority of criminal enterprises in Charouse and the surrounding region. She finds herself more wealthy now than many dukes in Montaigne, yet she hungers for more. Her criminal enterprise continues to grow, gaining new services and contracts on a daily basis.

Ève regularly bribes the corrupt judges and lawyers of the Montaigne judicial system. Well informed of what occurs at l'Empereur's court, she spares no expenses to keep tabs on the blackmail opportunities that might arise. Many young nobles owe a debt to her as it is, and they have no qualms paying with information on other nobles rather than handing their riches over to the unscrupulous Ève Lafrisée.

Ève has had tremendous luck in business, and she has a record of easily eliminating any who cross her. People in her entourage assume that she is more ruthless than she lets on. She does not know why this happens, but she allows the rumors to continue to further her reputation.

Despite being the boss of a huge criminal organization, she continues to work as an assassin. She commands a high price for her work, but it is well worth it.



Portraying Ève Lafrisée

Daring, ruthless, corrupt. Lafrisée is a wildcard. She is of average height with bright and curly red hair, brown eyes and freckled, bronzed skin. Although undoubtedly a Villain, she gladly helps or hinders a Hero, depending on what he can do for her in return. She always sports a smile, even if bested, and sees all strife as a way to rise above others.

She is a businesswoman in all things and is willing to make compromises, weighing gain and risk with ease. She moves quickly and without grace. Whether she strikes a deal or strikes someone down, her movements are direct and precise.

She can be disarmingly charming if she needs to, although she much prefers being feared than well liked. If she can, she hints that she knows more than she actually does, yet she often knows more than people suspect, thanks to her network of blackmailers and informants.

Story Hooks

- Ève exerts influence over all the gangs in Charouse. A new gang has sprung up, but they refuse to pay their respects. Fights have broken out between her operatives and the gang, causing unrest in the city. One of the two needs to go, before the streets of Charouse turn into a bloodbath.
- Lafrisée noticed someone following her, and later, a new informant came up dead. Someone has fingered the Heroes as the actor, setting her sights on them. They were set up, but Lafrisée does not care, she just wants revenge. The Heroes must find the real culprit to clear their names or deal with Lafrisée and her gang.



Ragnar Odinson

Ragnar Odinson is a local legend in and around the Lock-Horn Forest, most notably near Pierre-Percée. The stories are wild and varied. He is a drachen slayer, and killed the last of the drachen several centuries ago. He once died and visited the great hall, but his friends brought him back. He drinks from a silver flagon always filled with mead, although he only shares a sip at a time with those he considers friend. He has fortunes untold and shares them with those he finds worthy.

While many assume him to be long gone, and the songs and epic tales about this character as gross exaggerations, they are mistaken. The stories of his life and his deeds are true. The tales of his immense treasure are true. Ragnar is old, but alive and well. He knows no fear, only the sorrow of a too-long life and of seeing his bloodline extinguished by adversity and time.

Locals know Odinson by a different name, Vieux Gérard. He is somewhat of an authority concerning the Treasure O'Rourke, and he gladly shares the tales of Ragnar's life with any who show interest. People call them tall tales, but Ragnar knows them to be true—such as the time he stole a King's son after bringing the boy back from the dead. Or when he sailed to the skies with only his voice as the wind, or the time he fought a golden drachen, died, and then returned.

Every so often, he finds a worthy treasure-hunter and gives her clues to find a piece of his fortune, one chest at a time. His hope is to engender the same kind of adventurous spirit he had in his youth, and to see someone else fill his shoes. That, and he hopes to find someone worthy and able to finally end his long life. While he has a great sense of humor, he has become desperate to find death and an opponent who could take his life in battle.

He prefers to not involve himself in politics and abhors schemes and any subterfuge that goes beyond a practical joke.

Portraying Ragnar Odinson

Ragnar is a Hero of yore, with piercing grey eyes and deep wrinkles. He is old and vast, like the thickest oaks in the Lock-Horn Forest—tall, stout, with strong limbs, long white braids and a long grey beard. He looks like an active Vesten Raider who never bothered dying of old age.

Ragnar's moods change easily, going from joyous to depressed to belligerent in the space of a few poorly placed words and vice versa with well-timed humor. He might yell and scream at someone for bumping into him, but then offer to buy them a drink and tell them a story. Once past the gruff exterior, Odinson is a fascinating man with a depth of character and quick wit that rivals any Hero.

Ragnar can be found in any inn or tavern of Pierre-Percée going by the name Vieux Gérard. He enjoys storytelling and sharing news of nearby villages and settlements. If he hears of trouble in the area or beyond, he gets involved.

Story Hooks

- Ragnar seeks the final adventure to end his life. He wanders Pierre-Percée in search of a tale epic enough to fit him and a danger great enough to finally be the death of him. All this time, he has been holding out to fight a drachen, though any equally legendary creature would do. Any who could satisfy this desire would be rewarded greatly.
- Over the years, Ragnar has doled out tiny pieces of his treasure as reward to those he finds worthy. And now, it's nearly gone. Instead of admitting he has nothing left to give, he has decided to go in search of more treasure to refill his coffers. Will the Heroes help the ancient Vesten seek out new treasure, with the promise of making their own riches?



Général Pardie Soussens

The General of the now defeated Montaigne army tires of war. She has lost her appetite for violence, and had she not held the title of general, she would have deserted a long time ago. She is a strong woman and has no fear of death in battle.

In fact, her foolhardy bravery and opportunistic tactics early on in the war between Montaigne and Castille allowed her to climb the ranks to the position she now holds. Unfortunately, the war has eroded her youth and her willingness to take up arms against other men and women, no matter what side. Her once red hair has turned white and harsh lines have formed on her face as a result of the sorrow and bitterness she feels.

For the last several months, she has worked hard to recondition the Montaigne army, to build them back up so that they can support the retreat and supply lines of troops still in Castille. Unfortunately, her underfed and overworked troops remain stressed from the atrocities of war. Thanks to her efforts, the makeshift camp near Dechaine has nonetheless grown into one of the largest military compounds in the region. She has worked closely with the admirals and navy officers of Montaigne to reassign a portion of her troops to maritime warfare. General Soussens also wishes she could find a new start.

Now Pardie has to deal with more than just her exhausted, starving soldiers, selfish officers and military defeat due to l'Empereur's decision-making incompetence. The Duke who controls the region with Dechaine has ordered her to take back the city. She now knows the truth. Dechaine is not off-limits because of a plague outbreak: its people have overthrown the ruling class and run things now. She faces a moral dilemma that may very well kill her.

It breaks her heart to see her soldiers suffering and to see the people of Montaigne suffering, yet she has strict orders and her next actions are being scrutinized very closely. General Soussens has mobilized her troops, and she sends her soldiers to war once again, to wage death and violence upon the people who have dared rise up against tyranny. If she hesitates to take action, l'Empereur's powerful supporters will call her a traitor to the crown and execute her.

Portraying Général Pardie Soussens

General Soussens is tall and muscular, has cropped gray hair, piercing dark eyes. She always wears her general's uniform, coat unfastened, which has been repaired and mended several times over.

As a practical-minded woman, she has no familial attachments except for the men and women that serve in her battalion. She is disinterested in a scheme the Heroes might present to her unless it guarantees to save lives. She always prefers a direct approach and confrontation rather than a convoluted plot, though she is a master strategist.

Story Hook

- General Soussens tires of being pushed to fight against helpless people in pointless wars. She is disillusioned with the grandeur of her own nation and is just as likely to march against her mad King as she is against a town of rebellious peasants. Word of yet another war would surely push her into rebellion, though if she knew the royal family of Dechaine was in desperate straits, her honor would force her to act against the city. Will the Heroes attempt to sway Soussens in one direction or the other?



The Musketeers

Montaigne's elite military, sworn to uphold the principles of honor, duty, courage and loyalty. A Musketeer is the epitome of Montaignoise noble privilege and obliviousness. The Musketeers themselves are the most loyal, brave and honorable soldiers in Montaigne. Yet, each and every one of them comes from a noble house, hand-picked by other nobles, their ranks unintentionally populated by privilege.

The history of the group belies the elite status needed to join their ranks in recent days. During the first years of the War of the Cross, a group of soldiers held the Montaigne border against Castillian invasion for over thirty days. The Montaignois soldiers dwindled in numbers, and the last two units stood their ground. They eventually turned the tide of the battle by collecting all the fallen soldier's muskets, and releasing volley after volley into the ranks of Castillian soldiers. The Castillian commanders believed Montaigne had received reinforcements, and called a retreat.

When the two units returned home, l'Empereur rewarded them for their bravery by renaming their unit as Musketeers and giving them leave to recruit the best soldiers into their ranks. He pulled several of them in short order to join the la Garde Lumineuse (the Lightning Guard) as his personal bodyguards. Three of them still serve him to this day.

In the beginning, the ranks of the Musketeers filled with common and noble alike, but as the years went on fewer peasant soldiers had the training to meet the demands of the elite force. Each year, older Musketeers retire, and new recruits test for entry. The high requirements to join ensure only the best soldiers make it into the ranks of Musketeers. After the war with Castille, the experienced soldiers who could pass the tests come only from the nobility, and as older Musketeers retire, the whole order shifts in a more noble-centric direction. A young Musketeer claims to not care about noble birth among the ranks, and he certainly treats the older members with as much—if not more—respect as any noble born Musketeer.

The Musketeers represent the most loyal and well-trained soldiers in Montaigne. They populate the ranks of the Lightning Guard, and often serve as personal body guards to the highest ranked nobles in the nation. Even though their membership remains

static at 1,000 members, within the order they have a saying, "Once a Musketeer, always a Musketeer." Meaning even if you no longer wear the tabard and bear the signature Musket, those who do always consider you brethren.

Despite what appears to be favoritism towards the nobility, the Musketeers are beloved of everyone in Montaigne. A peasant trusts a Musketeer over a city guard to enact justice, and a noble trusts one with her life. Everywhere one goes, she finds a warm greeting, instant trust and likely a problem or two that need solving. Even in the poorest areas, or those most affected by l'Empereur's wars a Musketeer is likely to be greeted with a fanfare upon entry to a city.

A Musketeer's loyalty is renowned, which in recent times has caused no end of moral quandary for the order. This Hero loves his Nation and hopes to do the best he can to protect and defend its people. The people treat him as the soul of Montaigne—compassionate, generous and fair—yet he takes actions which actively improve the standing and interests of his Villainous, corrupt King. Dealing with the dichotomy of duty versus honor is not easy for most.

This contrast is reflected in the Musketeer's leadership. On one hand, Guillaume Houbleton, Lieutenant-Captain of the Musketeers, strictly enforces l'Empereur's laws and policies. He also protects the people of Montaigne from these laws. On the other hand, Julien Reinette—a former Corporal in the Montaigne army and now second in command as the Musketeers sub-Lieutenant—has no trouble supporting and carrying out l'Empereur's abusive powers against the people of Montaigne, and he often sends his Musketeers to escort an abusive noble, ensuring that no harm comes to him.

A Musketeer follows orders, but no one expects her to do so without question. Her devotion to honor and justice are part of why she is selected into the order. She would die for l'Empereur, but she would just as soon die protecting the very people whose lives depend on l'Empereur's generosity. She may see l'Empereur as oppressive, and yet she is sworn to protect him and in some cases, assist him in his oppressive regime. She may decide to retire early, disheartened. While another Musketeer may take the opportunity to rise above the rest of his brethren and adopt a



philosophy that puts the people of Montaigne ahead of the interests of l'Empereur. He justifies his actions by claiming to protect l'Empereur from himself.

Many Musketeers have adopted this attitude, and those who do assist Louiselle Marie-Francoise de Beaufort in her efforts to cleanse corruption from the inside of Montaigne. Their largest efforts revolve around keeping Lieutenant-Captain Houbleton in charge, and attempting to force Lieutenant Reinette to retire. Unfortunately, quite a few Musketeers who have been around long enough to see how things work follow Reinette's philosophy of following the laws to the direct letter. While the ranks of the Musketeers are not truly divided, the differing philosophies lead to rifts and disagreements more often than not.

Story Hooks

- ♦ The Musketeers garner a great deal of respect, but in places like Dechaine, the peasantry have grown restless and hostile. Lieutenant-Captain Houbleton wants to send Musketeers to give aid and relief to these peasants, but he has several other missions making his order stretched thin. Can the Heroes help Houbleton restore the Musketeer's good name?
- ♦ Lieutenant Julien Reinette has assigned Lisette Bernard to escort a noble to Charouse. The man is friends with Bernard's father, and is corrupt and abusive. He once hit her younger brother so hard, he had a bruise for a week. She is torn between following the order and dealing with the man once and for all. Maybe the Heroes can help her.
- ♦ The Heroes learn of a plot to set fire to Château de la Vie, the Musketeer academy. The culprits are Rilisciare members who believe the order is corrupt. Will the Heroes help the Rilisciare or the Musketeers? Or, will they find a way to reconcile the problem without violence?

Cédric Bédoux

Cédric Bédoux grew up an orphan in the streets of Crieux, working odd jobs to survive, sometimes resorting to theft. A small street gang eventually picked him up and taught him the finer art of deception and robbery, which he excelled at. Within short order, he rose through their disorganized ranks and took over. He insisted that the gang know how to handle real weapons, and they often went to the city guard barracks to watch them train and pick up tips.

A money lender hired Bédoux and his gang to deal with a man late on his debts. The man refused to pay, and the thugs threatened him with violence. He pulled a sword on the gang members, and for the first time in his life, Bédoux killed someone. That night, his life changed. He knew he never wanted to kill again, but he was too embroiled in his gang to leave them. He grew distracted and sloppy from the guilt of his deed eating him alive.

Bédoux's life took another turn when a seemingly easy mark turned out to be a master duelist and knight of the Rose & Cross, who knocked him on his butt before he could even begin to pick the man's pocket. Instead of turning Bédoux in to the city guard, Jean-Baptiste Babineaux offered him the chance to act as a squire and learn to be a better person. Seeing his chance to escape the life he currently lived, Bédoux jumped at the chance.

Cédric Bédoux served under Babineaux for the next ten years, honing his self-taught sword skills and attempting to right the wrong he committed as a youth. Babineaux sponsored Bédoux into the Knights of the Rose & Cross in the past year, something Bédoux had always thought was beyond him.

Portraying Cédric Bédoux

Cédric is a muscular man with long brown hair and striking eyes—one green and the other hazel. He wears the tabard of a Knight of the Rose & Cross with pride, refusing to take it off except in the most personal of situations. He is polite and affable, though he still has the quick wits of his street thug origins. Bédoux is wary of strangers, though quick to lend a helping hand no matter the circumstances. Those he trusts earn his unwavering loyalty and his mastery with the sword.



Sigsvald

Born in Vestenmennavenjar, Sigsvald is a legend in Altamira. He is the proprietor of the city's only mead hall, The Troll's Beard, and a master storyteller and brewer. He built the hall with his own hands, something that not only impressed the locals, but earned him a lot of respect.

Sigsvald was a Vesten Raider as a youth, raiding ships all across the Maw. He has a story for every scar, and recalls them with fondness. He left raiding to take up brewing when Brewmaster Skard offered his crew the entirety of an experimental mead as reward for delivering a shipment of purloined Numanari honey. He went to Skard's brewery and started helping out, eventually earning the title of master. With no formal apprenticeship, the Vendel League was disobliged to accept him as a Guildmaster, since it was the first time they had heard his name in all that time.

Sigsvald retired in Altamira after several years of fighting for the city. He considers the place his home, and is not pleased by the Montaigne occupation. He uses the mead hall as a refuge for the war-weary and a safe haven for Castillians seeking to leave the city. No one bothers Sigsvald, not even Marquise du Carré, though she tried when she first took up residence in the city. He quickly put her in her place, and now even her guards give him a wide berth, making the hall an excellent place for clandestine meetings.

The Troll's Beard offers the finest mead found anywhere outside Master Skard's own brewery in Vendel. Sigsvald specializes in light and fruity meads, and has some sparkling versions that both his Castillian and Montaigne clients would kill to access.

Portraying Sigsvald

Sigsvald is well into his fifties, though the only visible grey is thin streaks in his thick beard. He keeps his head shaved to show off the tattoos—and scars—earned during his days of raiding. He values a story more than anything else, and is known to offer mead for free if you offer a suitable story in return.

The Troll's Beard has a unique feature inside it—a run covered table. Sigsvald is mostly mum about what the runes represent, but anyone who spends any time drinking at the table can tell you that it does something. Drinking games are more daring, bar brawls started at it are more epic and stories take on a life of their own at the table.

Renée Martin

Renée Martin was born in rural Montaigne. She was a peasant working the fields of a noble with more land than time or patience. Her family did well for themselves, with work, a meager income and food most days. Her older brother died of a wasting disease when she was a baby, and her younger two siblings both died in the Castillian invasion, where Martin did not.

Martin and her siblings—all one year apart in age—joined the military in the second year of the campaign against Castille. Where the other two Martin children were probably too young to be fighting, Renée was in her prime. She caught on to sword use and tactics swiftly, earning distinction among her fellows. In her first skirmish battle, she was the only new recruit who actually waded forward and attacked, rather than standing in fear, or running away. She moved from unit to unit, as her previous assignments lost numbers quickly.

By the end, she had earned the rank of Commander, and was leading a unit on her own. When she returned home from the war, Martin was a changed woman. She knew the harshness of war, but also felt the glory of victory. She tested to join the Musketeers immediately, and, as a surprise even to them, they accepted her.

Martin knows she is different. She is one of few non-noble Musketeers, and the only one of her age. She trains in Château de la Vie with the other Musketeers, and strives to prove herself. Most of the others do not seem to notice the difference, or at least make no mention of it to her face. Those who do are the few others who joined at the same time, who bully and mock her. She weathers it without comment, simply pushing herself as hard as she can. But, they are a constant reminder that she is not like the rest.

Portraying Renée Martin

Renée Martin is young, but hardened by her time at war. She keeps her brown hair shorn, and her brown eyes gleam with youth. She is short and slight, a product of under-nourishment. She is not powerful, and instead uses speed and flexibility to outmatch an opponent. She uses that same technique when dealing with people, preferring brevity of speech over the flowery language her compatriots use. She is down to earth and helpful, genuinely believing in the Musketeer code and loyal to her nation.





Secret Societies have spread their influence all across Théah, and some more than others within the confines of Montaigne. Certain Secret Societies operate almost openly unchecked by their normal foes, while others must go further underground or risk gaining l'Empereur's ire and a death sentence.

The Brotherhood of the Coast

The Brotherhood has been very active south of La Motte, where a Vesten trader can easily find herself unable to pay the raised luxury tax. She instead charts a course for Castillian and Vodacce ports in the hopes of dumping her goods and valuables for a higher profit. Details of those charters and schedules all somehow make their way into the hands of the Brotherhood, who uses them to ransack ships carrying valuable goods. The commodity of such valuable information has allowed members to earn favors quickly in La Motte.

Die Kreuzritter

Members of Die Kreuzritter in Montaigne are few and far between. This serves the monster hunters well, in the sense that they all know one another by name, as well as what regions and towns they each operate out of. They trade information more often and aid one another whenever possible. Rumors of the Devil of the Summit—le Diable du Sommet—have finally made its way to the Secret Society, but they have yet to take action against it. It is only a matter of time before a group of “pilgrims” goes on a monster hunt. First, Die Kreuzritter needs more information. Le Diable has been elusive, and people say it returns shortly after being vanquished.

The Explorer's Society

Large towns and cities of Montaigne have shared clubhouses, libraries and collections that members of the Explorer's Society in good standing can visit. Individuals from the Montaigne elite maintain and care for these places of learning.

Members have a lot to do in Montaigne. Since most churches have been turned into museums by the nobility, the Explorer's Society has prioritized gaining access to the reliquaries, Syrneth artifacts, old tomes and other mysterious finds for study. The former clergy has complicated things by smuggling holy artifacts and reliquaries out of churches themselves and hiding the treasures from greedy nobles.

The Society has been unable to gain access to the restricted section of La Grande Cathédrale in Charouse, other than a polite tour for those well-connected members. It holds artifacts that beg to be studied and erudite papers that should surely be shared. It is only a matter of time until the vast collection that has eluded them finally becomes the Society's asset.

Močitutès Skara

Recently, informants have reported a tremendous conflict arising in Dechaine, as well as a possible outbreak of the plague. Of course, the claims of disease are greatly exaggerated, but that doesn't mean the people in the city don't require aid.

An agent making her way there can help in many ways, whether to aid those suffering from a deadly disease or to prevent a civil war breaking out. Either way, she may find herself butting heads with the very active and far-reaching Rilasciare.



The Invisible College

The members of the Invisible College have been very busy in Montaigne. Thankfully, the reach of the Inquisition in Montaigne is all but non-existent, save perhaps for a few concealed agents and informants. Buché has been the central connection to the Invisible College's operations in Montaigne, aiding Vaticine scholars throughout the nation to find work as tutors and professors in Buché's progressive universities. The members are also very active in Charouse, where the military colleges develop advanced weapons and more effective gunpowder.

Much like the Explorer's Society, members of the Invisible College also seek access to the tomes kept in La Grande Cathédrale. This shared interest might prove to be dangerous for all involved if the Secret Societies coveting or protecting the collection get desperate enough to bring violence with them.

Los Vagabundos

Montaigne is a nation filled with the third and fourth children of minor nobles. A minor noble may never teach his child to lead, though after so many wars, she may be all that remains of her family line. Los Vagabundos members have their work cut out for them, keeping an eye on the nobility and attempting to ensure the best get the chance to rule with such slim pickings.

Additionally, Altamira has been in the masked figure's sight for a long time. With the Grande's family held hostage by the Montaigne Administration, Los Vagabundos have been trying to extract them, but so far, only various acts of sabotage have been successful. Security has been too tightly controlled.

Favor in Montaigne

A Hero who belongs to Los Vagabundos can earn Favor while in Montaigne in the following way:

- ♦ Helping a worthy noble gain power in court is worth 5 Favor.
- ♦ Freeing the noble family of Altamira is worth 12 Favor.

Rilasciare

Whether the Rilasciare had a hand in the expulsion of the Vaticine religion in Montaigne or not is irrelevant. What is relevant is that the expulsion has emboldened l'Empereur and the nobility in general. Léon Alexandre's power is absolute, and agents of the Rilasciare have had to infiltrate every level of the Montaigne Government and ruling body.

A few months ago, the Rilasciare pulled agents to join the active cell in Dechaine, when an opportunity arose. While the revolution in Dechaine may have occurred on its own, the agents of the Rilasciare accelerated the process, first by intensifying the negative effects of l'Empereur and the ruling Duke's policies and then by educating the populace, making rousing speeches, spreading revolutionary ideals of Liberté, Égalité and Fraternité, thus lighting fire to the political powder keg with tremendous results!

With this resounding success, the Rilasciare will go to any length to keep the momentum to liberate the regions surrounding Dechaine. Meanwhile, agents within l'Empereur's court actively try to distract the Sun King. In that regard, they continue the Duke of Dechaine's deception that a quarantine is enough to deal with the threat Dechaine poses. They have also sent their best agents to sway General Soussens into joining the cause of the Revolution and wait for a report.

The leaders of the Rilasciare in Montaigne have lowered their moral standards in order to get things done. While all members of the Rilasciare uphold the goals of removing monarchies and religions from Théah, an agent typically struggles with the actions he has had to take. Murdering various spies to keep things quiet, sacrificing the few for the good of the rest and disagreements among members on the next proper course of action: all of these factors have created a rift in the Rilasciare. Some believe that the time is now and that their goals in Montaigne will soon be achieved, while others feel that time is on their side, and that opportunities will continue to move things in their favor.

Favor in Montaigne

A Hero who belongs to the Rilasciare can earn Favor while in Montaigne in the following way:

- ♦ Starting a peasant's revolt in a city is worth 5 Favor.



La Bravoure de l'Épervier

The Sparrow's Bravery. The Bravery refers to the group of men and women who formed a bond and now work together toward a common goal. Bravery also refers to the Mantle of the Sparrow, a red leather hood, adorned with a pointed nose and capelet. Finally, Bravery refers to the common attribute its members share.

This Secret Society was founded and operates today on the same principles as Los Vagabundos. When Los Vagabundos began solving issues with Montaigne nobility, it became clear that l'Empereur's endless resources pose an issue to the organization. L'Empereur's spies and allies became the greatest threat to the Castillian Secret Society's very existence. At its height, the conflict between them became such that Los Vagabundos saw many of its members thwarted and killed. Operating in a nation with a true Villain for a monarch had taken its toll on the organization.

In order to circumvent this threat, Colette de Lioncourt—the influential Duchesse d'Arcy—offered to fund and maintain a sect of Los Vagabundos in Montaigne. Her simple reason for supporting the cause? Her grandson wore El Vagabundo's mask when l'Empereur's agents killed him.

She did not know of the Secret Society's existence despite living with her grandson. In all the time he operated as an agent of Los Vagabundos, he operated under her nose in her own house. He even held secret meetings with members and sent agents throughout Montaigne, all from her own living room without her knowledge.

She had her own agents and spies track down those closest to her grandson, in order to find out exactly why he had been killed. When she captured them, they thought that Los Vagabundos' influence in Montaigne was doomed. But she liked what they revealed to her. She understood the importance of

their goals, and most importantly, the sacrifice that her grandson had made. She freed them, gave them El Vagabundo's mask and told them to return it to the Castillian. She had other plans for Montaigne. When the members returned, they formed the Bravery. It has been in operation for the last six years, so its influence is still small.

The Bravery aims to protect the Noble Heroes of Montaigne, while thwarting the corrupt Noble Villains. These straightforward goals involve a lot of complex operations. The Bravery is small. Colette de Lioncourt hired most of its spies from her own trusted people, and they do not know they support the Bravery. Little by little, they have whittled away at l'Empereur's influence, mostly by pointing out what a terrible job he does as a ruler. The Sparrow's Bravery has decided that it is in Montaigne's best interest to see Léon Alexandre removed from the throne and to put his youngest daughter—Dominique de Montaigne—as the rightful heir and monarch.

La Bravoure mostly operates in and around Charouse, where l'Empereur's influence is greatest, but the people witnessed an agent recently in Dechaine, where he rescued innocent nobles from an angry mob.

Favor with La Bravoure de l'Épervier

The Bravery operates independently from Los Vagabundos to protect the parent organization from being threatened by l'Empereur any further. However, agents of Los Vagabundos who need help or wish to operate in Montaigne know how to make contact with the Bravery, gain favors and get what they need.

Favors within the Bravery are interchangeable with Los Vagabundos and vice versa.





Charouse

The city of Charouse always teems with energy. The cobblestone streets clack with the sounds of hoof beats and expensive shoes. The clinking of coin and the clashing of dueling swords are common sounds echoing its narrow streets and covered plazas. Unlike any other city in Montaigne, in many ways it is its own nation. A person from another part of Montaigne views Charouse and its citizens as different than himself and for good reason. While Montaignois care about fashion and the arts, Charousiens set fashion and create art. The fortunes of a Charousien can change in a heartbeat if she plays the game correctly. Opportunity is found in every deal, with every meeting.

A Charousien has a great sense of purpose and moves aggressively, single-minded in his purpose, tending to business, loudly attracting customers from the streets to see his wares and services. First and foremost, a Charousien can tell where someone is from very quickly. Even the pauper hoping to sell

her cheap wares can spot a country noble in expensive clothing or a rich Duke in a slumming disguise. After all, her livelihood depends on it: she reads opportunity as clearly as if it were painted on the faces of all that she meets. For those very reasons, a Charousien knows a newcomer, be he from Montaigne or from other parts of Théah.

Charouse is a city of merchants, where the bourgeois and petite noblesse mingle with the poor hagglers, servants and commoners trying to get by with the next big sale or con job that sets him up for the next several months. It isn't that everyone trying to make money in Charouse is a crook, but it helps him make a living.

The wide Sinueuse River feeds the city with new goods all along its broad banks. Eager merchants proudly display new finds from faraway shores and well-known ports, such as exotic foods, the latest fashions or priceless antiques of Montaigne's past. Nearby, customers can find "les nouveautés du jour"—today's fashionable items—such as Ifri masks, Vodacce sculptures, rare dyes and pigments, fine-patterned fabrics,



silks from the Crescent Empire and rare scholarly tomes in all languages. Trusted servants buy these novelties to become part of the décor in a noble's home, proudly displayed in a salon as a status symbol more than anything else. As long as there is money to be spent, goods are sold, be they real or counterfeited.

Rarely are the richest members of nobility seen in Charouse proper, since they have their servants or smaller noble families represent them in affairs of money exchange. After all, Charouse is for merchants, and the truly powerful dwell in Le Château du Soleil—l'Empereur's new palace.

Le Marché du Pont-Neuf

The loudest and busiest place in Charouse is the Marché du Pont-Neuf (New Bridge Market). The open-air market sprawls either side of the largest bridge in the Capital. Pushing your way through is a necessity. Pedestrian, mounted and chariot traffic separates both sides of the bridge. The bridge connects the noble districts with the rest of the city. Due to its proximity to the nobility, the goods sold here are heavily priced and heavily taxed. They also vary greatly, from fragrant food stalls, to fashion and art, to luxurious and rare items from Théah and beyond.

Getting lost here is a simple task, but finding everything and anything is just as easy. The price is higher than anywhere else, but if it is for sale, you can find it here! Hopefully, you don't get tricked into buying a counterfeit.

This market is the largest in Montaigne and therefore the most well-known. You can find quality goods here, but also quality counterfeits. The counterfeit market is so large in Charouse, that a merchant can sell her wares clearly marking them as replicas. These counterfeiters, often as skilled artisans as the original, make it difficult for anyone other than experts to determine the difference.

Merchants must put up stalls at dawn and take them down long before sunset, by order of the Marshal of Charouse. Anyone who fails to pay the estimated tax and to exit the bridge in time is heavily fined, jailed or banned from making a living on the bridge for the foreseeable future.

At night, the bridge gives way to dancers, jugglers and entertainers, hoping for a coin or two as the

richest in the nation cross the bridge for a stroll. Escorts are also hired here for the night, whether to protect a noble with a sword or entertain him with the delight of their company. Where the bridge spills off into the plazas and streets of the merchant district, street theatre troupes, singers, magicians and puppeteers compete for attention.

Le Château de la Vie

Le Château de la Vie is an impressive edifice of light-colored stone, with large, gated courtyards. For a long time it used to be the seat of Montaigne power before l'Empereur moved his court to the newer Château du Soleil. It continues to be where one can find La Caserne Royale des Mousquetaires, where the Musketeers train and operate.

After a hundred years of being Le Château du Parlement, gossipmongers then dismissed it as Le Château du Vieux Roi—Castle of the Old King, referring to Léon Alexandre's father. Once it served as the central Montaigne government building, where l'Empereur, and his father before him, met with the Dukes, Councils, Judges and Justicars. The luxurious buildings surrounding the Château were reserved for the royal family and their guests, foreign dignitaries, ambassadors and well-connected courtiers. When l'Empereur built his Château du Soleil, activity in the Château du Parlement dwindled, reduced to being the host of the valiant Musketeers and the judicial courts. Now corrupt captains, judges and the nobles unlucky enough to be assigned to "Château du Vieux" oversee all of the minor bureaucratic functions of the government.

l'Empereur gives those whom he deems old and boring a bitter title and endless duties, forcing them to continue being bores, such as resolving minor disputes between merchants and citizens, stamping travel authorizations and other bureaucratic dead ends. This terrible social punishment often forces the poor noble to miss out on all the galas and parties where influence and riches can be gained or even cleverly stolen.

When Louiselle Marie-Francoise de Beaufort was assigned in jest as chief administrator of the Château de Vieux, she was laughed at by her father and sisters and ridiculed by the rest of the guests at l'Empereur's soirée. It had been a way for l'Empereur to reward



Beaufort's efforts at court...by appointing her somewhere out of the way. Now her critical discourse and reprimands of the courtiers, their immoral behavior and the harm they caused the rest of Montaigne could not be exercised as vividly. Dejected, Louiselle soon turned a new leaf and allowed her ambition to bolster her importance. After all, she may have lacked the finesse in her rhetoric when approaching l'Empereur with her enlightened thoughts on equality and liberty, but she has turned this insulting assignment into a boon with panache and wit.

Louiselle de Beaufort did not work alone, but with the help of the old administrator she balanced the budget with a surplus within a month of taking residence there and became close friends with the Musketeer captains within two. With each passing month, she breathes new life into the old Château and its luxurious neighborhood, with renovations and remodeling, rooftop gardens and new training regimens for the soldiers, bringing attention to the district. So much so that the fluid name of the place itself has changed from Château de Vieux to become Le Château de la Vie—the Castle of Life. The energy of change is palpable here, and while the corruption at the Superior Court continues, everything else around it changes, with a feeling that the Musketeers themselves have not felt in some time—hope.

Le Château du Soleil

At the edges of Charouse lies the great forest of the kings of Montaigne. This Montaigne ancestral hunting land, and what used to be the royal hunting lodge and a sprawling estate, is now the center of power in Montaigne. Over the course of Léon Alexandre's reign, it has become Le Château du Soleil—the Palace of the Sun.

The main pavilion is several stories tall and sprawls impossibly as one approaches the main entrance. The exquisite stonework has bright frescoes and striking symmetric lines. Splendid sculptures, elaborate fountains and carefully manicured gardens surround every connected building and courtyard in a surreal experience. It creates the illusion that one is infinitesimally small in comparison to the one the estate embodies—l'Empereur himself. This achievement was of course only possible at enormous costs to the Montaigne coffers, although it seems that they must

be limitless. Only with armies of engineers, sculptors, gardeners—still at the disposition of the master of the estate—was this masterpiece of Montaigne culture possible.

The interior is more impressive still. Every gallery and hall is adorned with finely made furniture, enormous paintings and ceiling frescoes and sculptural decor so vast, yet so detailed, that it dwarfs the visitors. The details overwhelm so much that the complex servant quarters are impossible to find, navigate or, for the various staff, to be noticed in the first place. A servant, of course, uses the complex walled passages and swiveling panels to remain invisible until he expects to serve again. A guest may find her glasses always full and her plates always bountiful.

The stream of palace guests attending daily gatherings, parties or grand galas can be just as overwhelming. Most hope to impress the Sun King so he will grant them riches and favor. Things are calmer if he is not present at his parties and attending to his frequent briefings and meetings. If l'Empereur likes someone, he keeps him around, assigning him apartments within the palace. Of course, the palace has a limited number of apartments available, and his favor changes on a whim. One day, you might be very close to the King and then find yourself in an entirely different wing, or worse yet, denied access to the Château du Soleil, should you lose the King's favor. These nobles are typically young, rich, beautiful and desperate for the King's favor.

Even now that the main buildings and the long halls have been in use for over a decade, elsewhere new parts of the estate is under construction. New pavilions are built to host the growing guest list of courtiers and powerful ambassadors that attend l'Empereur's court. Work crews have their own wooden barracks, just outside some of the auxiliary gates of the hunting grounds.

A small barrack near each gate links back to the main bastion of martial activity via well-kept gravel paths. The garrison of l'Empereur's Lightning Guard operates in these bastions. They dedicate themselves to their task, holding honor, bravery and diligence above all.

La Garde Lumineuse (the Lightning Guard) are the hand-selected elite in charge of l'Empereur's protection. With l'Empereur's safety in mind and at



heart at all times, they have never failed him. Strict schedules and regular reports allow the Lightning Guard to quickly root out any impostors, thus greatly reducing an infiltration within their ranks. They remain constantly vigilant, watchful for assassins and other nefarious enemies of Léon Alexandre and his court, even though most guests at a gala would not notice. Due to their vigilance, the court rarely sees a dangerous incident, but when it occurs, the Guard ruthlessly carries out punishment as requested—and l'Empereur has no qualms about executing his enemies to prove a point.

La Grande Cathédrale

The tallest tower in Théah, visible from most places in Charouse, is a church. The Great Cathedral of Charouse was built long ago, but the addition of its great tower was built within the last two decades, when l'Empereur was younger and on good terms with the Vaticine Church. He wanted to have the grandest church in Théah. After all, his worship was worth it.

Now that the Church has excommunicated Montaigne and l'Empereur has banned the Vaticine religion completely, he decided to have the Cathedral refurbished into a museum. It now holds a well-guarded collection of architectural models, rare Syrneath artifacts, ancestral swords and treasures from l'Empereur of Montaigne's conquests, historical reliquaries of former kings and nobles.

In the belly of the Cathedral's crypt, somewhere below what used to be a famous Vaticine altar, the sarcophagi and reliquaries of saints buried in the church are kept intact. It is no secret that the Vaticine reliquaries still reside there, but the museum officials decided to no longer display them to the public.

Below the crypt, in the rooms that hold the foundation columns of the Cathedral herself, members of the Order of the Rose & Cross meet on a regular basis. La Grande Cathédrale is the seat of the Secret Society in Charouse and its surrounding area. Knights and Benefactors in good standing meet in the Cathedral with the proper authorization from l'Empereur himself, always under the auspicious pretext of displaying new artifacts, donating new scientific discoveries or perhaps to admire new amenities in an unused alcove to hold the new enlightened writings of scholars. If the items displayed continue to enhance

the glory of his enlightenment, Léon Alexandre does not care what happens inside the church, as long as it is not Mass, of course. These pretexts are wonderful excuses for the members of the Rose & Cross, yet over time, the collection in the museum of the Cathedral has attracted the attention of the Explorer's Society as well as the Invisible College. Territorial disputes are not likely to occur, but artifacts and tomes may go missing from time to time.

Les Catacombes

Aside from the hopeful treasure or artifact hunters, the poorest citizens and the sewer workers of the city of Charouse, a new group of people has made their way through the maze of Syrneath tunnels, the criminal underground.

This criminal underground is a network with a clear hierarchy and territory-based charter. The Queen of the Underworld—La Reine des Catacombes—sets prices on illegal goods, taxing every criminal that operates in her territory, much in the way that the city officials tax the honest merchants of Charouse. Her cut is much more reasonable than the taxes set by l'Empereur and his council though. Known simply as "The Queen," the wanted posters bear the name Ève Lafrisée. She even bears the same long scar on her cheek, which twists her mouth when she grins.

As with any criminal organization, respect and loyalty go a long way, much further than brash acts of daring or murder. After all, rewarding murderers only encourages the competition, since she also runs a service-based business: interrogations, torture, assassinations or for accidents to happen, all for the right fee, of course.

The fee often depends on the target's influence, and what the illicit act entails. Rumor on the street has it that the Queen of the Underworld assassinates these targets herself, and that she is good at it. It is impossible to know for sure, due to her network of intermediaries and loyal, false witnesses. Either way, the Queen is well-protected, and proving anything would not make her any more of a wanted criminal. The city constables do not hunt her down for fear that destroying the Queen of the Underworld would create a power vacuum in her criminal networks, which would have more dire repercussions for the city than they are comfortable with.



Buché

Tucked in a low valley with many rivers converging to its port, Buché is the capital of the Valdoc region. It is a calm, sprawling city with prominent red brick buildings. Outside the city, farmlands, orchards and forests extend to windy hills. Farther west, small villages remain locked in deep forests and mountain ranges. To the east, rocky beaches grace the small sea inlet north of Doré Bay.

The port-city of Buché is the biggest tax haven in Théah. The Marquises of Valdoc have found a way to completely avoid the opportunist politics in l'Empereur's court. Like other cities far outside of Charouse's reach, the nobility have more control over the enforcement of imperial decree or policy. The lords bear the titles of Marquis and no higher. Due to an obscure law, they have the right to elevate one of their ranks to Duke to represent them at l'Empereur's court. This vote occurs once every five years, without the direct influence of the Sun King. The Duke is afforded powers, even overruling the tax policies of l'Empereur.

The Marquises value the peace and quiet the region affords them, in spite of attempts to engage in warfare with Castille, most notably with the twin city of Barcino. Now that the influx of soldiers returned from war has peaked, and many have found themselves without work, Buché has managed a peaceful agreement with Barcino. Unfortunately, saboteurs on both sides strike time and again, with neither side benefitting. Tensions with the independent city mount slowly below the surface of apparent calm.

The Open Markets

Les Marchés Ouverts—the Open Markets—refers to any market that sprouts up all over the city. They bear a name based on location. For example Le Marché de Saint Saturnin refers to the market that appeared next to the Holy Saturnine Church. Where the market eventually ends up is less relevant. The rivers and canals are slow and easy to navigate, allowing markets to sprout anywhere, thus making them difficult to regulate, but simple to estimate.

The markets would normally pay taxes based on estimations, but move often to avoid them, leaving the nobles to pay the estimated taxes. This allows markets to set their own rates, allowing the Open Markets to offer the best prices in Montaigne. Because the

markets fluctuate and move often to avoid the attention of estimators, hiring a local guide is essential to striking the right bargain.

The Open Market also refers to the types of goods bought and sold here. Because of the nature of the moving markets, a merchant can sell illicit goods for as long as she can evade the estimator. What constitutes a black market good in other locations is sold openly, as long as you can find a seller.

Most stalls carry a variety of goods, hoping to entice a customer to do all his shopping in the same place. Stall owners try to avoid too much competition with illegal goods, to allow the prices to remain firm. Instead, traders rotate goods to confuse the law. If a trader sells one illegal good this week, she likely sells something else the next. While it may be hard to pin down a single market stall for tax purposes, the officers of the city know the merchants by name.

The Scholars Districts

Buché is a prominent center of higher learning in Montaigne. Branching away from the city center, visitors can easily find its progressive universities, where a student or professor is chosen based on scholarly merit, rather than how much money his family can contribute. The universities hold well-attended debates regularly, and any night of the week masters and erudite scholars from all over Théah broach many subjects of higher learning, some which may be considered taboo.

A debater freely discusses controversial subjects in university lecture halls and amphitheaters, in spite of frequent arrests by agents of l'Empereur's Minister of Culture. A debater who has not yet been sent to a tribunal to defend her university-born ideas is not considered an accomplished professor yet. The arrests are often a spectacle of their own: aside from being entertaining to students and faculty, they reinforce the concept of ideas being dangerous tools, thus proving the importance of progressive universities and Buché itself as a cultural center.

The Invisible College's reach within Montaigne is predominantly present in Buché. It has taken strides towards helping Castillian scholars find a place in Buché's cultural circles, either as private tutors to students who can afford them, as assistant professors, librarians or renowned professors under aliases.



Holy Saturnine Church

Saturnine was a martyr from the times of the First Prophet. As one of the Saints who followed the First Prophet, he proselytized in the lands near Doré Bay and finally settled in what would become Buché. At the time, the Prophet symbolized salvation, a guaranteed promise in an uncertain world. This appealed to many, and soon a flock followed Saturnine. He founded a temple and within ten years he had drawn the ire of the local cults who still worshipped multiple gods and revered their ancestors.

The Holy Saturnine Church of present day, however, was built where Saturnine died for his faith. Saturnine's concept of One True God greatly angered the local leaders of other Théan religions. Refusing to participate in a polytheistic ritual, he was whipped and dragged by a sacrificial bull. When the bull finally stopped, Saturnine took his dying breaths, smiling at solving the riddle of martyrdom. His flock mourned him, and founded a new church in his honor in the very spot where he died. Since then, the church has grown into the largest of the region, its bells easily heard throughout Buché and its nearby fields.

Thanks to the relative isolation of the region, and its independence and distance, the Holy Saturnine Church continues Mass on a regular basis, functioning without the support of the Vaticine Church. It hosts bishops and priests from parishes that have closed their doors due to l'Empereur's decree banning the Vaticine religion. The tithes and donations are used exclusively by the Bishop of Buché rather than the Cardinals. The Bishop uses the funds to protect the members of the Vaticine Church in Montaigne, even funding secret pilgrimages by hiring guards and protectors, purchasing nearby lands where monks can work the fields and orchards and encouraging small villages to host exiled members of the church.

The Holy Saturnine Church is also the site of many holy relics, which have been moved and hidden, protected from l'Empereur. The Bishop of Buché knows it is only a matter of time until his defiance of the Sun King's decrees, as well those of the Marquises of Valdoc, catch up to the city. Buché experiences peace and prosperity, which is an anomaly. When the powers in l'Empereur's court understand the situation in Buché better, the Bishop fears their reactions will have dire consequences for his church and flock.

The Château of the Marquises of Valdoc

The Marquises of Valdoc greatly benefit from electing one of their own as Duke of Valdoc. Currently, Raymond de Taulose, reigning Marquis of Buché, holds both titles of Marquis and Duke, and has for over a decade. Eight other Marquises reign over Valdoc with their holdings spread out, yet they meet regularly a few miles outside of Buché in the Chateau of the Marquises—technically the property of all the Marquises.

They all have their own quarters, but it also serves as the main residence of the Duke. Raymond also uses the ancestral home of his family, but he spends most of his time here. In the main wing of this large estate, the Marquises discuss both local and foreign affairs and to make mutually beneficial policies.

Over time, the equality among Marquises has shifted, and the Duke's power and wealth has increased in spite of the original agreement. At the next Council meeting, the title of Duke is up for vote, and Raymond hopes to retain his position. He needs a two-thirds vote to keep the title, or it either goes to someone else or l'Empereur decides. He is likely to choose Raymond again, but wants to see his policies enforced more closely as a result. This has caused tension between the Marquises of Valdoc, and each of them has started mobilizing troops in case the Council fails.

Raymond's biggest rival is Yvonne de Gineston, the Marquise of Bâtonnier. She has spent the last several years putting herself in a position to benefit from the Council's demise. Whether the Council elects her the new Duchess of Buché, or l'Empereur ends up choosing her as the Duchess, she cares not, though she claims it would be preferable that the Council supports her. The other Marquises all have a claim, of course, and there is no shortage of ambition and greed among them.

The castle, much like others in the region, is a stout stone fortress, lacking the refined lines of modern Montaigne architecture. It is easily defensible, although it is unlikely that any of the Marquises can afford to hold the castle and invade his neighbors. The Duke is the only who could, were he to hire enough mercenaries—after all, many returning soldiers need work and he has no shortage of wealth—but he expects the Council will succeed. As long as they get along, Valdoc holds against the influence of the Sun King.





Dechaine

What was once a major port town currently suffers quarantine. A small fleet of Montaigne ships stays off the coast, well out of the way to intercept and warn any who approach from the seas. News of the quarantine has spread quickly to Vesten and Avalonian merchants, who have changed their routes to cover other major Montaigne port towns along the northern coast of the nation, focusing their sales in Lierie and Crioux.

At the northern tip of Montaigne, the city previously named Dechaine is old and well-established, with grey stone city walls and towers built several centuries ago. The Montaigne army has blocked off inland trade routes and from the outside, and it looks as though the citizens indeed burn the bodies of the diseased.

Alas, the rumors of a thwarted plague are merely propaganda, a gauche ploy by the local Duke, Jean-Richard du Lac, to distract from the real facts. The truth is much simpler and uglier.

The people of Dechaine have turned against the oppressive regime, which had starved them of wealth and eventually food. After being hit hard during the War of the Cross, and again in the recent war with Castille, with religious oppression by the privileged noble class and with the foreign trade tariffs driving the prices of mundane items higher and higher, the morale of Dechaine's citizens had never been lower than a month ago.

Peasantry Unchained

After years of discontent, on the brink of starvation, desperate and with nothing left to lose, an angry mob of the city's poorest citizens formed on the docks. A storm grew. The eloquent speeches of local church officials encouraged the mob. Well-respected and enlightened freethinking members of the community joined in. And the bourgeois, sick of seeing their wealth plateau due to their lack of noble blood in a nation that privileged birth over everything, added their own voices. Nobody anticipated, however, how far the mob went to get the justice they longed for. They approached the Marquis Isabeau de Dechaine's estate and at the gates demanded reparations for the abuses they suffered. Isabeau sent her staff to deal with the issue and discovered she was the figurehead of their pent-up anger and rage. The Marquis' staff brought out food to appease the mob, but it only served to anger them further. A call rose, "We are not dogs that you can chain up and starve until you need our bodies to fight your wars!" They threw rocks at the two dozen guards and shook the gates loose, storming the estate.

Chaos ensued. The crowd brought a fury of violence upon the guards, the serving staff and eventually the noble family. They were about to savagely beat the elder of the family, Mère de Dechaine—the Marquis' mother—as she held the Marquis' infant daughter, Hélène. A mysterious Hero stepped up and saved the helpless pair, taking them to safety while the mob put the torch to the noble estate and manor.



The City Walls and Beyond

The news that the tyrant of Dechaine was no more spread throughout the city like wildfire, and the citizens found themselves suddenly liberated. They paraded the Marquis' corpse through the streets, to the cheers and the folly of the crowds. Strife occurred here and there among the people, but those who opposed the tyranny of men and women won this night.

The crowds stayed out until the sun rose the next morning, singing songs of freedom and cheering for their liberators. Somehow the peasantry remained peaceful, with no rioting or fighting breaking out in any meaningful way.

Under the direction of the Rilasciare, the citizens recalled their military training from the campaigns in Castille. They quickly chose leaders among those who had led the original daring assault upon Dechaine's estate. The newly chosen leaders organized a citizens' council. In turn, the council organized its citizens in groups to take over buildings and hold the city walls, which had stood since the 1200s, tall, now mossy and mostly lost to new architecture.

They prepared themselves for a siege, as they had become a sovereign city-state of their own, and they expected consequences. Within two weeks, they held the city as the capital of their free land, spreading words and citizenry to the farms and hamlets beyond. They organized food camps, exchanged services for the good of the many and provided goods and commodities as needed. A tremendous need for organized communication arose and the citizens' council made decisions with small committees to keep matters simple.

They were equals. Men, women, merchants, militia, bakers, peasants. That was the promise of extinguishing nobility and the privilege of noble blood. They would defend this freedom fiercely—with their lives if required. Even fleeting freedom is better than a lifetime of humiliating servitude and starvation. Once known as Dechaine, a peaceful port-town, they now call their home Déchainé—"Unchained".

The Quiet Campaign

Outside of the county, news of the rebellion spread slowly, amid confusing reports of a plague that forced the current embargo and quarantine. The biggest threat to the revolution lies some fifty miles outside of Dechaine where troops currently sit, poised to mobilize.

Duke Jean-Richard du Lac, Dechain's duke and ultimately the one responsible for regaining control of the situation, is offering the old Général Pardie Soussens an astronomical amount of wealth, as well as titles and deeds to Dechaine, in exchange for taking the city back before l'Empereur learns the truth. Or, in the event that someone informs him, the Duke hopes to show his worth by thwarting the spread of the revolution into a nationwide phenomenon.

Général Soussens has seen too many wars. She has won many campaigns in Castille and learned much from Montegue's (l'Empereur's son-in-law) tactics during the war. When l'Empereur stopped supplying troops in Castille with the support she needed, Soussens stood her ground until she could not bear the loss of any more life. Her contingent, the last to return from war with Castille, received orders to form a military camp.

Many deserted a few months ago once they crossed into Montaigne, hearing rumors that the war was long over, easily won, then lost for no reason beyond l'Empereur's boredom. Those who remained loyal built a camp over the last several months and obtained the goods they desperately needed. The soldiers and officers expect to return to Castille for a renewed assault, unaware—beyond wild guesses—of the plans to take Dechaine back.

There they still sit, awaiting Général Soussens's orders, but she has yet to act. It is only a matter of weeks, or maybe days, before she makes her move. The Rilasciare located in Dechain has already sent agents to her camp to sow dissent and the ideals of liberté among the soldiers. Their work is made easier by the war weary Général Soussens, who has no heart for killing her own compatriots.





La Motte

The southernmost point in Montaigne is La Motte, an island most notable for its tall rocky cliffs, topped by grassy and fertile land. Climbers can only reach the top via the carved steps or the low-hill port which offers the only graded access.

The Low-Hill Markets

The port is a major hub for some of the biggest seafaring trading companies in Théah and beyond: it is a resupply stop before the Sinueuse River trading route where goods are then sold in Charouse to the richest nobles in Montaigne.

In the Low-Hill Markets, a Théan can find just about anything he can imagine, and until recently, at a cheaper price than he might have found anywhere else. All luxuries have seen an increase in trading taxes as requested by the Montaigne ruling body. This has affected the Vendel League very negatively as they use La Motte extensively.

The Vendel League rightfully suspects that these new taxes intend to undermine their power—and the power of the Guilder—and they work hard to change the new trade tariffs back. A deal l'Empereur made with the Vodacce Prince Vestini has prompted new luxury taxes. In return, Vestini has secured the growth of a Montaigne district in Five Sails by selling deeds of the old Vodacce side of town to Montaigne nobility. Those involved closely guard this secret deal, which means the Vendel League would go to great lengths to obtain these details. In La Motte, the only person who knows these details is the Port Master, Jean-Luc de la Porte. Getting in his good graces could prove a rather lucrative business.

Les Falaises: The Black Markets of La Motte

The new trade taxes have increased the frequency of visitors to its black market. This has caused unwanted attention to the people who run Les Falaises (the Cliffs). The slang term *going cliffside* means hitting the black markets for some untaxed goods. While many luxury and standard goods can be found here tax-free, the main reason to shop the cliffside markets is to gain access to *Magie Rouge*. Translated as “red magic,” this plant has euphoric effects when ingested or inhaled. Found growing on the rocky cliffs along

the coast of La Motte, this island is the only place the drug can be found. While it may cause euphoria for a short time, it also leads to short-term memory loss after use. La Motte authorities have banned the drug, and growing or harvesting the plant is punishable by a steep fine. That does not stop the gangs in La Motte from selling it at the cliffside markets.

Mont du Flambeau

The small island just north of La Motte is a well-defended fortress. Le Mont du Flambeau is a vestige of Vaticine influence in Montaigne. Once the seat of nobility for the region, the island sports impregnable walls as well as the largest cathedral and monastery in Montaigne since the 1200s.

It was also a major stop for many Montaignois on pilgrimage. At the time of the Hierophant's excommunication of Montaigne as a whole, the monks and pious pilgrims outnumbered the nobility and their meager armed forces: the nobles were more confident in their walls than the people staffing them. The monks living in the monastery organized an attack on the nobles in the night, when they least expected it. The pious sent the nobles and their soldiers out and locked themselves in, promptly making use of the walled city and its resources.

Since then, a new pilgrimage has arisen among the devout and stubborn Montaigne followers of the Vaticine faith: a pilgrim makes her way to resupply the monks and believers regularly to ensure that the slow siege lasts. This whole affair insults the local Marquis, who has spent a great deal of his fortune—if not all of it—trying to take the island back to no avail.

According to the quartermaster's latest calculations, the people left on Le Mont du Flambeau have six months before they completely run out of food, even with rationing. Unfortunately, the meager resupply that pilgrims bring in the dead of night is not enough to keep them sustained forever, so the Bishop has sent out some of his monks to organize a supply run that will let them keep the fortress island for several more years.

L'Auberge de la Croix d'Or

On the mainland, just east of La Motte, in a small village, near a church at the top of a hill, stands the most important inn in Montaigne. L'Auberge de la Croix d'Or is a bustling way station, owned by Marie and Claude Bonvalet. Due to its prime location and quaint setting, many messengers and spies working for every government and organization in Théah visit here to relay information to other agents, exchange letters, pay their blackmailer and so on.

The Bonvalet couple—along with their seven children—know this well and they like it that way. A person can pay a great deal of money for the right information, and he can pay a great deal more to keep that information quiet. The family has mastered the art of subterfuge and sells secrets to the highest bidder. So far, they have been in operation for thirty-two years without anyone being wise to their little scheme or perhaps being wise enough not to upset their business practices.

The inn itself is a stone and lumber construction typical of the region's rustic aesthetic. The main gate opens on a courtyard, with the inn proper to the left and the stables to the right. The side of the inn has room for the guests' carriages and horses, as well as a few of the Bonvalet's horses for sale or rent. The interior is warm and welcoming, decorated with many brass and copper household items, crafted by famous artisans from all over Montaigne. The restaurant portion offers the best tasting and most refined food in the region and may be the main reason why travelers recommend L'Auberge the most.

Near the back of the property, there is a building where traveling nobles can rest and be entertained. A lovely and dense garden—where guests often hold impromptu secret meetings—separates the building. The rooms here are lavishly decorated and typical of modern Montaigne taste, with large mirrors and paintings as well as high ceilings and gold motifs.

The Bonvalet family typically holds their private meetings in the large and well-furnished wine cellar. Nothing conspicuous about the staff resupplying the kitchen with more goods from their stock, after all.



Le Château de Nulle Part

Northwest of the isle of La Motte lies a small bit of land that juts out of the water, tall and rocky. This island is not large enough to appear on any maps, and the topside is difficult to access. Yet, those who pay close attention notice that someone brings supplies here every six months. Those foolish enough to make their way up the cliffside are not heard from again.

This is where l'Empereur sends people he wants to forget about: Le Château de Nulle Part—The Castle of Nowhere. It has only been in service for eight years. It is rare when a new prisoner is brought here, but the men and women who make their way here out of curiosity are apprehended and brought to solitary cells, much too small to do anything but lie down in the dark, on the cold hard rock it was carved from.

The soldiers who work here swear to secrecy, and being commissioned to work here is the Montaigne military equivalent of being sent to jail: those assigned rarely get shuffled out. Sometimes a soldier goes mad and deserts his post, swimming his way out, hoping to reach La Motte. When this happens, a sniper must kill one of her own. This is a rare occurrence, but it is always well-remembered by those who remain behind to watch over the hundred or so prisoners.

The most notable prisoner is probably the one believed to be in Ussura leading a military campaign, l'Empereur's son-in-law, Montègue. Well-loved by the people of Montaigne, Montègue was born a peasant and worked as a corporal for l'Empereur; he saved Léon Alexandre from certain death at the hands of the Castellians. After the tremendous victory, he earned the promotion High General of Montaigne and married Léon Alexandre's youngest daughter, which increased l'Empereur's popularity among the common folk...for a time. If word got out of Montègue's presence here, the Rilasciare could use him to lead the revolutionary Montaigne people, upturn the power structure and find freedom. Perhaps one of the soldiers who deserted and survived the swim to La Motte remembers. Or perhaps his memories have fled him after nearly drowning...

Altamira

Before the war, Altamira was once a popular Castillian port-city, a trading hub between Montaigne, Eisen and Castille, benefitting from the affluent lake, its connected rivers leading to the Doré Bay, as well as nearby connections to the Montaigne rivers that meet the sea at Crieux.

Now, it is a Castillian port-city long occupied by Montaigne forces. As one of the first conquests in the war between the two nations, Altamira quickly turned into the center of all Montaigne military operations in Castille, supplying troops and the goods necessary for a successful war. The Castillian nobility who once controlled Altamira have lost their power completely, yet the Montaigne Administration keeps them alive for the sake of keeping the Grandes of Castille guessing.

In spite of several attempts by El Vagabundo to rescue them, the noble family of Altamira remains sequestered in their vast estate on the rocky hill overlooking the city and port. The Montaigne government still requisitions the estate with a young Marquise as its figurehead—Sidonie du Carré. She is a fierce and cruel woman obsessed with controlling everything within her grasp including all aspects of Altamira.

The Montaigne Administration

The sprawling estate of the Altamira Grande has changed to make room for the Montaigne Administration. Members of the noble family are now kept in the lower northwest wing, under constant surveillance, in many cases forced to share rooms with siblings they don't get along with. They are allowed to wander as long as they obey the strict curfews and limited locations available to them in accordance to Maréchal Laurent Pointu, the Marquise's right-hand man.

The rest of the estate has been completely rearranged. The Marquise has taken residence in the Altamira Grande's former rooms, enjoying the lavish Castillian décor that she has grown fond of. The grand hall, where family dinners and guests once cheerfully ate, drank and sang together now houses the war room where high-ranking officers hold the most important briefings regarding Montaigne troop movements abroad—whether in Castille or Eisen. Other military briefings are held in adjoining rooms.



The Southern wings are the living quarters of the various nobles and officers that have a hand in the administration. The guest wing, a detached building near the gardens and fountains of the estate, is now a small hospital. In the event that they are wounded in battle, this is where the prominent daughters and sons of the nobility are rushed to be treated by one of the most brilliant surgeons of Montaigne—Jacques Ferrand and his staff.

Meanwhile, the Marquise makes sure she is aware of all troop movements. Many believe that she masterminded the initial invasion of Castille, directing generals and other officers with subtle manipulation or direct orders if necessary. She carefully orchestrates everything she does, benefiting from her tremendous attention to detail. She is served by a military council composed of affluent men and women with vested interests in Castille and Eisen. For the most part, they are capable nobles promised additional lands based on subsequent conquests of Eisen and Castille. Many of them, bitter with the lack of support from l'Empereur, feel that they may benefit from pushing for more military forays into Altamira. While the Marquise runs the Montaigne Administration as though it continues to war with Castille, her main priority is to extract Montaigne troops safely.

Since the support and supply lines have dwindled, many troops still exist in Castille, stuck in pockets of land where they may still war with locals, simply to get the resources they need to feed themselves, until they can travel to Montaigne and finally return to their homes. Because Altamira is the hub of Montaigne military abroad, half of the military appointed to Altamira obeys the Maréchal and the Marquise without question, while many other military contingents that simply pass through the region could care less about what goes on here or what she plans for the region.

It is unclear what the Montaigne troops are doing or preparing for, as they have been slowly falling back, mostly due to necessity as the central Montaigne government ignores their needs for supplies. This tension has caused strife between those who follow the Marquise versus the returning malcontents who see the war efforts and the loss of life of their brothers- and sisters-in-arms as a horrific waste. So far, the Marquise has proven that she has no qualms about having a Montaigne officer executed should he cross a line.

The People of Altamira

With the noble family of Altamira sequestered in their own estate and without a council or government they trust, the common folk of Altamira have turned to the local clergy for advice. Alas, the local Vaticine church has been closed by the occupying Montaigne government, so the religious leaders and priests have gone into hiding, joining the humble families of the town in their daily duties, passing themselves as scholars and laborers.

The Bishop of Altamira, Alejandro Lucio Pereida, finds inspiration in these trying times. He feels closer to his flock, plotting with them to free the noble family of Altamira, sending coded messages to faraway members of the Vaticine Church and generally being involved in a way of life he did not expect to see at the age of fifty-five. He feels that it is just that he should be the one to stand up to the Marquise. For now, he has listened to the advice of his priests and the merchants who prefer the status quo to seeing Bishop Pereida executed by the Marquise. Bishop Pereida has sent out many of his priests to nearby Castillian-controlled cities, hoping to find daring Heroes who might lend a hand in helping the noble family escape the clutches of the Montaigne Administration in Altamira.

Until that happens, taking back Altamira by force is out of the question, lest the Castillian military forsake the Grande of Altamira and his family altogether.





Lock-Horn Forest

Lock-Horn Forest has a complex history and is an enchanted land—magical and mysterious to those who visit it. At one point in time, the forest and its environs belonged to Avalonian lords who settled many fiefs or Eisen bands and Vesten Raiders assailing its northern parts. Now minor Montaigne lords completely control the land. For that reason, some names of villages and places carry different meanings. While the official language is Montaignoise, the commoners of the region speak a variety of dialects and bastardized languages combining Montaignoise, Avalonian and Eisen roots. This creates a surreal situation for a visitor where she might have a hard time communicating with the people native to this land. Couple this oddity with the magical, miraculous and the mythical, and the Lock-Horn region feels like a land of its own. The further one strays from the major roads between Aur, Sices, Arrent and Buché, the more likely she is to experience strange things and meets stranger folk. Add the rumors of Sidhe, Synchroneth ruins yet to be discovered and strange beasts that live deep in the woods, and you may find that you have indeed left Montaigne.

Land of Magic and the Three Kings

Magic is the true religion of the region. If you can see it, if you can experience it, it is real. Magic is real. The miracles of Theus are real.

King of the Tower

The King of the Tower is none other than the local Baron, Philippe de Niord. His crest bears the mark of his hunting dogs, revered for their ability to deter even the most fearful beasts found in Lock-Horn Forest. The Tower of Niord is the old keep, which stands from before a united Montaigne. It is old, its stones darkened by time, its path hidden by the encroaching vegetation. Those lost near here often find their way to Philippe, an old but gracious host, his meager staff barely enough to keep the homestead from decrepitude. The Baron de Niord may love his lands and its people, but he also loves theater and reading. Often caught up in reverie, he imagines himself going on adventures and finding romance.

When the folk here speak of their King, it is Philippe of whom they refer to, *le Roi de la Tour*.



King of the Forest

A Sidhe lives in Lock-Horn Forest, rumored to live in the woods to the southeast of Pierre-Percée. The folk of the region here call him “The Horned King” or “The King of the Forest.” King Jalan, a Seelie lord of no small power, has lived in Lock-Horn Forest longer than the modern concept of Montaignois has existed. The Sidhe of Avalon cast him and his court out, and they will likely live in the forest as long as it exists. He guards against those encroaching on this land of magic and hunts down those who cause trouble in Lock-Horn Forest. The only places he and his deer-riders avoid altogether are the various Syrne ruins that dot the region.

A hunter customarily leaves an offering to the Horned King before she leaves the forest.

The Straw King

The Legend of the Straw King is part of the rich history of Pierre-Percée. The legend tells of someone who will become King or Queen when the people of Pierre-Percée direly need help. The title is both a joke and a serious affair. The first Straw King was the Avalonian Glamour Knight, Lanvaus de Pierre-Percée, a good friend of Pæga du Lac. King Jalan of the Forest bestowed the title of Straw King to mock the Théan’s love of titles—his apparent crown of branches and leaves stuck in his horns earned him the name of King of the Forest. He bestowed upon Lanvaus the title so that the duty would fall to him to rally the people against the Montaigne tyrants who had begun systematic deforestation.

Now the title is long forgotten by those unfamiliar with the region’s history, but were a Glamour Knight worthy of the title come to Pierre-Percée and should the need arise for a Heroic King to take on the mantle, the King of the Forest would certainly keep his promise to Lanvaus and bestow the title again.

Pierre-Percée

Pierre-Percée refers to the region deep in Lock-Horn, connected to the lake north of Aur, and includes the northwest portion of the Lock-Horn Forest. Its villages are remote and difficult to tread, with brigands waiting for passers-by at bridges, forest-encroached roads. Most villages of Pierre-Percée are an exception in Montaigne rather than the rule. While most villages are rustic, those of Pierre-Percée are downright primitive with people living off the wealth of the forest rather than farming or tending herds. While the forest isolates the inhabitants from the trials that l’Empereur brings upon the people of Montaigne, it also presents an altogether different set of issues for them.

Great and fabulous beasts, ancient orders of elusive and evil druids, ancient treasures of Vesten raiders of yore and magical swords bestowed upon worthy protectors, Lock-Horn has it all, and Pierre-Percée teems with the Heroes ready to take on these miraculous challenges.

The Treasure O’Roorke

The treasure is said to be the fruit of two young Vesten Raiders along the Ifri and Crescent Empire coasts. According to local folklore, the two raiders and their crew attempted to sail all the way back to Vesten to share their riches. A storm brewed by an angry witch caught them, forcing them to navigate inland via a river. They settled in this land after being unable to sail any further than the small dirt islands of the Lake of Pierre-Percée. Supposedly, they hid their riches here in the Lock-Horn Forest in or around Pierre-Percée.

Those searching for the legendary treasure associate it with the name O’Roorke. Famed treasure hunter Fin O’Roorke propagated the name. Some say he died in Pierre-Percée searching, but never finding the treasure. O’Roorke did manage to uncover many mysteries along the way, including hidden meanings in folk tales and songs of the region.



The name may also come from the initials of Ragnar Odinson and Oden Ragnarsson, abbreviated to “R.O.O.R.” The folktales usually deal with the lives and deeds of Ragnar and Oden and have less to do with their rumored treasure. The local folk have long dismissed the existence of the treasure, instead, giving the hopeful treasure-hunters truths, rumors and outright lies with equal zeal and enthusiasm. There are always bits of truth thrown with the juiciest details of blatant lies. The folk of Pierre-Percée also refer to these treasure-hunters, whether fondly or mockingly, as “Rouqueurs.”

The legend of their treasures has endured, mostly because once in a generation, a treasure hunter gets lucky and finds a small fortune, with pieces adding to the puzzle and the reality that is the Treasure of Roor.

Ragnar Odinson and Oden Ragnarsson

La Ballade de Ragnar is a common folktale, told and sung in the region of Pierre-Percée. Ragnar is often the subject of the songs, although lyrics almost always mention Oden along the way as well, describing them as inseparable.

You can glean many clues about the treasure from the songs, in spite of their fantastic nature. Historians have verified the raids of the Ifri coasts, the Crescent Empire ports and other rich port cities along the way. The people in question, Ragnar and Oden, really did live in Pierre-Percée, and their descendants are prominent citizens here—Ragnar’s son married Oden’s daughter.

To this day, some folks believe old Ragnar to be alive and looking for his way into Valhalla, awaiting a group of Heroes to aid him in finding a proper battle. Of course, if one were to aid old Ragnar, he may finally reveal the secret of his treasure’s location.

Les Feuilles Blanches

The White Leaves is a place like no other in Théah. Some believe it is the birthplace of Porté Sorcery, where the first sorcier found a way to bind his blood to places and things, and where he came to his final rest. Other rumors put forth the idea that a powerful Sidhe made a promise here and that the Glamour left behind from her solemn vow had an effect on the land. More rumors explain that the effect of the White Leaves has to do with the Syrneath Ruins less than a mile away.

The area itself is difficult to reach without someone who knows the way. When a traveler approaches, the forest becomes noticeably quiet. At first, it seems that the sunshine, or even moonlight, plays tricks on his eyes, making the leaves dance in an invisible wind, shining the sky’s light brightly. After a moment, the traveler finds that the leaves of the trees look positively white and silvery. With each step towards the light, the forest grows white, peaceful and serene. Then the tree bark becomes white and finally the fallen leaves on the ground.

The next few steps to the six white trees of the magical grove daze the traveler. The light of the grove becomes too bright to behold, forcing him to close his eyes. If the traveler continues forward, he is transported away. It is an eerie feeling to be transported by the intangible wind that moves the trees. When the traveler arrives, he finds that the wind has taken him to his deepest desire, whether that desire is conscious or subconscious, even if it is an object or a person. His trail, a glowing debris of white leaves, can be seen for several minutes until the intangible wind blows it away.

Because it is a mystical place, most folk stay away, though some love the sensation of traveling in this manner and have no qualms about leading a foreigner through and serving as a trustworthy guide. The danger usually rests in trusting the White Leaves to take him home.



Porté: The Walkway

When a Porté sorcier uses a Blood Mark to open a portal, she creates a tear in the universe and moves through it. The space in between herself and her Mark is called the walkway, and every sorcier knows that she should not open her eyes, no matter what the voices say.

What the Montaignois know about the walkway could not fill half a tome, although some scholars certainly make a go of it with theories and specious vicarious accounts. Every sorcier claims to know someone who knows someone who explored the walkway with eyes wide open and lived to tell the tale, but nobody ever seems to be able to get the details straight. The truth is seeing what lies beyond the ugly hole in the universe without losing one's way is extraordinarily rare. The few who manage it come back changed, marked forever by the questing fingers of the space between. Sometimes a sorcier boasts strange new powers, but what has she lost in exchange?

The Nature of the Beast

The place beyond the *portail* may seem to an explorer like another world, similar to her own but surreal and mirage-like, with shimmering colors in the air that only exist in the peripheral vision and with voices that speak without source. She finds mirror images of places she knows alongside places that never existed. She finds her own home there, but subtly different in unsettling ways that only becomes apparent after she has left—all the doors open the wrong way, perhaps, or an extra room juts out where a wall should be. She finds ancient fortresses she has only read about in books, come to impossible life in brilliant detail, inhabited by people long dead.

But this is not a world at all. Nothing here is real. In the beginning, before any sorciers took shortcuts through reality's lacunae, only a vast nothing stretched out into infinity there. Over millennia, the dreams, memories and speculations of those left behind, cursed to wander this space forever, built a warped echo of the world to live in—a projection, an expression of their desperate desire to go home. As they drifted further from sanity, driven to despair by loneliness and fear, stranger places than any they had truly known took shape from their imaginations,

places from storybooks and nightmares. Today, a sorcier who opens her eyes can find the ages-old reflections of places long gone in the real world, fantasized into being by her ancestors and lingering in limbo indefinitely.

What's Behind the Voices

An entity that lives in the walkway is not a person anymore. He was once, but the madness of the Place Between Worlds inevitably corrupted him into something else. It is folly to trust him, because all his human desires are warped into monstrous yearnings. He wants to trade destinies with a valiant Hero, or ride her back into the real world, or kill her and take her power for himself, or trick her into staying with him as a companion forever. Even if she *could* find the true spirit of someone she lost there, it is unlikely to remain the person she sought, ruined by solitude and broken promises. He is most likely a Monster, with little to no remaining humanity. He might be a Villain, still able to distantly remember his life but too corrupted by the walkway to be an ally.

You can make a walkway entity a Monster or Villain, according to the rules for each (**CORE RULEBOOK**, pages 193–198). He often has Monstrous Qualities regardless, due to his long exposure to the walkway's corruption, but if you want to make a foe that has not been trapped very long or even one a Hero has a chance to redeem himself, he doesn't need to be Monstrous. A walkway Villain's Influence reflects his reach and authority over other walkway entities, but can also reflect how much the terrain and locations express that Villain's inner self.

Getting In

What sort of Hero can tear open bleeding holes in the universe and step through with her eyes closed, trusting that she comes out the other side instead of running the other way? You need an iron will and a level of fascination with the macabre bordering on uncanny. A squeamish sorcier who inherits the power but not the temperament tries not to use her gift (or curse) at all. If she chooses to use it, she builds a peerless confidence and the ability to win staredowns with nightmares. She walks a fine line between Heroism



THE LONELY SORCIER

Chances are only one of the Heroes has access to *Porté*. Venturing into the walkway to rescue a friend, find ancient knowledge, reconcile with a dead lover or for any other reason usually means pursuing a whole Story there, and you don't want the majority of the Heroes sitting idle for that. You can run these Stories as solo mini-sessions for the *sorcier* Hero if the others are not interested. If everyone *would* like to participate, but the Hero Point cost for bringing everyone through a *portail* and then back out again would be too steep, consider this optional rule: instead of the *sorcier* spending a Hero Point for each additional person, he can choose to spill more blood on their behalf. In addition to the Dramatic Wound necessary to open the portal, he may take a normal Wound in place of any Hero Point he would have spent to bring someone along. He can mix and match the two costs in any combination.

and Villainy, as the path of *Porté* is fraught with temptations on every side.

Every *sorcier* knows the potential danger in running out of blooded objects to return to, should he find himself unable to walk to an inaccessible destination. Villains with designs on removing him from the picture might hunt down his Marks and eradicate them one by one, or use a terrible blood sacrifice to close his portals and cut him off from his escape routes. But subtler dangers wait for the unwary, too.

In a popular trend among the rich and reckless, the *sorcier* hires an archaeologist and brings her into the walkway seeking ancient *Syrneth* ruins—or even the *Syrne* themselves—inside the walkway. Cautious *Porté* scholars condemn the practice as foolhardy, but just enough stories circulate about the fame and fortune of returning with solid clues to unraveling *Syrneth* secrets that adventurous *sorciers* still try it.

How It Works

A Hero who braves the walkway with her eyes open learns soon enough why few ever return. Spending time there corrupts the soul, even if a Hero does nothing to earn that corruption. Each Story Step taken within the walkway counts as an Evil Act for purposes of accruing Corruption, except the GM

does not roll for falling from grace. If a Hero ever reaches 10 Corruption while within, she becomes trapped, even if she still has Marks or close relatives—her emotional distance from the real world severs all her blood connections and thereby her Marks.

She does not become a Villain immediately and only falls from grace if she performs an action that would give her additional Corruption. Completing a Story Step does not count towards this and cannot cause her to fall from grace. If she escapes before gaining more Corruption, she can still redeem herself. If not, she is lost forever, becoming a true walkway denizen.

Players and GMs can use the Redemption Story (CORE RULEBOOK, page 203) as a model for creating an Escape the Walkway Story, which can pull a trapped Hero back from the brink of Villainy and present a route (if an arduous one) back to the real world. Completing the Story Steps of an escape story do not incur Corruption.

Listening to the whispers of the long lost can lure a Hero away from the straight and narrow too. A walkway entity cannot attack someone directly unless the traveler sees her first. But she can speak and apply Pressure to a Hero to stray from the path, open his eyes and embroil himself in a quest or mystery that distracts him from his destination. If the entity deals a Dramatic Wound, she can consume his blood to steal his Marks, usurping his destiny and his power—after all, she was once a *sorcier* too. She can then enter the real world the next time a *portail* opens near her. She inherits all the Hero's established blood connections, leaving him to find another way out.

A *sorcier* can trap himself in the walkway through a noble sacrifice, stepping inside to close a Villain's *blessure* without the luxury of keeping his eyes shut or checking to make sure he has Marks to walk to first. Closing a *blessure* requires navigating the walkway's dreamlike logic to repair the world's Wound, taking actions symbolic of healing or soothing based on whatever goes on with the walkway inhabitants at the time. A Hero might need to find a cure for an ailing king, rebuild a fallen wall or end a child's nightmares, all while stopping the more malevolent entities from escaping through the howling portal. This may take one or several Dramatic Sequences to accomplish and certainly carries all the dangers of getting trapped mentioned above.





Getting Out

Once trapped, a Hero races against her own despair to find a way out before the walkway claims her forever. She can quest for an exit, making deals with other trapped entities or trying to attract the attention of other sorciers passing through, but doing so always requires a Redemption Story, and one of the Steps must involve paying a price of some kind (see “What You Take with You” later in this chapter for more about this price). The Hero may journey through the warped memories of the long-dead; visit places that never existed, dreamed up by the stray fears of countless sorciers passing through; or face her own nightmares made manifest.

Many threats complicate a Hero’s quest to escape. Those who have been lost for much longer desperately try to cajole or force her to take them along when she leaves or spend eternity keeping them company. They may possess her like spirits, trick her into leading them to a Villain’s *blessure* or make her forget her life entirely. Dying inside the walkway does not end a sorcier’s suffering. Such an unfortunate soul lingers there as a monstrous walkway spirit, lost to humanity, until she escapes at some other poor bastard’s expense or a Hero destroys her.

Another Hero can venture into the walkway to rescue trapped friends, at plenty of risk to himself

and anyone he brings with him. It takes gumption and persistence to affect such a rescue. Bringing a trapped sorcier out requires the same expenditure of Hero Points that it takes to bring someone else in, as detailed in **CORE RULEBOOK**, page 221.

Back to Normal...Mostly

A freed Hero comes home in a rush of sensation and relief, but still faces consequences in the aftermath. If a walkway entity consumed her blood and stole her connections, then every time she creates a new Mark, she also creates a new way for the unleashed lunatic to use her power against her, or traipse across the world wreaking havoc. If she accumulated any Corruption due to walkway exposure, she loses those Corruption Points one per Scene after returning to the real world—but in the meantime she still struggles with the darkness she brought back with her. Time has no meaning within the walkway, so an escaped Hero’s personal experience has no bearing on when she returns. A handful of seconds or a hundred years may have passed. Her perception of time may have matched the world’s exactly, or she may come back before her own birth!



What You Take with You

A Hero once trapped in the walkway never emerges unscathed. He always pays a price or strikes a deal for his freedom. He may sacrifice something dear to him, like a memory, a prized possession or even a loved one. He may agree to bring something terrible back with him. He may trade away one Skill for another, create a new Villainous rival born of his own fears, gain Corruption that does not automatically fade or even fundamentally change the way his Porté magic works. Whenever a Hero escapes the walkway, his player and the GM should work together to decide what kind of deal works best for him, and whether he struck it consciously or not.

Alternate Porté Powers

If the player—or the character—decides to alter the way her Hero's magic works, she can choose from among the following options. These are not the only options available, just examples. The player and GM should work together to determine any new powers the sorcier may develop.

- The sorcier loses the ability to create Blood Marks. Instead, she chooses another type of anchor for her power, something else to which she can walk to or something else she can pull through. She can always sense the presence of her new anchor just as she could a Blood Mark, and she knows when one is available for her to use for Porté. The new anchor could be a specific type of object or person, or it could be something that aligns with one of the sorcier's emotions—the thing she most desires, fears or wishes to destroy at the time, for instance. Of course, nobody has a perfect understanding of her own feelings all the time, making for some unpredictable journeys. Some specific examples of new anchors include: orphaned children who need help, valuable relics with hotly contested ownership, people near death with desperate final wishes or places that see light for the first time in over a hundred years.
- The sorcier treats his maximum number of Minor and Major Marks as though he had one additional instance of the Sorcery Advantage than he has. In exchange, whenever he places a Mark in an Action Scene, he must spend two additional Raises to avoid the Mark being apparent to another sorcier as though she herself had placed it.
- The sorcier loses the ability to teleport through a portal (though she can still pull objects through). Instead, she may spy through her Major Marks, perceiving a Mark's surroundings with all five senses as though she were there. A character in the Mark's location may notice he is being watched and from where, if the sorcier fails the Risk to spy unnoticed.
- The sorcier gains the ability to make Superior Marks which allow her to move through the walkway more efficiently; she spends a Hero Point to open the portal instead of taking a Dramatic Wound. She can only place a Superior Mark on a location, and not a person, as the point she is moving to must remain fixed at all times. A sorcier can only ever have a single Superior Mark, which goes above and beyond her normal number of Marks. If she wants to place a new Superior Mark, she must first sever the previous connection. A Superior Mark takes a great deal of blood, and placing one costs the mage a Dramatic Wound and a Hero Point.
- The sorcier loses the ability to create Blood Marks, and instead can activate Porté to Pull or Walk to anything in his line of sight. He spends a Hero Point instead of the normal Dramatic Wound (and a Raise during a Sequence) to do so. A Hero can activate this Sorcery once per game session for each Sorcery Advantage he has purchased. When Walking to an anchor, he cannot take anyone else with him. If something blocks the Hero's line of sight—a door closes, a dense fog rolls in, a clever Villain blindfolds him, etc.—then he cannot activate this power.



Dueling in Montaigne

From Charouse to Buché to Dechaine, every noble has a passing knowledge of the sword, though few can maintain membership within the Duelist Guild. Montaigne culture generally avoids direct conflict—insults are whispered or inferred. Passive aggression is a fine art nearly equal to painting or sculpting amongst Montaigne nobility, though sometimes insults come to blows, and pride is so injured that physical conflict inevitably comes. For these reasons, noble courts retain Guild Duelists, who stand as bodyguards paid handsomely and often without want.

Excess and passion define the Montaigne culture, except in the case of dueling. The Duelist Guild of Montaigne finds its roots in classical Vodacce and Castillian dueling. The Montaignois have enhanced these traditional ideals and rules. Lawyers within the Guild ensure that legal vocabulary obscures common language. The reasons for this are twofold. First, only the properly educated can understand the legality of duels, preventing a poor non-noble from bringing steel against his betters. Second, by codifying the legality of duels, combat to the death is infrequent. Duelists are expensive assets not to be thrown away with a flight of fancy.

Montaigne duels must occur within a Guildhall or witnessed by a ranking guild member. Any member of the Guild may witness a duel to the touch. Verbal agreement by the parties involved is the only requirement. A local Guildmaster must oversee duels to the first blood, with terms generally drawn up and signed by all parties involved. Duels to the yield only occur within the confines of a Guildhall or overseen by a Guild Chair. Lawyers of both parties draw and review the terms, but require personal approval from the ranking liege of the region. Duels to the death are exceptionally rare, requiring the Guild Chair as a witness and approval of l'Empereur.

Those not participating view duels as sport. A proper duel is an event for socializing and networking as well as a bit of blood sport. Montaignois society considers betting on these events gauche and in bad taste, though this does not stop the more base of the nobility from indulging.

LA GARDE LUMINEUSE

La Garde Lumineuse, the Lightning Guard, carries the most prestige amongst bodyguards. These select few personally guard l'Empereur. This station demands much sacrifice, though the benefits of being amongst the best of the best entice nearly all duelists. Achieving this position requires politicking along with exemplary skill. One cannot simply talk his way into this position, nor can he just fight his way in. A clever tongue, kept in check by a quick wit (that also knows when to say nothing at all), is just as important as a deft sword-arm and fast footwork. Of course his loyalty to the Sun King and all of Montaigne must be without reproach as well.

Regardless of the results of a duel, all parties consider the insult that sparked it resolved. Seeking revenge for a proper duel's outcome is illegal and runs a high risk of imprisonment in irons or worse.

This does not mean that illegal duels do not take place. Passions flare. Laws are ignored. Steel flashes. Blood spills. The Montaignois people, both noble and peasant, have a fiery streak with a strong sense of person. It is not uncommon for a duelist to have many unsanctioned duels in her history. Recently, duelists have taken to handing roses to their opponents and rivals. Normally, when gifting a rose, the thorns are removed to prevent injury to the recipient. A duelist leaves a single thorn for each unsanctioned duel she has participated in. Woe betide the duelist who receives a half dozen roses with thorny stems. Claire Bouchier presented her most recent rival with three-dozen roses, the stems bristling with thorns. Her rival yielded.

Noble lineages strong with a history of Porté have created some of the most feared duelists in all of Théah. Aorciers able to rend the fabric of reality and combine it with the skill of Montaigne sword-play change the dueling ground, and traditional rules simply do not apply. Rumors persist of sorcier duelists who move amongst the dueling ground in the blink of an eye, as well as strike from seemingly impossible angles.



The Guild forbids the use of *Porté* in official duels unless both participants have access to the magic. While plenty of nobles have access to the Sorcery, few duelists claim to master its use, at least not officially. Many unofficial duels between sorciers end in one or the other disappearing into the walkway between places, making it a dangerous notion to engage in on a regular basis.

De Vore

In a small village named Auzat, nestled in Les Sommets Blancs, a château named Mont de Vore rests. This is the home of the de Vore Fencing style. The building sits lakeside under the watch of snow-capped mountains. Skills are finely honed here. A de Vore student learns proper posture and the superiority of all things Montaigne. A de Vore Duelist, said to resemble a statue, holds her head high, only allowing slight movements during combat. She is the epitome of efficiency. Noticeably, her lead sword hand holds her rapier higher than comfortable, parallel to the ground. A student of this style claims she “raises the bar” of dueling by this action.

Mont de Vore gifts a graduate a riding crop to remind him to hold proper posture and protocol. Monsieur Riche la Barre is the current head of the Mont de Vore. Full of charisma, la Barre is a former Garde Lumineuse. He lost his left eye in an assassination attempt on l’Empereur and dispatched the would-be assassin while bleeding and blinded. His time as a vaunted Garde Lumineuse came to an end with a scandal concerning one of l’Empereur’s daughters. His history spared his life, and he left for a quiet retirement in the mountains where he had once himself learned de Vore. He decided to spend his later years teaching the next generation the Style that had served him so well.

Style Bonus: De Vore Politesse

When wielding a rapier in your lead hand, you gain a special Maneuver called de Vore Politesse. When you perform this Maneuver, spend all of your Raises and select a character (you may choose yourself) in the same Scene as you. De Vore Politesse prevents all Wounds dealt to that character (even Wounds otherwise impossible to prevent such as from the Lunge Maneuver or the automatic Dramatic Wound from taking a gunshot). Wounds prevented must be dealt by another character—damage caused by the environment or Consequences (such as explosions or cannon fire) cannot be prevented with de Vore Politesse. A Hero may perform de Vore Politesse once per Round.



Légendes of Montaigne

Bayard, of Lock-Horn Forest

In the deep of Lock-Horn Forest, where the path occasionally gets lost in the undergrowth and the canopy lets in only the barest streaks of light, magic stirs. An exhausted traveler can lose the trail and wander into the wilds, never to find her way back. Few travel the Lock-Horn alone, fearing the strange magics of the land. Yet, those who have tell wild tales of magical creatures that only show themselves to lone travelers.

Legend has it that in the twilight hours, a beautiful and majestic stallion approaches a desperate and terrified soul: the creature already saddled, bridled and perfectly sized to the traveler. The weary traveler, however, must pay attention to the color of the horse's coat.

If he appears white with a flowing golden mane, he guides you to safety and leaves you on a clear path, closer to your destination. If he appears as a black figure with a shining mane of roan, best to offer him a treat and make your own way, in the opposite direction he appeared. The black stallion offers no help, instead taking you deeper into the dark forest. No one is entirely sure what becomes of those who trust the dark horse, for none who have ridden him have returned.

The Truth

The horse, Bayard, is a close friend to King Jalan of Lock-Horn Forest and a creature of some magical prowess. In return for Jalan's protection and aid in preserving the forest, Bayard helps Jalan's friends and delivers his enemies. If you have no quarrel with the Sidhe king and pay him respect—traditionally by leaving him an offering as you leave the forest—Bayard assists you when you need help. Should you show disrespect or animosity toward the forest or its inhabitants, Bayard delivers you to Jalan himself and lets the Horned King decide your fate—usually not a pleasant one.

The indicator of friend or foe amuses both Bayard and Jalan, as the horse's coat shifts hues depending on the time of year. Typically he is pale in the winter and dark in the summer, to better blend in with his surroundings. The concept of appearing differently is exaggeration and storytelling. In different towns, people believe the material of the bridle, the direction he approaches from or the style of saddle determines if he helps or hinders, though this is also pure myth.

Dames Blanches

Traveling through mountains can be a treacherous enough activity on its own, but a strange tale surrounds the peaks of Les Sommets Blancs and Mount Doré. Those that travel the peaks report tales of strange sights and sounds when blizzards hit the mountains. The flurry of snowflakes resolve themselves into figures known as les Dames Blanches—the White Maidens. The women dance and sing in the storm, inviting travelers to join them in celebration. While the invitation may seem like a trap, to share a dance with one of the Maidens ensures safety through the storm, while to deny them means the path will be lost forever to the newly fallen snow.

Descriptions of the Dames Blanches vary, some say they are very much solid human forms in dresses white as snow, with skin not much darker; others claim the Maidens are shapes made in the swirling of the snowflakes. Their voices, however, always whisper as one with the wind, surrounding any travelers lost in a storm. They call from all directions, beseeching their newfound friends to dance.

When the weather is fair, the lost traveler can also beseech the help of the Maidens by offering a trinket when she beds down to rest. The item must be white and of at least some value. Commonly carried offerings include silk or fine linen handkerchiefs, lace fans, gloves and hair ribbons. When left in the snow overnight, the items vanish, and come morning a set of footprints lead the way back to the lost mountain path.

Occasionally, those traveling over the mountains do not make it to the other side. Many say the travelers lost on the mountain joined les Dames Blanches, dancing happily forever in an unending storm.

The Truth

Strong magic fills the air of Mount Doré's peak, and les Dames Blanches form from snow and its ambient power. Combined with the power of a natural storm, the Dames take shape from the whirling eddies in the snowfall, pulled along the currents of wind and energy that flow through the area, and take on a life of their own. The magical energy of the mountains naturally follows the path most traveled, allowing the



persistent tales of les Dames Blanches leading the way to safety.

They only help those they take a liking to, often because they have shown themselves true of heart or left a fantastic gift. Gifts thrown over the edge of the cliff serve as powerful tokens for the Dames, and they accept these gifts graciously, leading wanderers safely through mountain passes. A tribute left on the trail overnight may summon them to clear a path through a snowed-in passage, though this practice is less reliable.

Les Dames Blanches vary in power and frequency, but often show up as Strength 4 Monsters with the Elemental Monstrous Quality.

Dame Fortune

In the markets of Montaigne, you may frequently find the same token over and over in various shops and stalls—a single coin with a hole drilled in it—either prominently displayed over the door to the shop or worn around the shopkeeper’s neck. This coin, traditionally the first profit earned by the merchant, is an offering to the Lady of Fortune.

Merchants say it ensures a thriving and successful business as long as it stands in clear view. Along the canal, merchants frequently give a secondary offering, tossing a coin into the water at the start of the day to draw business and ward off law enforcement.

Legend has it that Dame Fortune herself occasionally appears around closing time, drifting between stalls in the Open Market or wandering the meandering paths of the Marché du Pont-Neuf. Should your wares catch her fancy, she may very well stop in to make a purchase, but be careful how you treat her.

She may not look any different than the average customer, but a bad experience may doom you to a terrible year. Treat her well, on the other hand, and business may boom, affording not only a secure living, but a luxurious one. Of course, if you are unwise enough to forget to display your coin, she won’t even bother coming in to shop, ensuring the business will not last another moonrise.

The Lady is not known to punish those who do not offer her tribute, but she protects those who do. Even the most competitive vendor dares not tamper with or steal another merchant’s coin, for fear of earning her

DAME FORTUNE AND THE BLACK MARKET

The story of Dame Fortune did not just arise from superstition about economic luck. The dark coin a merchant carries designates him as part of an underground organization, vetted and trusted by those who would work with him. The practice started with La Reine des Catacombes in Charouse, but quickly spread all over Montaigne.

Anyone wishing to sell illegal goods in Montaigne—even in places like the Open Market where merchants sell illegal goods as a matter of course—finds that without a coin, she cannot even get a merchant to talk to her. The only people who try to sell illegally without coins are undercover guards and idiots who want to get arrested.

ire, and he gladly shares the story with any who ask about the token. For many a merchant, it is the source of great pride, something passed down from master to apprentice as a testament to his success.

The Truth

Superstition is a strong force, and when enough people agree on something, it is hard to go against the tide. Faced with the same symbol from all directions, new merchants simply follow along for fear of being outcast or ignored for not following some unspoken law, not to mention the threat of poverty from a displeased Dame Fortune.

What many learn over time is that a specific coin, made of very dark metal and always worn around the neck, signals to a buyer looking to deal in affairs that may not be entirely legal. The Lady of Fortune can smile on anyone, after all, and a merchant crafty enough to not get caught in illicit dealings usually finds himself handsomely rewarded.

A law-abiding merchant willing to turn a blind eye to this practice protects herself from unscrupulous vendors, who have few qualms about silencing any voices that draw unwanted attention. Instead, she simply hangs her own coins and prays silently to the Dame for her own well-being, quietly ignoring the untimely fates of a merchant who pokes about where he does not belong.



Le Diable du Sommet

Despite religious pilgrims regularly traveling them, the mountain regions of Montaigne are a dangerous place. Les Sommets Blancs are always covered in a thick layer of snow, making travel treacherous, and Mont Doré plays host to one of the deadliest creatures in Montaigne history, le Diable du Sommet. Legends say the creature stalks the peaks feasting on human blood, settling for goats or other livestock if none can be found.

Travelers are warned to stay on the paths and avoid the wooded areas if at all possible, and to not travel at night. The devil of the peaks hunts at night and looks for easy prey, such as people wandering the woods alone.

Le Diable du Sommet is a hulking creature that moves just as easily on four legs as two. It has an abnormally large, muscle-bound body covered in a thick coat of matted, snarled, reddish fur. Wickedly curved horns and claws adorn its head and hands, and its hind legs end in cloven hooves. None of the accounts quite agree on what kind of animal le Diable is, or if it is an animal at all; the way it moves on two legs leads some to believe it may be some kind of mutated or cursed human. Others claim it is one of Legion's, a creature of nightmares, part goat and all monster.

The beast has long tormented the settlements in the valley and most notably has been terrorizing the cattle ranches in Pourisse. Incensed by the attacks and loss of his livestock, Pierre Flaubert de Doré regularly sends hunters up the mountain to slay the devilish creature.

Though they have more than once returned with pelts and heads of various vicious animals, the attacks have never truly stopped, instead only pausing for a few weeks or months at a time. No manner of destroying the creature's corpse has prevented the return, from burial to burning and scattering the ashes to the bay. The people whisper that the beast is immortal and simply rises up from death each time to torment them forever.

The Truth

While local predators can account for a number of the attacks, the average wolf cannot rip the head clean off a steer. Some more logical hunters point toward bears, known to rear on their hind legs and to have the savage strength required.

The same magic that empowers les Dames Blanches creates a number of the illusions around le Diable. Over time, the magic in the area warped one of the bears inhabiting the mountain, allowing it to grow in size and strength and extending its lifespan. The stories of goat hooves and horns are exaggerations, told by scared locals to demonize the creature, though it needs little help in that area.

It hunts year-round, lacking the hibernation patterns of its unaltered kin, and often attacks towns in the winter months when prey is sparse. Few have actually come across the creature, though it carries old scars and wounds. Its ability to heal from ailments that would easily be fatal to another animal feeds the stories that it is either unkillable or some kind of undead beast.

Le Diable du Sommet is a Strength 6 Monster with the Fearsome and Powerful Monstrous Qualities.



Vaticine Angel

Having thrown off the shackles of l'Empereur's reign, the people of Dechaine gratefully and openly returned to the Vaticine faith. Among the ancient architecture that makes up the city is a small cathedral, where the populace gathers to celebrate their long-suppressed faith and seek divine aid.

Followers of Theus believe the Creator always provides to the faithful, and the church-going citizens of Dechaine have redoubled their devotion, hoping for help from the Vaticine Angel. Said to come under cover of night, the Angel leaves necessary commodities—food, clothing, blankets—to faithful families in need. To denote their devotion to the faith, homeowners inscribe sigils on the frame of their front door or hang a symbol of the faith above it.

In Dechaine, the Angel appears to be particularly active, leaving supplies for the city as a whole in the cathedral and smaller parcels at individual households. Thanks and praise follow every delivery, usually made on nights where fog from the nearby harbor creeps in and covers the town. A Dechaine citizen takes the deliveries as a sign that his revolution stands and can spread, and that soon all of Montaigne will be able to live without the overbearing shadow of l'Empereur looming over him.

The Truth

While the clergy of Montaigne mostly hide, they still believe in their solemn duty to serve the followers of Theus. Originally donating out of their own pockets (or the coffers of the hush-money paid by l'Empereur), over time these members of their close-knit communities began to look for ways to offer help without insulting families by offering charity; to be self-made in Montaigne is everything, no matter where you are from. Gifts from Theus are different than pity from neighbors and easier to swallow by the prideful Montaignois.

In La Motte and Dechaine, the clergy operating under the guise of the Angel are especially active, helping to allot resources in the Unchained city as it restructures itself and gathering supplies to deliver to the siege at Mont du Flambeau. As followers of Theus, they serve their own people first, but refuse to deny aid to others if they can afford it. The groups work independently of any other Secret Societies, though the Močiutės Skara are aware of their presence and send aid when they can.

Son Ombre

Well-known in the underground community and among the nobles and constabulary of Charouse is one simple fact: you do not cross Ève Lafrisée. Speaking ill of her, attempting to back out of a deal, avoiding repayment of an outstanding debt and even trivial matters ensure a swift and painful punishment by her hand. Whispers and gossip abound when nobles are disgraced or merchants vanish; in polite society, the most common way to speculate on Lafrisée's involvement is to simply say they fell in Her Shadow. The unspoken implication, of course, is that those who stumble into the dark do not make it out unscathed.

A member of the noble class does not much fear death or assassination, protected as she is by her station; however, one involved in underground affairs without such lofty positions knows he risks life and limb if he chooses to cross, hinder or otherwise inconvenience the city's most infamous assassin.

Regardless of the infraction, the punishment is always disproportionately severe, with bodily harm often added as a "tax" to the coin, favor or information originally promised. Even a relatively secure noble sips from poisoned cups or trips beneath the wheels of a gilded carriage, but the common end for one of status is social and financial ruin—it is more satisfying to leave her alive to suffer through the humiliation than to deliver her to the merciful arms of death.

The Truth

Even those willing to ask Ève about the way she handles her "problem clients" get nothing more than a knowing smirk. Some speculate that she has a handful of select enforcers who carry out her bidding and uphold her reputation, and flawless alibis support this theory. No one can say for sure whom Ève may have recruited to this team, but they are all surely as deadly as their leader.

Ève herself knows the miraculous fulfillment of her will goes beyond mere enforcement. Since cementing herself as the ringleader of all things illicit, she has noticed another force protecting and aiding her, be it from the rare uncorrupted members of the court or from attempts on her own life. She has no idea who this mysterious benefactor is, only that she has never



once demanded anything of her and apparently has her back unconditionally.

Behind Ève's success is an older sister she has never met. Margaux Lafrisée was separated from her siblings at a very young age. Upon hearing of Arnault's demise, she sought out and shadowed Ève as she clawed her way to her current position. Lacking the conviction to run a criminal empire herself, she instead assists from the shadows to protect her little sister. When she appears, it is often as a hooded figure that blends easily into a crowd.

Margaux is a Villain with Power 10, Strength 6 and Influence 4. She uses her Influence to hire street thugs to keep tabs on Ève.

Sword of Achille

In the war waged by the Third Prophet, paladins and knights of the faith helped champion his beliefs. They traveled to the nations outside of Castille, bringing with them his word. One of these paladins, called Achille, made his way to Montaigne, where he united the people and established the Vaticine religion in the region for the first time. The people stood in awe as he fought back those that would harm the new followers of the religion, doing successful battle even with those who wielded magic against him.

To the populace, it was nothing short of a miracle to witness him win battles against impossible odds, and many converted on the promise of similar divine protection. After his death, his followers buried Achille in the catacombs of the Grand Cathedral. His sword, claimed by the Church, sat on display for many years, until l'Empereur banned the religion in Montaigne.

Since then the sword has vanished, but scholars maintain that it still exists and will surface again to bring about another religious revolution. Especially in Montaigne, where the nobility vehemently opposes the Vaticine religion, the religious peasantry long for something to rally them and reinvigorate the faith. The legend goes that the sword ignites into bright white flame in the hands of the truly faithful and ensures victory and good fortune to spread the word of Theus and reclaim lost, heretic lands.

The Truth

While the sword of Achille does exist, most of its grand abilities can be attributed not to any magical or divine blessing, but to the material it was forged from. Made of dracheneisen, the artifact remains just as effective now as when first wielded by Achille. The miraculous properties it holds—flaming in the hands of a faithful wielder, allowing Achille to be the last standing in a battle against sorcerers—can all be attributed to the sturdy material.

For centuries, the sword rested in the Catacombs of La Grande Cathédrale in Charouse, under an unassuming name in an effort to conceal it from Die Kreuzritter, who loathe to see dracheneisen in any hands but their own. The habit of the various scholarly groups to appropriate, move or quietly claim artifacts means the exact location of the sword is unknown at the moment, and the nature of the weapon is said to be concealed by its unadorned scabbard—certainly not the original it was forged with.

Even the group currently possessing it may not be entirely aware of exactly what they have, but rumors have abounded for years that it was hidden from the Montaigne nobility when the religion was all but banned. Many adventurers have scoured the religious reliquaries searching for the sword, but to this date, it has yet to be found.







Chapter 4

Vestermennavenjar



VESTENMENNAVENJAR

“Red rivers breed fertile valleys.”

Ancient Vesten proverb

“Young rivers run red. Strong rivers run silver.”

Modern Vesten proverb

In many ways, the Vestenmennavenjar is a strange contradiction to itself. Its people have struggled for centuries to provide themselves a sustenance-level existence amid the ice, snow and stormy seas they call home. Relying heavily on raiding to supplement their nation’s resources, Vesten culture has long been based around thrift, sacrifice and tenacity in the face of bleak odds.

Now, the Vendel League, with their ubiquitous Guilders has brought an era of prosperity to the nation, making modern Vestenmennavenjar richer than at any other time in the nation’s history. This has converted much of the raider-and-warrior economy into one of traders and diplomacy, a change embraced stridently by some Vesten and disdained just as strongly by others.

The nation is a distinct powerhouse in the world’s economy, with the Guilder gaining traction enough to make it even more powerful. But, a Vesten does not have a king and crown, his nation has no single ruler.

Instead, each town and village has a local jarl who runs the government and a carl (merchant-leader) who runs the economic side of things. They still have nobility, traditional family lines who have long-led the good people of Vestenmennavenjar over generations, and brave Heroes who have earned their own word-fame through glorious deeds. But unlike other kings and queens, a jarl works hand in hand with his merchant counterpart and does not necessarily rule over her.



Economic Warfare

Once thought of by the rest of Théah as largely filled with barbarians and bandits, Vestenmennavenjar is now one of the most peaceful nations in Théah. Under the silver-lined tutelage of the Vendel League, a Vesten merchant has discovered that trading can be far more profitable than raiding, and while her people are no less brave and strong, she has mostly eschewed violence, at least as an economic principle. Casting a skeptical eye at the war-torn world outside of her borders, she often wonders why everyone else has not followed along.

While the jarls hold the executive power over the people, making decisions on laws, adjudicating inter-town policy and leading the city's defense, the carls hold the real power. Every carl in Vestenmennavenjar belongs to the Vendel League in some capacity. They represent the Vendel League's interests in Vestenmennavenjar and work closely with the Guilds to ensure a solid foundation for the economic power the League claims.

While no noble leader rules over the nation, the Vendel League serves as a form of centralized government, deciding best practice and standards which carls then bring to the individual jarls. The peace between the many disparate groups comes not from conquest, but from economic gain for all. Many would-be carls travel all over Théah, representing the League to the other nations, pushing forward an agenda that leads to greater profit, eventually giving the Vendel League a hand in the politics of every nation.

On the outside, Vesten appears weak. The nation has no standing army, no vital exports and no single ruler. The navy is a merchant fleet, and pirates and privateers hound the bays. Yet, the League's ships travel to nearly all ports unmolested, they export the greatest amount of luxury goods of any other Théan nation, the Guilder is accepted nearly everywhere the Vesten trade and the Vendel League has representatives and Guildhalls in nearly every major city in Théah.

Long ago, the people of Vestenmennavenjar learned that invasion and war was no way to win over a populace. Instead, they plan to slowly gain power all over Théah, by being an indispensable source of economic stability. Who needs a military fleet when cargo ships are welcome in every port? Who needs an army of soldiers when merchants travel freely in all lands? Who needs a flag to fly over conquered soil, when your money changes hands in every nation?

While far from complete, the Vendel League has spread its influence into most of Théah's nations. They sell weapons and armor to Castille and Montaigne alike. They accept bribes from Vodacce Princes to increase their prices in Castille and accept bribes from Castille to ignore Vodacce ports. They purchase food and grain from the Sarmatian Commonwealth, only to sell it to Eisen in exchange for weapons to sell to Ussura. If trade is happening in Théah, at the very least the Vendel League knows about it, and they likely have a stake in it.





Important People in Vestenmennavenjar

Frederick Ulfson, Jarl of Vendel

The Vendel League's chosen replacement for the last powerful jarl of Vendel, Frederick Ulfson, is not a bad man by any stretch of the imagination. He is just not a good leader. Which, many believe, is exactly the reason the League chose him.

Unlike many jarls, Frederick was not raised to the warrior ways. Originally a furrier, who worked to facilitate trade in luxury fur between the cities of the Northlands and the merchants of Vendel, his charming personality won him popularity with his clients and the heart of young Sofia, daughter of a former jarl of Klorhulg. Sofia was pleased to move to the more urbane environment of Vendel with her new husband, and many credit her with being a major force behind his popularity with the Vendel League. A shrewd woman with a head for long-term planning, Sofia's youthful ardor soon dimmed as she grew tired of her husband's luxurious tastes, selfish priorities and shortsighted ways.

After growing bored with managing his fur trade business, Ulfson took his wife's advice and invested heavily in silver, a ploy that paid off well as the League's Guilder became accepted worldwide. With this wealth, he secured a largely advisory role working under his uncle, Aksel Redhand, then jarl of Vendel. Playing more on his personality than actual skill, Frederick became one of the most popular faces in Vendel, renowned for his support of the arts, educational and charitable efforts and for generally being a great guy.

Frederick inherited the jarldom after his uncle's untimely mysterious death. He remains wildly popular in Vesten for his jovial personality, generosity and support of the arts, but has not had equal fortune with his reputation among his peers who suspect (rightfully so) his figurative impotence in political matters.

Frequent visitations by influential folk from other nations have led some to believe that Frederick's loyalty to Vendel (and to Vestenmennavenjar) is not as strong as it appears. Some fear that Frederick (knowingly or unknowingly) provides confidential information about his city or the League to foreign spies.



Portraying Frederick Ulfson

Ulfson is a handsome man, but in a fashion just a tad too polished and polite for many Vesten to truly appreciate. Slight of build and always perfectly outfitted, his detractors claim he must have Montaigne blood in his ancestry.

Regardless of his lineage, however, Frederick pays inordinate attention to his appearance, employing more tailors, haberdashers, bootmakers, jewelers and the like than any jarl before him. He wears his auburn hair and beard neatly trimmed in a fashion better suited to the mainland of Théah than to his homeland.

Because of his ego, Frederick is susceptible to flattery, bribes of pretty baubles and outright seduction. Few things raise his ire as quickly as an insult to his appearance or taste, and he has held petty grudges for years over such.

Story Hooks

- Frederick is not as incompetent as the Vendel League believes him to be. He hates their use and abuse of slaves and works to undermine their power in Vendel. He worries that they might catch on to his deceit and needs someone to help him ferry information back and forth with his foreign collaborators to divert the League's attention.
- While always appearing as the gracious and supportive wife in public, those in the know claim that Sofia actually hates her husband and seeks his demise, but not before her children grow old enough to inherit his place. Some believe that Sofia resents him being made jarl rather than herself, being far more politically adept than Frederick. Can the Heroes discover her plot and stop her before she gets to Frederick?

Gylffi Hafgrimmr, Jarl of Klorhulg

A Vesten proverb states that “a wise person's heart is seldom cheerful,” and Gylffi Hafgrimmr is nothing if not a wise person. The changes the Vendel League have brought to Klorhulg weigh heavy on his shoulders, and while he wants to see his people happy and wealthy, he is far from certain that the benefits outweigh the price.

Jarl of Klorhulg for many decades, Gylffi is known for his strength, wisdom and unyielding dedication to the town he rules. For generations, his people have carved a living out of the ice and snow—harvesting furs from the indigenous animals of the Allfather Ice Floes, fishing during the few months the sea breaks free from the Allfather's frozen grasp and supplementing their scavenging with back-breaking work in the silver mines nearby. Recently, however, the northernmost jarl has seen his town change from a remote outpost kept alive by hard work and bravery to a bustling town built largely on the back of overworked and abused slave labor, and the change causes Gylffi great concern.

Just like many Klorhulg citizens, Hafgrimmr spent time in the silver mines as a youth and knows firsthand the price that must be paid to wrest the precious metal from the frozen soil. Now, as jarl, he worries not only for the slaves the Vendel League use (and abuse) to harvest it, but for the moral toll that profiting from such abuse takes on his people.

Slavery is illegal in Vetennavenjar, but the use of indentured servants, called thralls, is a common practice. The laws of the Allthing protect thralls, and give them rights, which is inconvenient for forcing people to work the silver mines day in and out. Certain members of the Vendel League began importing slaves and pressing them to work in the mines, lying to Gylffi and anyone who asks as to their origin.

Meanwhile, the Močiutės Skara recently moved into Klorhulg. The jarl is unsure of why they came, but he is pleased by their concern over the miners.



Portraying Gylffi Hafgrimmr

Hafgrimmr is the epitome of a Vesten sea-king. He often wears his long dark hair braided, with intricately carved beads of whalebone plaited into his beard. His eyes are as dark as a storm at sea, scowling out from beneath a heavily furrowed brow.

Although his citizens have adopted elaborate luxurious clothing in many foreign styles, he still wears the wool, fur and leather that has served him throughout his time as jarl of the city, without jewelry or adornment, save for those available before the town's turn to wealth. The jarl's primary concern is for the (physical as well as emotional and moral) health of his townspeople, leaving him in great turmoil about the current affairs with the local mines.

Gylffi is very accessible to visitors to the area, believing strongly in hospitality as a sacred duty, especially in the frozen north. Those who ask favors of him or seek him out for diplomatic missions find him a fair and generous man, but neither gullible nor naive.

Those who recognize his concern for the situation may find him willing to aid them, while those who approach him merely with bribes (or with insults to his people for their greed) discover his bristly nature a challenge to deal with.

Story Hooks

- While the Vendel League does not technically have the ability to replace Gylffi with a more compliant puppet, they have already maneuvered one of Klorhul's other prominent leaders out of the area (Elisif Geirsdatter, formerly carl of Klorhul, now the new Mistress of the Breffa). He needs as many allies as possible if he wants to keep his position in Klorhul.
- Knowing that what happens in the mines violates just treatment, Gylffi, rumors have it, turns a blind eye to (if not actively sponsors) the efforts to free abused workers from their torment in the mines. He quietly funds revolutionary groups attempting to free the slaves, but needs to appear impartial to the League's spies. He could really use a go-between to help him.

Ragna Ankidatter, Jarl of Kirk

In days gone by, Ragna would have been considered the perfect jarl. Her ferocity, wisdom, honor and duty are impeccable. But do modern times require something different in a leader? The seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, Ragna Ankidatter was destined to be jarl from childhood and groomed for the task. Almost a century ago, the former jarl of Kirk's household fostered her and taught her everything a jarl needed to know—at that time.

Times, however, change, and while her focus on the traditional ways of the Vestenmennavenjar has served her (and her town) well for decades, it has recently brought her into conflict with the Vendel League, who prefers a more modern approach to things. Whereas the League looks to break from tradition, Ankidatter finds strength in adhering to the past.

Ancient Vesten folklore claims the jarl of Kirk immortal, and in one form or another, the same entity has been jarl for as long as the city of Kirk has existed. Reportedly, when the jarl of Kirk draws near to death, her soul retreats into an eagle's egg protected deep within her chest. Upon death, her successor removes and swallows that egg, granting the new jarl all the knowledge and experience of the jarl line back to the city's inception. With this ancient lore in mind, Ankidatter struggles to find a way to pass on her legacy.

Ragna has been grooming potential replacements for decades; all of whom have died under questionable circumstances. She currently trains several individuals, hoping that at least one of them survives longer than she does and can continue the traditional ways. Fate seems to have other ideas, however. One of her prospects has demonstrated a very weak constitution, and another (Ragna's favorite) mirrors his mentor so much that all but the most strident traditionalists in Kirk realize he is ill suited to lead the city into the future.

The Vendel League did not consult Ankidatter about the creation of the Breffa (the Vendel League's Guilder minting operation) beneath her city, though she understood the political and economic virtue of its placement.



The same cannot be said of the erection of the Mestrkirk, however. Adamantly opposed to the corruption of traditional Vesten faith with Objectivist heresy, Ragna has done everything in her power to stymie the new cathedral's completion. Including throwing political, economic and religious stumbling blocks in its way. Work on the Master Church, however, continues to proceed apace despite the jarl's efforts.

Portraying Ragna Ankidatter

As tall as most men in Vesten, Ankidatter stands straight as an oak, despite her advanced age. Her hair, silver and straight, falls past her waist, and she most often wears it in a simple braid, although she may appear it unbound for special occasions of state.

She dresses in very traditional Vesten clothing, adding to the rumors of her timelessness. She frequently carries a long walking staff that doubles as a weapon, should the need arise. At her heart, Ragna wants the best for Kirk and for Vestenmennavenjar as a whole.

Unfortunately, her vision (correct or not) equates traditional with good and modern changes as corrupting. Those who approach her with respect for the old ways likely find a strong ally. Those who belittle Vesten's history find Ragna to be an unyielding opponent.

Story Hooks

- ♦ Jarl Ankidatter is old and dying, but she has yet to pick a successor. She has tried training a new jarl, but each has hidden political motives she does not agree with. She instead wishes for Ulga, one of her students from decades ago, to return to Kirk and take her place. She asks the Heroes to search for her before it is too late and one of her current students takes over.
- ♦ Rumor has it that one of Ragna's students, Snorri, is covertly loyal to the Vendel League, serving as the League's spy within the jarl's court. If he succeeds Ragna, it could mean a drastic change for the city upon her death. Kenna, her other student, weak of constitution, but strong of heart, tries to prevent Snorri's advancement, but she needs outside help.



Alvor Ekillsdatter

Loved by her crew, and feared by those who know her only as the head of the Vesten Raiders, Alvor Ekillsdatter is Vestenmennavenjar's best-known pirate queen. While the rest of Vesten may have given up raiding for trading, Alvor and her Raiders hold fast to the timeless traditions of their people, patrolling the seas for bounty untold. Some blame the Vendel League for not putting an end to the Raiders, others wonder if more than meets the eye concerning the two groups.

Ekillsdatter grew up as a fisherman's daughter in Eskjo, but was captured by a band of motley pirates barely out of her teens. Her captors intended to sell her into slavery elsewhere in Théah, but through daring (and a disproportionately large amount of good fortune), she escaped and made her way back home by working on various freebooter vessels. Upon returning home, she discovered that the sea—and specifically pirating—remained in her blood, and since her village had long-since left raiding as an honorable profession, she set out to make a life for herself among those of a similar bent.

Over the years, Alvor worked with one crew after another, rising in the ranks until she eventually became captain of her own ship within a group known as the Vesten Raiders. More than a decade later, she now commands the entire Raider fleet, having earned the undying loyalty of her crew and the rest of the Raiders through her intellect, daring, practicality and apparent possession of an unending amount of good luck.

Portraying Alvor Ekillsdatter

Ekillsdatter is a middle-aged woman, who has spent her entire life at sea. The wind and sun have weathered her plain features to a leathery tan, and life on board pirate ships has left her with more than a few scars. She dresses in practical clothing in the Vesten style: pants, sturdy boots with good grip for stability on the deck and layered shirts and vests to deal with variable weather. Yet she is fond of ornamentation, especially “trophies” such as hats, scarves or jewelry from her various quarries.

Those who encounter Alvor find her jovial and motivated as much by a desire to overcome risk and undertake adventure as any real profit. Always up for

VESTEN RAIDERS

While the Vendel League formally condemned the Vesten Raiders as criminals and thugs, early in the League's history the two groups were more closely tied than the League now cares to admit. Recognizing that they needed protection for their fleets to succeed with trade throughout Théah, and fearing their ships provided an irresistible target for the Raiders, the League hoped to kill two birds with one stone by hiring the Raiders on as a mercenary force. They quickly discovered, however, that the Raiders' independent nature did not mesh well with the League's need for obedience and order. Most Vesten are not aware that the Raiders ever worked for the League, and the League closely holds secret the current nature of their relationship (if any). But to this day, Raiders almost never target League ships.

a challenge, be it gambling, racing or sword fighting, she has been known to take on overwhelming odds if presented in an interesting fashion. While she does not stand for outright cheating, anything short of breaking a stated rule is fair game, and she shows respect for someone who outwits her by thinking outside the box.

Story Hooks

- Something has happened with the Vendel League, causing them to target the Vesten Raiders. Even as Ekillsdatter directs her ships away from attacking those flying League colors, the League makes her captains' lives difficult. The League does not attack them, but instead levies taxes on the plunder and hikes up prices for making port in Vendel. She suspects someone poisoning the League against them, but needs help ferreting out the culprit.
- While Alvor is well loved, no reign lasts forever. Several of her fleet's captains eye her place on top, and it may take more than good fortune to keep her in her current role. Will the Heroes help her maintain her position, or try to uplift someone more favorable as the leader of the Vesten Raiders?



Elisif Geirsdatter

Brusque and businesslike, Elisif Geirsdatter has a head for numbers that serves her well. Originally the daughter of (and assistant to) a Klorhulg fur trader, Elisif worked her way up to carl of the town, before being persuaded to move to Kirk and take on an even more challenging task—Mistress of the Vendel League’s mint.

As the only child of a widowed fur trader, Geirsdatter grew up naturally independent—her father left for long periods of time trapping and on trade missions, and Elisif learned to take care of herself from a very early age.

As she grew older, her father taught her to tally and figure values, how to track who pays the best prices for each kind of fur, who demanded top quality pelts and who would be content with less perfect goods. By the time she was a young adult, Elisif was handling the business side of her father’s trade routes, leaving him free to concentrate on trapping and hunting. After his death, she began working for the city, eventually succeeding her mentor to become Klorhulg’s youngest carl.

Not long after the Vendel League began utilizing slaves in their mining, the League offered Geirsdatter the position of Mistress of the Breffa, a role requiring her to leave her hometown in favor of Kirk. The Vendel League promoted her in part to utilize her sharp business acumen and in part to avoid her protests about the conditions in the silver mines near Klorhulg. Now in charge of the mint that creates Guilders in Kirk, Elisif is too busy to concentrate on the situation back in Klorhulg, exactly what the League intended. Although, that did not stop her from sending discreet letters to members of the Močūtès Skara about the situation there.

Nominally in charge of record keeping, as Mistress of the Breffa, Elisif manages all of the high-level functions of the Breffa, including arranging Guilder shipments, supervising mining quotas and (perhaps most importantly) ensuring the mint beneath the city remains a secret.

Portraying Elisif Geirsdatter

Geirsdatter is tall and slender, and young for the vaunted position she holds. Wise beyond her years though, she has a wit and intelligence unmatched by many others. She carries herself strongly, marching the halls of the Breffa with militant precision. From her neatly braided hair worn in a coronet atop her head, to her clothing and speech, everything about her is carefully controlled and perfectly arranged.

Elisif allows little room in her daily life for intrigue or dalliance. She considers her work to be a nigh-sacred duty, and a person attempting to use wealth or blackmail to get her to neglect or betray it finds himself with the full weight of the League crashing down on him.

Her one vulnerability, however, is her concern for the effects of the mines on her hometown, and that leaves an Achilles heel that might be exploited by someone attempting to influence the Mistress of the Breffa for his own purpose.

Story Hooks

- Despite the League’s efforts in removing Elisif out of Klorhulg, she maintains her connection with Gylffi Hafgrimmr, the jarl of the city, and works with him to ensure things do not degenerate too far. She tries to develop a messenger network back to her home, but the League thwarts her efforts. She needs a little breathing room to get everything situated, maybe something the Heroes can help her with.
- Other than the League itself, the Mistress of the Breffa has the most information about the flow of Guilders around Théah. While the League endeavors to keep this information secret, spy networks would surely pay well for such vital information, making Elisif a potential target for espionage attempts.





Ivethay, Giantess of the Island

While Ivethay is legendary as the giantess and witch that claims territory over Ivethay Island in the center of Wyrd Lake, in truth, she does not exist. At least, not in the way outsiders think of her. Ivethay (meaning witch or crone) is not a personal name, but the title given to the most highly respected wise woman of the Ukonsaari tribe who make its home on the island.

The current Ivethay, Brynhild Bergljot, has served the Ukonsaari for nearly a decade, after her mother stepped down from the position. Raised to the role, she is well educated in the Ukonsaari spiritual traditions and beliefs, healing arts, diplomacy and a wide variety of other skills that allow her to serve as the spiritual advisor to the entirety of her people. An experienced tracker, hunter and warrior as well, she travels on her own from one side of her massive island to the other. She no longer lives within any one village; instead she splits her time between moving nomadically along the shores of the lake in hopes of discovering abandoned babes before the elements overtake them and counseling the various villages under her protection. Along the way, she visits the various villages of her tribe in order to bless their foster children and provides advice, support and knowledge to her people.

As per tradition, Ivethay herself has no husband (although the tribe expects her to take lovers, and may bear children fostered with other tribesfolk). The Ukonsaari consider an adopted child hers (even if he never actually meets her), just fostered out to the tribe members who raise him.

Ivethay is more than a spiritual leader and mother figure to the Ukonsaari. She is war leader, political representative and arbiter of inter-tribe disputes. She unifies the various tribes and keeps the peace, which is a huge job by itself.

While all the tribes of the island respect and listen to Ivethay, the tribes still follow warlike ways, encroaching on each other's lands and raiding each other's fisheries when one thinks it can do so without recourse. She represents the tribes to the outside world, though she rarely leaves the island. This means that whenever anyone comes from outside the island, she must first pass Ivethay's inspection before she can traverse the land.

Portraying Ivethay

A head or so taller than the average (still tall) Vesten, the protector of the island tribe is a warrior to be reckoned with. Dressed traditionally for her people, predominantly in furs and felts rather than woven wools, it is not uncommon for her to carry a babe on her back, but she *never* travels without a weapon.

The current Ivethay is firmly in her middle years, looking forward to another decade or two before retiring as her mother did before her and passing her duties on to one of her daughters (adopted or of her own birthing.)

Those who approach Ivethay respectfully find her wary but reasonable to deal with. Her priorities is always protecting her tribe and the children they adopt, but as long as a proposition serves that goal, she may be convinced to become an ally. Those who threaten her people, however, find an unyielding and eternal enemy in the giantess.



Story Hooks

- Leaving fosterlings for Ivethay is a tradition more popular in the nation's brutal past than in Vesten's peaceful future. The giantess knows that her own population cannot succeed without supplement, but loathes resorting to stealing children. She hopes to open her island to visitors, but receives pushback from more traditional island members. She could use emissaries able to easily traverse between both lands.
- Jarl Egil died suddenly with no living heir. Each of Egil's brothers now fights for the right to lead, and the people seek a peaceable solution before the shedding of more blood. They whisper rumors that Egil's brother, Alfdi, sequestered the legitimate heir, bearing a notable birthmark, on Ivethay Island more than three decades ago. Some think Ivethay herself this long lost heir and seek her out. Will the Heroes help Ivethay to realize her position as jarl?

Lucas Gillespie

Lucas Gillespie grew up in a small village in the Highland Marches hearing stories of the greatest warriors in the land, Eliodd's Knights. He idolized the gallantry and romance of their lives, and hoped to one day follow in their footsteps. As he toiled in his family's fields, he daydreamed about daring adventures and harrowing rescues. He studied all he could about the Sidhe, the ancient laws of Glamour magic, the code the Glamour Knights followed, and everything in between.

That knowledge was put to the test when a Sidhe settlement sprang up near his village, and the Glamour the fae brought with them began to take over the land endangering the crops and his livelihood. Gillespie, though still a youth, approached the local Sidhe lord and requested a single favor in equal exchange. The lord agreed, thinking to get the better of the foolish lad. Invoking the oldest known laws of Glamour, Gillespie bound the Sidhe to a specific area of land, well outside his hometown, and in return, he exiled himself from the Highland Marches. The Sidhe Lord, unable to deny the favor became trapped in a tiny holding, unable to leave or spread her magic

until such time as Gillespie once against steps foot upon the Marches.

Now, Gillespie travels the whole of Theah. He is a renowned member of the Knights of the Rose & Cross, dedicated to defending the helpless and fighting for what is good and right. He may not have any Glamour magic of his own, like the Knights of old, but he embodies their codes and laws to the best of his ability.

He has recently settled in Vestenmennavenjar after hearing rumors of inhumane treatment in the silver mines, and the Vendel League turning a blind eye to a harsh slave trade. He seeks to not only free the slaves in Klorhulg, but to depose the members of the Vendel League who are allowing such inhumane acts happen.

Portraying Lucas Gillespie

Friendly, helpful, and jovial. Lucas Gillespie is a loquacious man barely out of his teenage years. He has dark brown hair and greenish blue eyes that seem to pierce into the soul of any he fixes his gaze on. He is an impeccable judge of character, and devotes himself fully to any he deems worthy of his loyalty. Gillespie is a poet and a storyteller, gladly relating the stories he has collected from all his travels in exchange for one of your own. The Heroes are likely to encounter Lucas Gillespie in or near Klorhulg, especially if they take an interest in the silver mines.

Story Hook

- Gillespie plans a daring rescue attempt to save the slaves from the Klorhuld mines. He has no idea that there are already people working to aid and relieve these people, and his actions could cause problems for the Močiutès Skara in the region. Can the Heroes convince Gillespie to wait for the slow moving Society to do their work, or will they help him with his rescue attempt?
- When Gillespie bound the Sidhe to small part of the Highland Marches, he thought he had the perfect solution of leaving. Recently, he heard word that his parent's farm is under attack from Sidhe loyal to the Lord he tricked. He cannot go home to help them, as that would break the spell, but maybe the Heroes are willing to go help his family.



The Vendel League

Formed almost 200 years ago, the Vendel League was originally a loose alliance of merchants and traders formed to protect the interests—and wealth—of the Vesten people. While it employs, works with and does business with countless people, the League itself formally consists of 100 merchants and traders from around Théah: nine Chairs form the ruling council, and 91 Seats represent particularly powerful individuals, carls, businesses, trade houses and townships around the world.

A Hero is likely to interact with the Vendel League in any area of Théah she visits. Representatives and trade masters can be found in every major city of Théah, pushing the Vendel League's goal of making the Guilder the standard currency. While in Vendel, a Hero may meet directly with any of the nine heads of the Vendel League. Listed below are the nine councilors who make up the leadership of the Vendel League. Some of them are clearly Villains, while others may help a Hero in her adventures.

History of the League

The League's original members were eight Vesten carls, each the head of their own particular guild. The decision to make the League was voted on by all the carls of Vesten, and included trade agreements with Avalon, Eisen and Ussura. The then-Imperator of Eisen gifted the League with considerable start-up capital to fund the venture in exchange for a seat on the League.

These nine original members became the Chairs of the League, and each was replaced in time by their hand-chosen successor. The rest of the hundred seats were made up of the carls and merchants throughout Vestenmennavenjar.

Shortly after the War of the Cross, the Vendel League Chairs made strides to exert their power beyond Vestenmennavenjar's shores and began filling the 91 seats with foreign trade partners. When doing so, the Vesten members took on Avalonian versions of their names, making it easier for foreigners to pronounce.

Now, League membership is more about profit margins and political alliances than loyalty to Vesten ideals.

Titles and Forms of Address

Each of the Chairs and Seats have the title of master in some way. Only the Chairs use the Master title as part of their position, while the Seats use Guildmaster instead, or in some cases Master Merchant or Master Trader.

Of course, the idiosyncrasies of what to call a Vendel League member are often even lost on the Vendel League. Sometimes Master Mokk may require a petitioner to use as many titles as possible, even throwing Carl of Vendel in there for good measure. Of course, no one calls upon Chair Master Sigvald Gunnisen, Val Mokk, Carl of Vendel unless he is in dire straits.

Succession

While the League's 91 Seats may be bartered for, bought and sold, the Chairs remain sacrosanct. Interfering with a retiring Chair's choice of successor is blasphemy to the League, and anyone foolishly trying to bribe, murder or purchase his way into a Chair finds himself removed from the League entirely, either by political sanction or more permanent means.

That does not stop the Chairs from scheming against each other, each attempting her own form of bribery and lobbying to get the other Chairs to pick a successor she approves of. The Vendel League used to be rife with blackmail, bribery, threats and a slew of other problems which stemmed from the Chairs' internal spats. Now, that kind of corruption is less heard of, if only because the Chairs have gotten better at keeping their infighting a secret.

The Seats are certainly no better, and often worse than the Chairs. People from all across Théah populate the Seats, and make their homes all over. While distance separates them, infighting is just as rampant, and the stakes are often higher. While the Chairs play at threats and blackmail, the Seats seek to break their brethren.

A Seat may spend her time undermining another's reputation and legitimacy, leaving him without a Guilder to his name. In the end, someone of her choosing purchases his Seat out from under him. The Seats make alliances and gather of Vendel League merchants and representatives under them as a support network against such treachery.



Merchant's Guild: Master Val Mokka (Sigvald Gunnisen)

Although on paper all League Chairs are equal, Master Val Mokka effectively leads the Vendel League. Mokka's great-great-great-great-grandfather was one of the original Vesten carls that formed the League—a fact he brings up as often and as loudly as humanly possible—and the Merchant's Guild Chair has passed directly through his family line to the present day.

Born and raised in Vendel itself, Mokka inherited his position from his mother more than a decade ago. Although his bald pate, poor manners and corpulent belly may be repugnant to many, he is very good at what he does. Unfortunately, much of what he does is manipulation, greedy acquisition and power mongering.

Val Mokka is nothing if not a merchant at heart. The Mokka's sell anything and everything caring more about moving goods from one point to another than specializing in a certain good. From the seat of the Merchant's Guild, Mokka has made his money taxing foreign and domestic merchants just for doing business in Vendel. The Guilder is his invention, and his intention is to use it to tax merchants all across Théah eventually.

Under Mokka's leadership, the Guilder has become accepted across Théah, a true wonder of economic virtuosity. However, Mokka's success has also created a near-endless demand for silver to create new Guilders, and he has absolutely no trepidation about the slavery, corruption and abuse taking place in Klorhulg to meet that demand.

Heroes are likely to butt heads with Guildmaster Mokka as he has no love of those who meddle with his productivity or the interests of the League. He is a potent ally to those who serve his ends and a dangerous foe to any who upset the League's production lines.

Sailor's Guild: Master Allen Trel (Avor Troelsen)

Native to Eskjo, Master Allen Trel was only 15 when he inherited his place as head of the Sailor's Guild and his Chair on the League. When his mentor, Master Jal Erksen, passed away unexpectedly, many believed that Trel (the youngest person to ever sit a League Chair) was not ready for the responsibility. But, in the past decade and a half, he has proven to be cool headed, far seeing and well-spoken—everything his mentor could have wanted in a successor.

Wiry and prone to practical clothing, Trel has grown into his role with the League. He now oversees planning for new trade routes, schedule changes and other League matters requiring a first-hand knowledge of the sea. He does not interject opinion into topics that don't concern him, ensuring that he works well alongside almost every other one of the League's Chairs. The exception is Joris Brak, the head of the Carpenter's Guild, upon whom Trel has an unrequited crush. When Brak is present, Trel loses his composure entirely, becoming a verbose babbling fool. Some of the League has noticed, but Brak himself remains entirely oblivious to his fellow Chair's adoration.

Most of the League views Trel as a non-political entity, which he prefers. While he has political views and goals, he believes the leadership of Vesten remains with the jarls and carls, of which he is neither. He stays out of League politics as much as he can, offering business solutions that appease everyone in areas of his expertise and staying neutral on other matters. He is not a threat to the other members' plans, and instead they send him gifts and offers of support in hopes to gain his aid. He often returns such gestures unanswered.

Trel may offer the Heroes guidance or assistance with shipping in and around Vesten waters. While the Vendel League does not directly employ the Vesten Raiders, Trel does have enough sway with them that he could help the Heroes with any issues that may come up.



Carpenter's Guild: Master Joris Brak (Joris Braakenjorsen)

While another carpenter might consider himself a craftsperson, Master Joris Brak is an artist through and through. He joined the carpenter's guild as a youth, in an attempt to find an outlet for his creativity. While his attention to detail ensured he would never be the fastest builder, his talent for blending beauty and utility quickly earned him a reputation in his native village of Soroya and then throughout Vesten. He moved to Vendel as a young man, to apprentice under the then-Master of the Carpenter's Guild and spent the next decade first learning and then eclipsing his master's work. Brak was surprised (and not entirely pleased) to be appointed as his mentor's successor when the older man retired, but he has many able underlings to delegate the practical aspects of the Guild to, leaving him time (although never enough for his tastes) to pursue his own artistic projects in peace.

Brak is full of contradictions. He can muscle a beam into place with a strength that his average build belies, and yet his long delicate fingers carve minute details in the smallest of projects. A handsome man, he draws attention and admiring glances from the women (and sometimes men) around him, and yet remains oblivious to their flirtations, behaving as if he truly married his work.

Brak cares little for the politics of the Vendel League. That is not to say that he doesn't care about his League and the wellbeing of his nation. Indeed he does all in his power to keep the Vendel League in charge in Vesten, but he has no head for all the infighting and espionage. Most other members of the League know Brak is loyal and strong, and therefore do not bother with him. While he wouldn't help a Hero do something like undermine one of the Vendel League Chairs, he would certainly help her fight off a threat to the League.

Blacksmith's Guild: Mistress Sela Cole (Selma Colbjorsdatter)

The newest Chair of the Vendel League is Mistress Sela Cole, who apprenticed to the most talented blacksmith in her native Klorhulg while still too young to do more than work the forge bellows. Over the years, Sela proved herself to be talented not only in blacksmithing itself, but in the role of the smithy within a community. Her mentor, seeing her potential, took the girl under his wing for training beyond what he normally gave his underlings, which drew resentment and eventually hostility from her peers. Although his affection remained utterly filial, jealousy spurred rumors of an illicit relationship between the widower and his student and eventually made her life in Klorhulg miserable.

She left with his blessing and a letter of recommendation to the Master of the Blacksmith's Guild in Vendel. She soon found herself in a similar role to the Guildmaster, although she carefully downplayed any special treatment. After pirates murdered the Guildmaster while traveling, his will revealed Sela to be his choice of replacement. As the most recent addition to the Chairs and despite her best efforts, some still assume her promotion had more to do with her relationship with her mentors than her ability.

It does not help that she dresses well, preferring form fitting clothing when working and Montaigne styles when out and about town. Sela is neither weak nor foolish, and her placement as Guildmaster was no mistake. The woman knows her way around a business deal and a forge with equal measure. Her outgoing personality and gregarious nature win her friends and allies easily, making it difficult for anyone who wishes her ill to realize those desires.

Sela is probably the easiest of the Vendel League to approach and deal with, but that does not make her the least formidable. Her network of allies could prove a valuable resource to a Hero, as long as he makes it worth her while to help him.



Jenny's Guild: Madame Lorraine Weller (Avalon)

Madame Lorraine Weller has held a Chair with the Vendel League for so long that no one currently on the League (Seat or Chair alike) remembers a time when she was not a part of it. She maintains a network of spies across Théah, using her Guild to obtain information vital to the League's efforts. Originally from Avalon, Weller inherited her seat from the then-Vesten Jenny Guildmaster, after decades of serving as her assistant and aide. Rumors says she has more kings and queens as clients than any other member of the Jenny's Guild, although she meets inquiries about such tawdry matters with an icy stare that rivals the Allfather Ice Floes in intensity and duration.

Weller is an impeccable dowager, with manners to match. She never appears in public without her silver hair perfectly arranged, and her wardrobe consists of beautiful gowns risqué by Vesten standards, save for the scarlet underpinnings that act both as modesty barriers and a badge of her office. Her cosmetics are always expertly applied, and although obviously stunning in her younger years, she still maintains the elegant beauty that earned her a following across all of Théah.

Despite her age, Madame Weller is no stranger to the jenny's halls. She regularly accepts clients between executing her duties to the League. Her services are costly, but well worth the Guilder. She claims it keeps her young and invigorated, and in truth, her demeanor and looks belie her advanced age. Some say she entertains private guests in her rooms in the League Guildhall in Vendel, though she would never hear of mixing such business with pleasure.

Madame Weller is probably the most in-the-know personality on the Vendel League, and her extensive network of spies serves her well. She is a ruthless woman when it comes to protecting League interests. No matter who her foes may be, she deals with them with a cold precision and accuracy that terrifies even the worst of the other Chairs. A Hero should step carefully if attempting to undermine the League, as she may turn her sights on her.

INTERACTING WITH THE VENDEL LEAGUE

Vestenmennavenjar's Vendel League is a large and nebulous organization. Individuals rarely deal with the whole thing, as it contains nearly a hundred different personalities all over the nation. Through disinterest or genuine Villainy, the Vendel League is responsible for many different heinous acts. Of course, the Vendel League is also responsible for putting Vesten-made goods on the map and bringing in a great deal of wealth and prestige to the nation.

As with most large organizations, not every member of the League—Chairs or Seats—are Villains, in fact few of them are. The whole of the organization is a corporate machine, and Heroes attempting to involve themselves in Vendel League affairs should be prepared to deal with red tape and political schemes.

When deciding to use the Vendel League in a game, consider first if you want to utilize the Chairs themselves or the various minor members. The Vendel League is relatively open to interactions, as they host meetings every day at the Guild House in Vendel. But figuring out whom has a sympathetic ear and whom might start working against the Heroes should be a task all its own. Generally, using a single Chair as a point of either conflict or contact for the Heroes should suffice for most games, though there's nothing stopping the Heroes from trying to root out corruption and replace the League.



Usury Guild: Mistress Red (Gytha Hallesdatter)

While trade may be the obvious face of the League's economic influence around Théah, money sitting idle might as well be nothing but decoration. Using money to make more money is the true power behind a wealthy nation, and Mistress Red, the Usury Guildmistress, is an expert at doing just that. Under her tutelage, the League has opened small branch banks for loans in every town and sizeable village in the nation. She personally supervises Guilder-based loans to other countries as well, netting a healthy profit if the loans are paid back and political advantage (as well as deeds to the lands put up as collateral) if they are not. She is a very logical individual, going about her business and her role for the League with the same cool clarity. She is not cruel or dishonest, however. She makes certain her contracts are crystal clear, but harbors no empathy whatsoever for those who commit and then fail to fulfill them.

Mistress Red is faithful to the contract, and all her business dealings—both in and out of the Guild—require contracts. She is scrupulous, though fair, in both wording and clauses ensuring that both sides of the deal have equal weight and measure. She has no need of hidden loopholes or vague language as she finds people break contracts no matter how simple or complicated. She benefits from her fairness as often as not, and it remains a good business practice to gain social capital for being fair.

Although still fairly young, Mistress Red commands the respect of everyone around her, even her elders. She keeps her red unruly hair in severe braids to keep it under control and wears simple cut, unadorned clothing. Her demeanor is just as severe as her wardrobe; her pursed lips are so iconic that children in Vendel mimic her expression to mock stoic playmates. Some consider her ruthless, but she considers herself pragmatic. She knows a good deal when she sees one and always reads the fine print on a contract. She could be a valuable ally to a Hero while in Vesten, if he can offer her a suitable contract.

Brewer's Guild: Master George Skard (Jorgan Skaardalsen)

If ever a man earned the word “jovial,” it is Master George Skard, head of the Brewer's Guild. Built as stout as one of his kegs, Skard's tiny eyes are almost always hidden by the broad smile on his face, and his laughter warms the Vendel League's Guild House. But then again, when one's life is making and distributing alcoholic beverages, perhaps joviality comes easily.

Skard has held his Chair almost as long as Master Mokka, although his influence on the League is quite different. He firmly believes that the secret of a good life, a happy marriage, a well-running town and a successful nation all can be found at the bottom of a well-brewed cask. And, with the help of the League, he not only turned Vesten brew from a homespun necessity to an in-demand export, he also fostered the exploration of bees, fruit trees and grapevines hardy enough to endure Vesten winters, in the hopes of ushering in a whole new era of brewed possibilities to the nation.

Skard's largest interest lies in making unique Vesten brews, wanted up and down Théan coasts. He spends as much time in the fields tending his grains and fruits as he does in the League halls, making him relatively easy to find. He has a laboratory in Vendel, outside the Guild Hall in which he brews mead, wine, beers, and various other fermented drinks. He experiments with flavor both by additions to the brews and the casks he stores them in. He sells the resultant concoctions for high price small batches to pay for his next experiment. He even offers paid tours of his experimental brewery in hopes of getting feedback on his newest brews.

Master Skard cares more about his brews than he does about his position within the League, and has let his relations with the other members wane over time. They mostly ignore him, making decisions without ever consulting him, even about his own trade. For Skard's part, he is happy as long as he can brew and drink without hassle. He is just as likely to ask a Hero to do him a favor as he is to grant any. While a long time member of the League, his influence over his peers is not as strong as it could be.



Miner's Guild: Master Eladio Ballesteros (Castille)

Master Eladio Ballesteros is one of only three current Chairholders not native to Vesten. Born in Castille, Ballesteros apprenticed with the former Guildmaster, also from Castille, and traveled to Vendel with her to continue his studies after she took the Chair. Not long after Ballesteros arrived in Vesten, a cave-in injured him while inspecting silver mines outside of the town of Klorhulg. The remote location and an unseasonably severe storm challenged his recovery, and his injured arm had to be amputated to save his life.

Whereas some might have become more concerned about the dangers of mine work after such an injury, Ballesteros reacted just the opposite. He became bitter, and his loss seemed to jade him where mine conditions were concerned, perhaps believing that if he had already sacrificed so much, a miner had no room to complain about the travails she endured. This cold-hearted apathy blended well with Mokka's greed, and the Merchant Guildmaster carefully applied subtle influences to discredit any rivals Ballesteros might have had for the succession to his mentor's chair. Successful in his endeavor, Mokka now manipulates Ballesteros' ego and callousness in support of the League's risky mining endeavors.

Ballesteros did not need much prodding from Mokka, though he recognized the debt he owed the other man when he first took his office. Together the two men have turned mining silver from a moderately profitable luxury good into the staple export of Vestenmennavenjar in the form of Guilders. Mokka ensures the rest of the League remains fuzzy on the subject of the slave conditions in the mines, and Ballesteros ensures the mines are always stocked with fresh and able bodies.

Ballesteros is just as much a Villain as Mokka, if not more so. While greed and wealth clearly motivates Mokka, something deeper and harder to satisfy motivates Ballesteros. He is bitter and has developed a taste for watching other people suffer. His actions, motivated by this sadism, make him volatile and hard to placate. Mokka keeps a modicum of control by allowing him to sate his dark desires, but even Mokka fears crossing the man when their desires diverge.

Joseph Volker: Butler and Representative of the Late Emperor Riefenstahl

The Chair held by Joseph Volker is unique, in that it alone does not belong to a Guildmaster. In fact, Volker himself served as a butler before being assigned to his Chair, a move that might well have been an intentional slight to the League by the late Emperor Riefenstahl who appointed Volker to that position.

As a contingency of Eisen's aid to the original members of the Vendel League, one of the League's Chairs has always belonged to the Emperor of Eisen. The Emperor chooses her successor, who also acts as her representative—at least, that is, until the last Emperor died and was not replaced. Now Volker, who has held his Chair for nearly as long as Madame Weller, waits and hopes his homeland can get its act together enough to send a true successor. He has sent letters since the war, but fears returning to Eisen and giving the League cause to nullify the Chair.

Although his contact with Freiburg's Eisenfürst Nicklas Träge has been spotty, Träge has responded and kept in contact. Though Träge has no intentions to do anything other than mind his piece of land, he has helped keep Eisen relevant to the Vendel League by adopting the Guilder. Of course, Freiburg's own stability is less than ensured, and Volker knows it. His contact with the other Eisenfürst has proved less useful.

Volker loves his Nation, and although he has not left Vendel since taking his Chair, he still wears a felt hat in the Eisen style almost constantly. Very old and thin as a rail, the weathered but unbroken former-butler stalwartly does his best to continue to serve his late-ruler's memory.

Volker is a member of the League just like any other and cares just as much about the League's interests as any other Chair. His preoccupation with Eisen's Imperialism may make him seem distant, but he keeps his eye on the other members, dutifully playing the political game with them. He fears assassination or simply death through old age before Eisen sends a replacement, and does what he can to prevent death before one can arrive.





Secret Societies

Secret Societies in Vestenmennavenjar have an easier time getting around than in many of the other western nations. As long as they do not violate Vendel League sanctions or disrupt the individual leadership of a jarl, they find it easy to function.

This means though that organizations like Los Vagabundos or the Rilasciare need to keep their heads down as much as possible.

The Explorer's Society

Vestenmennavenjar has a slew of Syrneth ruins hidden deep in the mountains to the north. Unfortunately for the Explorer's Society, those ruins are buried under ice and snow for a large part of the year. The paths to and from the mountains are treacherous, and the environment provides no guarantee of a particular, clear path even during the warmest months.

The Society hosts expeditions at least once a year during the melt season, though even then the paths are dangerous. A member has yet to fully explore even one ruin, though not for lack of trying. Time and again, the expedition fails due to some natural disaster or another. Most casual members refuse to do research in the nation, leaving much unexplored. A more daring explorer can find a native guide to take him into the mountains in the summer months, sporting an artifact or two as his reward, if he returns at all.

Some industrious members of the Explorer's Society have taken to looking along the coast for ruins, though the most they ever find are ancient standing stones covered in ancient runes.

Brotherhood of the Coast

The largest contingent of Brotherhood ships can be found amongst the Vesten Raiders. Not all Raider ships subscribe to the Brotherhood, though all ships follow the basic codes. A Raider flies her own colors, not those of the Brotherhood, though a member gains the same respect as if he does.

Few fly the Brotherhood colors in the Maw or Grumfather Bay, but one who does receives protection as long as he vacates the area in a timely fashion. The Vesten Raiders claim plundering rights in those waters, and if a member of the Brotherhood wishes to operate in the area, he must first join up with the Raiders. So far, the arrangement has worked out well, though with the increase of trade between Vesten and the rest of Théah through those waters, many privateers look here for their fair share of wealth.

Die Kreuzritter

The hills and mountains of Vestenmennavenjar are filled with monsters of all sorts. Few of the Order make home in Vesten, and a member who does has her work cut out for her. A Vesten reveres his living myths, the Jotun, and does not take kindly to a monster hunter coming through attempting to destroy them.

Reports of ghosts, trolls and demons get conflated with bandit attacks on a regular basis. Some villages hire agents to deal with rogue trolls or to find a loved one taken by forest creatures. But, for the most part, the Vesten people happily live alongside what Die Kreuzritter consider monsters. Getting assistance or leave to kill these creatures may prove rather difficult.



Seekers of the Word of Ekerila

Much of what the Vesten people know of the runic language comes to them through oral tradition. Few other than the *Ypperste Prest* can actually understand the runes, but even they do not know all of them. Stories say the runes are the written language of the gods, and each defines an aspect of life.

While a *Ypperste Prest* taps into runic magic, she only accesses the most basic of runes, only those still understood today. These basic runes represent the backbone, not the entirety of the ancient language. Some standing stones hold entire stories written in the runic language, of which only small parts have been translated. Translations of the runes is a lost art, one the Seekers of the Word of Ekerila hope to revive.

They hold to not a single story, but a set of tales tell of Ekerila, the first *Ypperste Prest* who translated the language of the gods into the written runes the Vesten know today, and named them Futhark. Ekerila had knowledge of an ancient and powerful race of beings and recorded what she knew of them in the runic language. The magic of the runes brought their legend to life, and she learned from them new words of power, which she then translated.

Dedicated simply to recording knowledge, Ekerila naively shared her runes with others. These fools abused the words of the gods and nearly brought the land to ruin, as the magic defining the world was wrenched apart, and sought to balance itself. Terrified of what she unleashed, Ekerila took her runes back and destroyed all but the most vital of them. Today, only a small handful of Ekerila's runes have survived the passage of time.

The Seekers of the Word of Ekerila believe that the ancient race Ekerila learned from was the *Syrneth*. The members hope to not only discover those runes lost to time, but the entire Futhark language that Ekerila used to bring forth the legend of the *Syrneth*. They are convinced the two, runes and the *Syrneth*, share more connections than the legends lead people to believe, and seek to find such clues.

Favor with the Seekers of the Word of Ekerila

A Seeker primarily concerns herself with the study of ancient runes, especially those found in or around *Syrneth* ruins. The Secret Society seeks to find a connection between the two and highly prizes any texts, translations or evidence of such.

A Hero who belongs to the Seekers of the Word of Ekerila can earn Favor in the following ways:

- ♦ Acquiring an artifact, relic or knowledge containing ancient rune text is worth 4 Favor, if that artifact is turned over to or shared with the Seekers. This could be anything from texts with runic translations, actual artifacts with runes or the location of a previously unknown standing stone containing runic writing.
- ♦ Providing evidence of a link between ancient runes and the *Syrneth* is worth 5 Favor. This could be a relic collected from a ruin with ancient runic text or texts or translations of runes that mention the *Syrneth* people.

A Hero who belongs to the Seekers of the Word of Ekerila can call upon it for aid in the following ways:

- ♦ Access to a reliquary costs 3 Favor. A Seeker reliquary contains rare magical artifacts or runes discovered in their expeditions. Such a relic functions similarly to a Signature Item, although the effects of a particular relic are at the GM's discretion. An agent is expected to return the relic to the reliquary once his mission is complete, and refusal to do so can result in him being declared a traitor.
- ♦ The Seekers can encrypt a message for an agent for 1 Favor. This encryption takes the form of runes, likely only translatable by a *Ypperste Prest*.
- ♦ Requesting aid from a *Ypperste Prest* costs 2 Favor. A *Ypperste Prest* is typically Strength 6, but she also possesses the Sorcery (*Galdr*) Advantage (see page 189).



The Invisible College

The Invisible College is not so invisible in Vestenmennavenjar. Backed by the Vendel League and the Guilder, any who wish to pursue scientific research receives free rein to do so in the major cities of the nation. The Inquisition does not have easy footholds in Vestenmennavenjar, and the recent embrace of Objectionism has brought some of the best scientific minds to Vesten. Some of the more controversial research or information remains hidden—just in case a traveling Inquisitor happens upon them. For the Invisible College, Vestenmennavenjar has proven a rather comfortable retreat from the normal hiding holes and safe spaces in other parts of Théah.

Favor in Vestenmennavenjar

A Hero who belongs to the Invisible College can earn Favor while in Vesten in the following way:

- Assisting in building a University or place of learning in a Vesten city is worth 5 Favor.

Knights of the Rose & Cross

Ever since the Vendel League introduced the Guilder to Théah, they have attempted to encourage people to adopt the currency. The best way to do so is to become Beneficiaries of the Knights of the Rose & Cross, giving their wealth as backing to the famous organization. A Knight in Vesten finds himself treated very well and welcomed with open arms. The promise of wealth and fame draws Knights from all over Théah, along with duelist schools and duels for sport and show.

While the Vendel League and the various jarls and carls provide an abundant form of wealth and patrons, a Knight eventually finds that the people of Vestenmennavenjar rarely need protecting. He likely finds himself on guard duty on a wealthy merchant's trade route as much as he stands in the entourage of a jarl. That isn't to say there is not anything for a Knight to do in Vestenmennavenjar. Indeed, plenty of people end up on the wrong end of the League's balance books and would pay handsomely for a Knight to assist them.

Los Vagabundos

Though the Vendel League ostensibly controls the economics of Vestenmennavenjar, the jarls and carls still rule the Nation. While the League would gladly have every jarl and carl on their payroll, many Vesten have remained firmly against what they view as the corporatization of the nation. Los Vagabundos agents attempt to keep good jarls and carls in position, staving off a Vendel League takeover. Los Vagabundos agents closely watch after League members that do good, in case someone decides to slip a knife in their backs to gain additional power.

Močiutès Skara

Vestenmennavenjar has not seen war on its soil in centuries, and as such the Mother's Shawl had little reason to venture there until recently. News of slaves mining silver in Klorhulg has reached the ears of the Society through Elisif's spies, and their members send aid to resistance fighters seeking to free the enslaved. While not directly engaged in the conflict, agents work to provide proper medical care and rations to any who gain liberation.

Rilasciare

Rilasciare members have their work cut out for them in Vestenmennavenjar. One would think that because the nation has no monarch that the Rilasciare would be satisfied, but the Vesten people have simply exchanged one form of tyrant for another, the Vendel League. Even if the people deposed all the jarls and carls across the nation, the Vendel League would remain as the true corrupt leader of Vesten. A Rilasciare agent does what she can to undermine the power of the League and the different Guilds, though the sheer amount of power exercised within makes it difficult.

Favor in Vestenmennavenjar

A Hero who belongs to the Rilasciare can earn Favor while in Vesten in the following way:

- Blocking or preventing a Guild member's activity is worth 4 Favor. The Vendel League is worse than most monarchs, as it has multiple heads. Cut the feet out from under one, and the rest come toppling down.





Places

Vendel

While no High King has ruled from the ancient throne for centuries, Vendel remains the heart of Vestenmennavenjar and the seat of its political and economic power. Vesten proverbs say that more bargains are born in Vendel than in the rest of Théah put together, and true or not, trading is and always has been the life's blood of Vestenmennavenjar's most prominent city. The first traders to establish routes with other parts of Théah came from ancient Vendel, and the twin jetties of the Beard shelters the city's natural port, making it a sanctuary compared to the stormy waters surrounding the rest of Vesten. The deep cove of Hål Bay (literally the Hole) and its location near the mouth of Grumfather Bay made Vendel a historically convenient starting point for raiding ventures, not only south across the bay to Eisen, but to the rest of Théah as well. The same features make it ideal as a trade port in modern times, and even today, the majority of Vestenmennavenjar's trading with the rest of Théah originates out of Grumfather Bay.

Vendel is home to the nation's earliest permanent settlements. Strong, straight spruce forests have provided generation upon generation with easy access to lumber for construction of both buildings and boats, and as the people cleared the woodlands, they gave way to lush farmlands and grazing fields fed by deep clear springs—all the resources necessary to support a thriving population. The distant mountains provide shelter from both weather and invasion, which has allowed the people of Vendel to grow in number and wealth without overt threat from neighboring jarls or foreign armies. Compared to the stony, uneven terrain that comprises much of the rest of Vesten, the vast and sprawling river valley makes expansion easy, meaning the village of Vendel quickly grew into a town, developing equally as fast into a city, without becoming as overcrowded as other early cities with similarly rapid growth rates.



The lush farmlands surrounding Vendel provide for the majority of fresh fruits and vegetables, flowers, spices and herbs grown in Vestenmennavenjar. Livestock requiring gentle rangelands, such as cattle, thrive in the former river-valley, providing alternatives to the hardy goats and sheep raised in other parts of the nation. Vendel exports fresh foods to fish-weary Vesten towns across the nation, in exchange for the luxurious, rare or more easily transportable harvests other areas can muster. Those trade goods in turn provide the backbone for the Vendel League's dealings with other nations around the world.

In modern times, Vendel rivals any other bustling city in the known world, while still respecting its ancient roots. The oldest districts near the city's center were built with such solid masterwork and attention to detail that descendants of their long-passed crafters still use many of the original buildings. As time passed, new neighborhoods grew up alongside the old, unlike many cities where older buildings were destroyed to make way for new. These new districts, often richer and more elaborate than the old, create an ever-expanding evolution of architecture styles and techniques around the heart of the city. Traveling from outside the city to its heart is like journeying backwards in time, at least in regards to the building structures and styles. Newer areas have broad streets, carefully paved for carriage and cart transportation, and buildings are often interspersed with gardens, parks and other aesthetically pleasing areas for public gatherings.

These expanses of hedge, greenery and pathway, intended for social outings, picnics, public theater and the occasional hanging, flogging or other public punishment of criminals, also provide prime territory for duels, private meetings and trysts. Although patrolled by the city watch of Vendel, they are also a hot spot for late-night crime, leading to nicknames like "Pickpocket Park" and "Slit-throat Square." The older parts of town are progressively smaller and less luxurious, although Vendel crafters have always taken great pride in their architecture. Some of the buildings standing in the oldest parts of town date back to the earliest times, to before Vestenmennavenjar was a nation and Vendel was little more than a coastal village settled by a formerly nomadic tribe.

The League's Influence

Like any large city, Vendel's people have traditionally ranged from the very poor to the incredibly wealthy. Since its advent, however, the League has made great efforts to ensure that any citizen who desires work finds a job suitable to her abilities. Civic projects, such as schools and universities, offer a broad range of service-related employments, and Vendel's carl has implemented a program hiring those finding employment difficult to aid in the general upkeep of the town. Rag-pickers, street-sweepers, gardeners and landscapers; if a townsman can scrub stones or wipe windows, the town finds gainful employment for them. Even the elderly, crippled and infirm, treated as valuable members of Vendel society, can find work teaching, recordkeeping, managing projects or even creating works of art for the benefit of the entire city.

Vendel's people likely welcome a new visitor, regardless of her origins, so long as she is not overtly hostile. The intellectually minded find a vast array of schools, museums, galleries and libraries available to the public. Those of a more martial mindset may encounter some of the world's greatest weaponsmiths and armorers there, along with shipbuilders and creators of large weapons—trebuchets, cannons and even more eccentric death machines. The stores and marketplaces house as fine a variety of merchandise as available anywhere in the world, with all transactions using the League's Guilder. The League handles some goods more discreetly than others, though they forbid nothing as trade goods in Vendel; the League believes the market itself defines what is acceptable for sale or not. They do, however, strongly tax and monitor sales on potentially problematic goods.

In Vendel, more than elsewhere in Vesten, the jarldom has become largely a ceremonial role under the League's capable management. Frederick Ulfson "inherited" the title when his predecessor and uncle, Aksel Redhand, died of mysterious causes. The Vendel League's prefers Ulfson as the replacement, in no small part because he remains largely complacent being a diplomatic figurehead and allows the League to define the city's policies. Ulfson's wife, Sofia, on the other hand, is far more politically adept than her spouse. Married to Ulfson when merely 15, she has borne him eight children, all of whom she carefully arranges influential partnerships for, despite none of them being out of childhood yet.



The Guild House

A masterpiece of international architecture, the Vendel League Guild House is the jewel in the city's crown. Before beginning construction, the League consulted with master designers from around Théah, handpicking elements designed to surpass the greatest accomplishments from each, not only in beauty but functionality. The grounds are designed to allow easy surveillance by the fewest guards possible, while drawing attention towards the main building via lush gardens and landscaping.

The ground floor is largely composed of the League Hall where the Chairs can meet with visiting petitioners either en masse in a gallery setting, or in private council chambers. Depending on a guest's status, he may find himself waiting in a stark chamber furnished with hard wooden benches, or sumptuous suites where he is afforded the most luxurious amenities the League has to offer. A page in the Guild House often supplements her income by selling information on which chambers various visitors waited (and for how long). These tidbits indicate a social and economic barometer, and thus gossips and gamblers alike pay well for them.

Above the main level, each Guildmaster holds jurisdiction in his own wing, all of which spreads out from a central point like a nine-pointed star. These halls, as expansive as many estate houses, are the official home to a Guildmaster and her staff during visits to Vendel. Traditionally, she never hosts a visiting dignitary in these private chambers; to do so invites a level of informality quite at odds with the League's business model. Many of the Guildmasters also clandestinely keep private lodgings of varying levels of opulence, elsewhere in the city, however, and private get-togethers are not uncommon between a League member and potential business partner away from the traditional settings of the Guild House.

A few Guildmasters do not bother to keep holdings outside the Guild Hall, preferring to conduct all business with a closeness to the rest of the Guilds. These have expanded on their portion of the Guild Hall to create fully functioning Guild Houses, including training and crafting on Guild Hall grounds. Primarily, the Carpentry and Usury Guilds function solely out of the Guild Hall, and only the political capital the Masters have amassed keep their activities from rubbing the other Chairs the wrong way.

Mjotuthrstoll, The High King's Throne

At the heart of the city of Vendel, amidst stately storefronts and elegant estates, a cobblestone pathway, too narrow for a carriage, leads up a stony hillock to a plain granite vista. Standing stones, twice a person's height and twice an arm's reach in breadth, ring the courtyard. Each, carved with ornate beasts and ancient runes, tell stories of the ancient gods and Heroes of Vestenmennavenjar. Placed in such a way that the rising sun on the morning after the Winter Solstice shines directly upon it, a timeless stone throne rises nearly as high as the runestones around it.

The great chair, the throne from which the ancient High King of Vestenmennavenjar ruled over the united tribes of the nation, is inscribed with a bindrune symbolizing the four standards of Vesten culture: luck, loyalty, honesty and courage.

While no High King has sat Mjotuthrstoll for two centuries, the site—and the stone throne itself—plays a vital part of Vestenmennavenjar's culture. Vesten say that those of true leadership quality feel a palpable thrum when resting a hand upon the dark stone chair, and a would-be leader often makes the pilgrimage to Mjotuthrstoll, inevitably reporting to have sensed such a phenomena on his arrival. An ailing victim of an incurable disease traditionally travels (or is carried along) the narrow walkway to supplicate herself before the empty throne in hopes that the great leaders of the past will reach out from the Afterlife and grant her relief from her misery. A mother rubs her baby's cap on the bindrune, hoping to instill some of the virtues of her ancient rulers in her child through contact with its magic.

The Market

The Vendel League has turned Vestenmennavenjar from a land of warriors to one of traders, and the Market proves their success. Larger than most of Vesten's outlying villages, the Market was once an expansive flatland used predominantly for farming and grazing, along with the occasional seasonal festival, and when a merchant came into Vendel with goods to trade locally, he often set up his wares in the same field. Over time, as trade through the port town increased, so did the frequency and number of merchants. The League, seeing an opportunity, bought the land and erected small permanent stalls allowing



sales throughout even the rough winter months and hired guards to patrol the area to ensure the visiting merchants' protection.

Now, the Market is a bustling business area throughout the year. Anything that can be found for sale in Théah is likely to be traded there, from precious metals and gemstones to carrots and salt cod. Farmers, furriers and other seasonal sellers may have temporary stalls, but some businesses have now been at the Market for generations, creating entire streets dedicated to clothing, food or other specific goods. There is a quarter for slave trade, carefully overseen by League representatives to uphold the highest standards of care—at least within the city itself. Vendel is one of the only places selling slaves openly in Théah, much to the chagrin of the other nations.

Kirk

Kirk has always been a keystone in Vestenmennavenjar culture and religion, and has been the capital city of the nation for the past hundred years—despite the Vendel League's efforts to move it to Vendel. The standing stones at the city's center are widely held to be the oldest in all of Vestenmennavenjar, and the buildings surrounding them house many of the nation's most revered priests and priestesses. The land around Kirk is dotted with locations long thought to be sacred to the gods, dense with sets of carved standing stones dating back to the most ancient of times. The small villages in the area play host to many priests who maintain these stones (and help guide the religious lives of those who know them to be holy ground). Each season, pilgrims travel from around the nation to partake in holy festivals and celebrations honoring the gods, recognizing the sacred times and places of the Vesten faith and dedicating themselves to the religion followed by their ancestors back through the annals of time.

Kirk's distance from the shore historically protected what was Vesten's largest town (until the League's presence propelled Vendel to that seat) from outside invasion. No less brave than their cousins on the Western Coastline, the people of Kirk historically steeled themselves against different kind of foe. Legends of this area include a plethora of supernatural creatures fighting the good people of Kirk for control of the land: giants in the mountains, trolls

along the river and other creatures born of legend that do not want to let go of their ancestral homes. Modern scholars may not put much faith in these old tales, but almost every building in Kirk still bears the rune-signs of protection against such foes, even if the artisans claim they merely nod to a time-gone-by.

This isolation from foreign invasion also made Kirk a haven for universities and libraries throughout the generations, protecting knowledge sacred to the Vesten (and those studying it) from potential foreign threats. Per capita, it holds more schools of higher learning than any other town in Vestenmennavenjar, and many of the nation's greatest crafters, writers, creators and artists have studied in Kirk.

The same inaccessibility that made the city a safe haven for knowledge and religion throughout the ages, now offers the League a similar level of protection against foreign armies—including Vendel itself. The Breffa, thought by outsiders merely an archive for Vendel League business records, likely holds in its basement more wealth than the rest of Vestenmennavenjar put together.

While Vendel may be where Vestenmennavenjar's deals are made, Kirk is where its wealth is stored.

Mestrkirk

While still a work in progress, the Mestrkirk (also called The Greatest Cathedral) has already drawn Théah's attention. Objectionist teachings do not necessitate pilgrimages, and yet the Mestrkirk's reputation is so great that countless devotees from around the world have made the journey to Kirk over the past several decades to witness the yet-uncompleted glory of its sweeping buttresses, majestic towers and elaborate grounds.

As Kirk also contains many historically notable traditional Vestenmennavenjar churches, some are confused by the League's decision to sponsor the largest Objectionist cathedral ever conceived in the same city. Others, especially those most fervent followers of the traditional faith, believe that this gesture by the League blatantly insults their faith. They claim the merchants' greed for foreign goods and wealth has tempted them to insult the gods of Vesten with this blasphemous building and anxiously await the day when the Allfather and his divine kin





smite down this abomination and all those involved with its creation.

Regardless of the League's intentions, no one can argue that the church is a sight to behold. Even those most devoted to Vesten religion come to see the church, which has brought quite a bit of commerce to Kirk in the past few years.

The Breffa

To the outside world, the Breffa is the location where the Vendel League stores the vast records of their deals. The League scribes' ravenous demand for accounting paper provides the heart of many modern Vesten jokes; one suggests that the demand for rags to craft into paper pulp threatens to leave the entire nation with full pockets but no pants, while another claims that the League has sent expeditions out in search of natives with four hands each, in order to double the efficiency they can keep records.

Jesting aside, the Breffa holds accountings of every deal, no matter how minor, made by the Vendel League and its delegates since its inception in the fifteenth century. The Breffa keeps these official records using the traditional runic writing that predates the League by eons. Some believe this merely testifies to the League's devotion to its heritage and history; others recognize that it makes information gathering by outside spies more difficult than if records were kept in a more modern dialect.

From accountants to archivists, ink-makers to inn-keepers, many of the families in Kirk now work in one way or another for the League, making this

information depository one of the most important buildings in Vestenmennavenjar.

In truth, however, the Breffa is even more than it seems. Beneath its unobtrusive upper floors, a subterranean stronghold secrets away great stores of League wealth: gems, ingots of precious metal, deeds for land in foreign nations. Here, as well, the truly important records are kept, documents seen only by members of the League and the Mistress of the Breffa herself. A foreign spy would pay untold riches and countless lives for access to these chambers—if he knew that they existed.

Beneath that, unknown to all but the highest of the League, is the striking mint that creates the now world-famous Guilders. A single master crafter known only as "Meister"—reportedly originally from Vodacce, but now bound in loyalty to the League by means even the Mistress herself does not know—supervises the mint. He manages a trio of apprentices, all who live in the subterranean levels with him, in the creation of the League's famous Guilder. The Meister or his minions strike each and every coin, and not a Guilder leaves the Breffa without having passed approval under the Meister's vigilant eye.

The League only hires the most loyal of soldiers to guard these underground storage and creation facilities. Many owe life-debts to the League or have family members fostered under League member households, guaranteeing their fidelity.



Grumfather Bay

Inland through the Maw, through the treacherous waters of the massive Hoppe Channel, lies the great body of water known as Grumfather Bay. No narrow sealet, Grumfather Bay could easily hold the entirety of Avalon, the Highland Marches and Inismore, along with the waters around and between them. While Ussura and Eisen lay claim to the southern shorelands, Vestenmennavenjar has claimed the north shores and the vast waterways for as long as there has been a Vestenmennavenjar, and by their ancestors before, back through the annals of time.

Eskjo

Tucked on the northern coastline of Grumfather Bay, Eskjo is a small but fiercely independent town that relies almost entirely upon the waters of Grumfather Bay for its livelihood. Its people are predominantly fisher-folk, and the jarldom of Eskjo remains very traditional, with leadership passed down within the same loosely tied family line for generations.

The most notable figure in Eskjo, however, is not the jarl, but instead a woman by the name of Alvor Ekillsdatter, the leader of an infamous group of pirates called the Vesten Raiders. While their territory encompasses all of Grumfather Bay and the Maw beyond, Alvor uses Eskjo as a base of operations for her vast armada of pirate vessels. From there, she directs this network of privateers as they prowl in swift ships outfitted with light-but-deadly arsenals of cannon and other weaponry.

While they eschew attacking Vesten fleets for the most part, foreign vessels are fair game. Sailors know Alvor for her sense of humor and penchant for gambling and games of chance, and, in fact, some victims have escaped her clutches by proposing interesting challenges or offering amusing bets that piqued Alvor's interest.

The Raiders' standard method of operation (made possible by the stories of what happens to those who do not cooperate) is for the most part bloodless and far less debilitating than it could be. The Raiders ask the trade vessels they catch for a "donation." If the Raiders deem the offering worthy, they allow the merchant ship to go on its way with no further issues. If the ship refuses the request, or if the Raiders consider the payment miserly, they shoot the ship

to bits, board and take everything of value—often including the tight-fisted captain and crew's clothing. The Raiders allow those who survive the encounter to go on their way, limping to the next port where they face ridicule by those who paid the Raider's fee without further issue.

Somajez

Somajez may well be the least "Vesten" town in all of Vestenmennavenjar—in fact, only a few years ago, it was officially an Ussuran garrison. For generations, ownership of this large village (and the military fortress it supports) has been a matter of hotly contested debate between the nations of Vestenmennavenjar and Ussura. The conflict is due in no small part to its location at the furthest eastern point along the coastline of the Grumfather Bay, offering either nation a jumping off point for both naval and land-based military maneuvers and reconnaissance towards the other. Its people have developed a culture that embraces some aspects of both nations, while integrating them in a fashion wholly and resiliently Somaji.

More of an outpost than a town, Somajez's existence has always relied heavily on funding from whichever nation currently lays claim to it. With little in the way of natural resources and located too far east in Grumfather Bay to warrant much in the way of non-military trade routes, the village would have likely never developed beyond a smattering of nomads without the presence of the fortress. When the first garrison was placed there (many debate about whether it was a Vesten or Ussuran deployment), they brought enough resources and goods to hire the locals to support their needs, and that wealth allowed the tiny village to grow into the decently sized town seen today.

In return, the people of the village spent generation upon generation providing services for the military troops stationed there and exist in a strange state of symbiosis with them. The fortress, which has borne a dozen names over the centuries, hires locals to perform mundane services within its walls: cleaning, cooking, sewing, repairs, animal care and the like. In addition, troops themselves rely upon the Somaji people for everything their official channels do not



provide for them: food of better-than-barracks quality, non-military issued goods ranging from luxury items to illicit drugs and non-authorized weaponry and, of course, entertainment of a wide variety of types and specialties.

The most recent change in Somajež's status is possibly the least dramatic transfer of control of the city in history. Whereas past transpositions have largely been as a result of hostile takeovers by one nation or the other (often to the detriment of the townspeople themselves), Somajež rejoined Vestenmennavenjar most recently through an entirely bloodless succession, thanks to the intervention of the Vendel League, who made ceding it to Vestenmennavenjar part of their current trade agreement with the leaders of Ussura.

As Vesten tradition demands that every town, city and village have its own jarl and carl, Somaji townsfolk were promoted to these roles upon the city's transfer. The fortress itself also has a commander, appointed under the Vendel League's supervising eye, to watch over the military forces stationed there. The true power in Somajež, however, lies in none of these individuals. As the representative of the Vendel League in Somajež, Waldemar Hagensenn is nominally one of the jarl's underlings, but in all matters of true importance, the jarl knows that Waldemar's word (being that of the League) stands as good as law.

Jarl Forest

Spanning a goodly portion of the nation's interior, Jarl Forest is the largest and thickest woodland in Vesten. Some of the trees in the heart of the forest are rumored to have stood since the gods themselves walked the land, towering taller than any building in Vendel. Jarl Forest has provided wood for most of Vesten's fleets, and (with the advent of the Vendel League) now serves as a major source of lumber export for more sparsely wooded nations around Théah.

The Jarl Forest also hosts some expansive noble estates, many of which span hundreds of acres of deeded land. Hunting—the more dangerous the prey, the better—is a popular pastime among nobles, especially since the Vendel League's success has minimized warfare as a Vesten way of life. Many have turned their traditional martial skills to sport, rather than

lose them altogether. Landed nobles sometimes host great tournaments with exotic prizes for those who bring in the most challenging quarry during a set time period, and these tournaments can draw entrants from across the nation and beyond.

Only the bravest hunt in the heart of the Jarl, where folks say giant serpents large enough to swallow a mounted rider whole dwell, along with monstrous spiders, as big as a cottage and capable of snaring an entire hunting party in their webs. The most feared (and thus prized) quarry of the Jarl, however, is the legendary lindworm, a wingless drachen with sharply clawed forelegs and a long serpentine back half. Fierce and highly venomous, the largest lindworms reportedly breathe flames and noxious smoke. Legend states that one of the last High Jarls slew a lindworm single-handedly as proof of her bravery and skill, before attaining her title and ascending the Mjotuthrstell.

Krog (The Inn at the Crossroads)

What started as a single building, Krog (the Pub) grew into a small village consisting largely of the descendents of the original owner. As even the fastest horses find it impossible to traverse the entirety of Jarl Forest in a single day, Krog became a popular spot for a traveler seeking lodgings other than camping along the roadsides as she travels. Now in its second generation, Krog offers a smithy, two inns, a brewery, a mercantile and a carpenter, as well as whatever temporary merchants or traders may have set up shop nearby for a season.

Run by the original owner's son, Bjorn, and his wife, Justa, Krog is the only real non-religious settlement located deep within the Jarl Forest. Because of this (and the forest's deeply rooted folklore), some believe that the kindly pair is something other than mortal themselves. While quite sprightly for their advanced years, neither admits to anything other than hard work and clean living as credit for their vigor.

The Krog's out-of-the-way location makes it perfect for clandestine negotiations and secret meetings. Bjorn and Justa, likely aware of how many foreign spies—League emissaries and Vesten villains—patronize the Krog, cannot be so choosy about clientele when located so far off the beaten path. The elderly couple, however, remains loyal to their nation, despite what business may transact in their great room.





The Stones

Scattered throughout the deep woods of the Jarl Forest are some of the nation's oldest standing stones. While some of these formations bear clear messages of praise or supplication to the gods or brag about the achievements of mortal rulers or warriors, others are so old that no one fully understands the runes engraved upon them.

One such grouping, originally a dozen stones, of which eleven remain, bears markings so ancient that even the most learned of Vestenmennavenjar's Ypperste Prest admit little to no understanding of the stones' original purpose. This, however, does not stop a Ypperste Prest from dedicating her life to the protection and study of this formation, known simply as the Stones.

Travelers from around Vestenmennavenjar make the trek into the heart of the Jarl Forest each year to visit the Stones. A penitent who finds this ancient formation leaves gifts and sacrifices on a slab-altar. Often spending days or weeks in consultation with the priests who dedicate themselves to the Stones, hoping to glean solutions to the trials and tribulations that launched his journey. A priest, for her part, aids the pilgrim as seems appropriate, sometimes utilizing Galdr to supplement her innate wisdom.

Rumors speak of an oracle dwelling with the priests of the Stones. Although the priests do not allow outsiders to visit directly with the seer, particularly vital questions (or those from influential supplicants)

may be passed along to the oracle. Rumored to see the living myth around her so clearly that she can follow its flow and direction forward, she gleaned insight into the future. Some claim the oracle predicted the advent of the Vendel League a generation before its founding, although whether the current oracle is the same as the one who spoke of Vestenmennavenjar's change from military giant to an economic powerhouse is up for debate.

Gandr (The Staff)

While many trees in the Jarl Forest are majestic, one stands above the rest, both literally and figuratively. Known as "Gandr," stories purport this stately oak to have been a walking staff used by the Allfather himself, which, when thrust into the ground, bore roots. The trunk is larger than a house at its base, and the branches reach so high that some legends claim someone who climbs all the way to the top on the night of a full moon can speak directly with the gods.

As the only oak in a forest of birch and pine, Gandr has been a pilgrimage destination for countless generations, particularly for someone who wishes to leave her past behind and join the sacred band worshipping and caring for this legendary tree.

Some believe that swallowing an acorn from Gandr can cure any poison or malady; others say that only an arrow made of its holy wood can slay a lindworm. Regardless, the tree is sacred to the Vesten, and anyone who would do it harm quickly finds the entire nation joined in arms against him.



The Northlands

Vestenmennavenjar is not a land for the weak. Its harsh environs and inhospitable weather have forged a population of the hardest and fiercest folk in all of Théah. But even among the Vesten, those of the Northlands have long been admired for the stoic fortitude with which they inhabit the most extreme region in the land.

Most of the population of the Northlands cleaves together in small villages near resources such as timberlands, fresh water or seasonal animal migration zones. Available food inherently limits growth; even after the Vendel League brought increased wealth to most of the nation, the Northland villages remain the poorest and closest to subsistence level in all of Vesten. Many of the coastal villages are only accessible by water during the short summer months when the Allfather Ice Floes undergo their annual melt. The rest of the year, they (and the villages further inland) can only be visited by overland means, predominantly caribou-drawn sleigh, dog sled and the like.

Klorhulg

Klorhulg is exceptional in the Northlands, in that it is (and has been for generations) a real “town,” compared to the villages scattered elsewhere throughout the north. Its growth and prosperity historically can be attributed to two main factors: its location in one of the deepest fjords in Vestenmennavenjar and the silver mines in the area.

Because Klorhulg’s bay is deep enough to never freeze over and far enough west to not become ice-locked in anything but the harshest winters, it has remained Vesten’s northernmost active port for centuries. Klorhulg distributes vital supplies shipped from the rest of Vestenmennavenjar (and throughout Théah) overland to other northern villages, making it a central hub for communication, trade and culture throughout the Northlands. Other Northland villagers trek for hundreds of miles over icy terrain to trade luxurious furs for necessary goods and gear, and the merchants of Klorhulg then turn around and trade these to foreign markets.

In addition to its location and accessibility, Vestenmennavenjar blessed Klorhulg with the nation’s richest and most prolific silver mines. Originally, locals worked the mines, producing enough metal to

export for jewelry and other luxury purposes. When the Vendel League introduced the Guilder as their sole avenue of trade, demand outstretched what local production could handle, and the League began sending thralls north to aid with the mining.

For a time, this was a win-win situation for everyone involved. An indentured servant worked off her debt much faster than in other parts of the nation, and the locals were grateful for assistance in keeping up with the League’s quotas. As demand for Guilders increased, however, the labor demand became taxing and eventually tyrannical. A thrall quickly paid off her debts and fled for an easier life further south, and the local mining force began balking at the output demanded of them by the League’s overseers.

In response, the League imported slaves to assist the local labor, passing them off as thralls. At first, the extra labor eased the demand enough, but as the League’s influence grew and their need for silver to mint new Guilders skyrocketed, the demand put on the miners began to outstrip humane production levels.

The Allthing’s laws concerning thralls caused a bit of outrage at the treatment, but the slaves were completely unaware of their own rights in the nation. As conditions grew worse, the thralls and independent miners began to refuse to work, citing dangerous conditions and inhumane treatment. The revolt threatened to shut down the League’s enterprises. Master Ballesteros discharged all the local mining labor, thanking them for their service and replaced them all with illegal slaves.

To prevent a mutiny among the townspeople, he offered locals small subsidies not to work in the mines, largely as a bribe to look the other way at the inhumane slave conditions. This served largely as a bribe to look the other way at the inhumane conditions still going on in t Some locals (including the former carl of Klorhulg, Elisif Geirsdatter) are less willing to accept such bribes, and the League deals with them in various fashions. Many wonder how the current jarl, Gylffi Hafgrimmr, will respond to the League’s pressures.



The Allfather Ice Floes

In total, the Allfather Ice Floes are as big as the rest of Vestenmennavenjar put together—at least during the winter months. These massive expanses of ice double in size during the winter, but melt significantly in the summertime, unlocking the majority of the northern coast for a few months to allow fishing, whaling and shipping in and out of the Northlands.

The Ice Floes have been an important hunting ground for local villagers, who travel out onto the ice in search of seal, walrus, ice bear and other nutrient-rich foods to sustain them. Even experienced hunters find the Floes perilous. Many who venture forth never return, falling victim to the animals they hunt, the unpredictable weather or to the monstrous creatures that legends say claim the Ice Floes as their territory. The potential reward is worth the danger; without the bounty found on their barren expanses, many of the Northland villages would be unable to survive.

In recent years, the Allfather Ice Floes have become a popular safari destination for intrepid explorers. Rich foreigners pay well for the experience of heading out onto the ice in search of trophies, making hunting expeditions a strong supplementary income source for those willing to babysit the often unprepared explorer on his journey.

Beyond the great ice bears, long-fanged walrus and other exotic creatures, some explorers seek even more elusive quarries. Legends say, far to the north where the Ice Floes never melt, dwell the Jotun, a mythic tribe of cannibalistic giant half-humans who remain in isolation and exile from the earliest days of Vestenmennavenjar. These Jotun supposedly possess ancient magic (such as how to survive in the barren ice wastes) that explorers have been attempting to ferret out for centuries.

To date, no one has provided verifiable proof of a successful Jotun encounter. But the reason remains a mystery. Maybe they do not exist, or have managed to elude contact (or kill those who have reached them). Or maybe anyone who has come into contact with them is wise enough to keep their secrets to herself.

Vesten know the Jotun are real, just not as cannibalistic giants—at least not all of them. Jotun are living myths, the people and things from the past who continue to influence Vesten life. That does not stop an enterprising ice climber from profiting from an ignorant foreigner and her misplaced expectations.

Wyrd Lake

Located at the northern edge of Jarl Forest, Wyrd Lake formed from the remains of an ancient prehistoric volcano, fed through an underground spring with the purest waters in Vesten. The lake feeds several major rivers that span the northwestern quarter of the nation, and its tributaries reach both the northern and western coastlines, spanning hundreds of miles along the way.

Since people first settled into the lands that would eventually become Vestenmennavenjar, Wyrd Lake and the island in the center of it have played an important part of local folklore. Some legends name the island as the home of the great tree that binds the world of the living with the world of their ancestors. Others claim the ancient giant foes of the Vesten retreated to here after fierce Vestenmennavenjar warriors drove them from their lands. The story that gives the island its name—Ivethay Island, meaning “Island of the Crone” or “Witch Island”—states that the lake and the land within it are owned by an immortal witch who turns trespassers into trees; thus creating the vast forests that cover the island.

Ivethay Island

Ivethay Island is a lake-locked, forested plot of land located in the center of Wyrd Lake. The island, large enough to be a small nation in its own right, instead houses only a few small tribal villages, most of whom have little contact with the world outside of their island.

The Ukonsaari tribe has dwelled on Ivethay Island and the shores surrounding it for as long as there have been people in the lands of Vestenmennavenjar. Notable by virtue of their height (the average Ukonsaari stands literally head and shoulders above the average Vesten), this matriarchal tribe has had a stormy past with the other Vesten tribes and eventually retreated to the large island in the middle of Wyrd Lake as a means of self-defense. Over the centuries, this isolation has spawned rumor and superstition about the Ukonsaari, some born from lack of information and some actively fostered by the Ukonsaari to provide another layer of protection from their foes.

There are no real towns on the island, despite it being more than large enough to support one. Instead, multiple small villages scattered across it shelter the



different family-groups of Ukonsaari tribesfolk, all interrelated through an elaborate system of matriarchal lineage-keeping. In order to prevent inbreeding within a predominantly closed population, the female elders of the Ukonsaari carefully track their people's genealogy and arrange marriages between the young people of their villages, often fostering children in another village to facilitate developing relationships with each other. While each of the villages has its own religious and political leaders, they all look to a single wise woman—a position known as the Ivethay—for inter-village matters or to deal with particular important issues.

The legends surrounding Ivethay Island have created their own bizarre solution to the tribe's miniscule population. One of the stories states that, while the giant witch that lives on the island turns intruders into trees, she has a soft spot for children and cannot bring them harm. For centuries, a woman who has been unable (or unwilling) to raise her own children has trusted in this folktale, bringing her infants to the shores of Wyrđ Lake and leaving them there in hopes that Ivethay will watch over them in ways that she cannot. Unwed mothers or families too poor to feed their babes often undertake such desperate measures, but over the years, the Ukonsaari have also adopted children targeted for death, such as rivals for a throne or the illegitimate offspring of political leaders and powerful nobles.

The Ukonsaari raise an adopted child as a full member of the tribe, without social stigma or ramifications for being born outside. When he achieves adulthood, he can marry, work and live his life exactly as if he had been born on the island. In fact, in some ways, he is more valued (at least in his youthful potential) than a locally born child, because the women who arrange marriages between the various villages know his foreign blood adds strength and diversity to a dangerously small and stagnant breeding pool.

While the tribesfolk consider it a sacred duty and honor to raise these abandoned babes, their generosity sometimes puts them into direct conflict with Vesten from outside the island seeking to use the children as nothing more than pawns in a political chess game. Knowing they cannot hope to battle toe-to-toe against the richer and more powerful folk who might come after their wards, the Ukonsaari rely on stealth, secrecy and superstition to keep intruders away from



their island and the precious refugees they protect. This practice of leaving their children for Iethay, while long in tradition, has slowly tapered off, leaving the people of the island desperate for new blood. Some seek to open trade relations with the villages outside the island allowing people to immigrate to the island, but others fear the changes such a thing would bring.

Despite their isolationist traditions, the Ukonsaari do have some contact with the world outside of their island. Sometimes a tribesperson journeys to nearby villages or homesteads to trade with neighbors for goods and supplies that the tribe cannot produce. Such a trader hides her connection to the Island, however, instead presenting herself as a traveler, peddler or the like.

Western Coastline

In some ways, the Western Coastline of Vestenmennavenjar is almost a nation unto itself. Although each rules independently (like the rest of Vesten), the towns and villages along the western coastline of Vestenmennavenjar are alike in many ways. They face similar challenges. Their location along the Western Coastline isolates them from the more land-locked Vesten villages, and even their neighbors along the northern and southern coasts are unlikely to make the dangerous journey along the harsh coastline to trade or visit their western cousins.

The rocky cliffs, treacherous tides and ship-rending storms blowing in from the western seas challenge even those who live along the western coast; for visitors, they often prove a deadly stumbling block to interacting with Soroya, Costa and Thorshofn (the largest of the western coastal cities) let alone any of the smaller, less-inviting coastal villages. Sailors from other areas often veer far out to sea to avoid these coastal perils, leaving the western coast inhabitants strangely isolated.

Having grown from the same original nomadic tribal base, west coasters speak near identical dialects (and their individual verbal idiosyncrasies are more understandable to one another than to outsiders, due to generations of shared trade and commerce). Because of their proximity as well as a shared historic background culture, they more than likely share relatives with the populations of other west coast cities than with townfolk further inland.

With all these similarities uniting them, then, each of the three major cities of the Western Coastline has also curiously developed a very unique personality from the others. From xenophobic Soroya to diverse Thorshofn, each of the communities along the western seaboard have a unique way of interacting with the world around them, and these differences become more noticeable as Vestenmennavenjar itself increases its connectivity to the rest of Théah.

Soroya

Northernmost of the western coastal towns, Soroya is a throwback to the nation's past, to a time when isolation was the norm, and each jarl guarded his territory not only from foreign invasion, but from his neighboring jarls as well. While most of Vestenmennavenjar has embraced the Vendel League, welcoming the wealth and luxury that foreign trade has brought their nation, for the most part a person of Soroya eschews the League's "advancements," seeing them as signs of debilitating weakness on the part of her neighbors. While she recognizes that thwarting the League would be foolhardy, a typical person from Soroya remains as aloof as possible from the merchant group without bringing the League's attention too strongly down upon herself.

Soroyans are a proud people. The last High Jarl of Vestenmennavenjar came from Soroya, a fact that his great-great-grandson (the current jarl) has never forgotten. As a culture, folk from Soroya, more traditional than the majority of Vesten, do not welcome outside faiths. The only thing more likely to receive a colder shoulder than an outsider is an outsider bearing signs of the Church, whether Vaticine or Objectivist. While the town's official policy does not allow for outright violence against those of other faiths, there has never been a guilty verdict involving crimes against those bearing either Church's word in Soroya.

While most of Vestenmennavenjar prospers under the Vendel League, Soroya is a town in decline. Unlike Klorhulg to the northeast, Soroya has no mines and the environment around the town has little in the way of resources interesting to the Vendel League. A Soroyan relies almost entirely on the sea for his goods, as his ancestors have for millennia.



Unlike most of Vestenmennavenjar, Soroya has not truly given up on its traditional marauding ways, although a Soroyan raider practiced more discretion than he needed, even before the League took hold. Whenever a fisher from the town's fleet spots a merchant (foreign or Vendel League) ship in his local waters, word gets sent back to town through a clandestine series of light and flag signals. Sleek unmarked ships engage before the foreigners can pass through Soroyan waters.

If successful, they slaughter the unfortunate crew to eliminate any witnesses, and ransack the boat before burning it to the waterline and sinking it in the seas off Soroya's coastline. While ostensibly belonging to "lawless brigands," in truth the fleet is commanded by the jarl of Soroya, and all goods recovered go directly into the city's coffers. So far, the League has not taken official notice of this practice, but they likely know and now bide their time before reacting to the remote and rebellious jarldom.

On the other hand, the Vesten Raiders are less than pleased with the competition in the Western Seas. Especially since the Soroyans are killing the crews. They do not yet know that the raids are coordinated by the local jarl, but it is only a matter of time before the information leaks and they do something about it.

Costa

Significantly southwest of Soroya is the town of Costa, which exists solely due to two complementary environmental factors. The first is a small but extremely deep bay perfect for harboring the type of vessels designed for open water (rather than coastal sailing). The second is a cliff-sheltered stand of woodland nearby—small by most standards, but sufficient to provide straight, tall timber enough for generations of Costa's shipbuilders to ply their trade. The combination of these two resources helped shape Costa's people into the sea-faring explorers that they are today.

While daily life within the village of Costa is not wholly different from the lifestyles of those who live north or south along the coast, a Costan more likely sails for months—even years—at a time, rather than

on shorter fishing and sailing trips. While most of these voyages nominally focus on trade, in truth, the amount of goods exported and imported by sea travel for Costa is fairly small. Many of the "treasures" returned with are not things at all, but instead knowledge and experiences. Exploration of the world around him, the further away the better, has become such an ingrained part of Costa's culture that a youth commonly goes on pilgrimage via sea voyage as a rite of passage upon attaining his maturity.

What truths he learns upon his journey he brings back to the town, sharing with his friends and family members and valued as an integral part of who the Costan has become. A villager from Costa takes on deed-based surnames based on her premiere ocean voyage as her trade name: Eagle-eye for a person who spotted an uncharted island, Surfson for someone who explored many foreign ports, Twoship for a sailor who survived her initial vessel's sinking mid-journey and the like.

These journeys and the accumulated knowledges and gathered artifacts make Costa a treasure trove of worldly knowledge unlike any other location in Vestenmennavenjar. A person seeking answers to mysteries based on life experiences and exotic treasures (rather than books) may well find what he seeks in Costa.

Costa's jarl, Mara Eastman, is renowned for her first sea journey, which took her west through the Trade Sea, out of the Highland Marches' western coastal waters, south through the Widow's Sea and then east all the way to the Crescent Empire. While this did not solely qualify her for the role of jarl, the wisdom she learned along the way surely was a consideration.

Costa's architecture, cultural adaptations and general atmosphere reflects their tradition of travel. The people welcome travelers to their small town with open arms, treating them as almost royalty and pumping them for information and stories about their life and travels. They rarely treat foreigners with suspicion, as many are transplants themselves, coming home with a native after falling in love.



Thorshofn

At the southern tip of the western coastline lies the town of Thorshofn—Thor's Bay. Named for an ancient legendary jarl, the entirety of Thorshofn was originally built up along the inlet that gives it its name. Over generations, the town has grown, following the fjord valley northerly inland, creating a long, narrow town between massive stone cliffs.

Like most coastal towns in Vestenmennavenjar, the majority of Thorshofn's resources come from the sea. With a diet predominantly of fish prepared in one variety or another, a Thorshofn townsfolk supplements the fish with sea-plants, coastal birds (and their eggs), shellfish and crustaceans. The town also relies heavily on another bounty from the sea that its northern cousins have far less of: direct trade with nations outside of Vestenmennavenjar.

Thorshofn's location at the mouth of the Maw means it historically receives a great deal of foreign attention, both positive and negative, at least in comparison to the rest of the Western Coastline. Early raiders from what would eventually become Eisen and Avalon sometimes made their way to Thorshofn, but almost inevitably, the distance was more than the invaders had prepared for.

Weakened from his journey, a would-be intruder often fell to the defending townsfolk, either killed outright or taken as a servant or slave to those he would have conquered. Either way, he forfeits his goods and gear, and over time, the different aesthetic styles and tastes became integrated into Thorshofn's community fully.

In time, foreigners began seeking out the village, not to invade, but to trade, and the local folk flocked to Thorshofn as the largest supplier of foreign goods on the Western Coastline. These trade routes eventually came to form a significant portion of the economy of Thorshofn. Locals export vast quantities of salt cod and other durable sea-goods, and a trader from the

west coast villages coming from as far away as Soroya finds a market for her furs, gold and other precious metals, or whatever goods that do better in a foreign rather than local market. Foreign merchants, predominantly from Avalon and Eisen, bring in a wide variety of luxury goods to Thorshofn: silks and brocades, blown glass, printed books, wine, tobacco and other specialty products rarely seen in Vestenmennavenjar outside of Vendel proper.

This access to foreign goods (along with the integration over time of many aspects of foreign culture) has colored Thorshofn in many interesting ways. The jarl and carl work very closely, carefully balancing foreign trade while recognizing that their town's increasing wealth makes them a vulnerable, ripe plum dangling out to the rest of Théah.

While the core of the town's fashion remains traditional, those from Thorshofn more likely owns a scarf of fine wool from the Highland Marches or dagger from Castille than those who live elsewhere in Vesten. Locals are also more likely to have blended families of mixed Vesten and foreign descent than in other parts of the nation, and thus more likely to be multilingual (or at least know a smattering of another language) as well.

While travelers are welcome to the city, the people of Thosshofn value trade more than anything else. If you come empty handed, expect to be greeted by a great deal of suspicion. Of course, the city itself boasts a small gathering of nearly every other nation in Théah, who may act as allies and a safe haven.

Many a merchant keeps a house in the city to rest and enjoy the international flavor for a few days before heading back out to sea. The residents of Thorshofn tend to be more transient as well, coming and going with the merchant ships in quest of a new deal.





Galdr

The ancient art of Galdr is not precisely lost, but it is definitely hard to find.

The mythological Vesten Hero, Ekerila, is the individual responsible for discovering—or rediscovering—the ancient *futhark*, the language of the gods. But Ekerila made a terrible mistake. She trusted the wrong people with this gift, and power fell into the hands of those who misused it. She struggled the rest of her life to try to right this error, to ensure that only those proven worthy could be trusted to wield the power of the Galdr.

She failed, because her task was impossible. Once such power had slipped through her fingers and into the reach of others, she could never hope to reclaim it.

Although the power of the Galdr is rare in modern Vesten, it has begun to see something of a resurgence in recent history. A traditional-minded Vesten sees it as one of the Old Ways, a reminder of the times when the gods spoke through the fury of the wind and lightning and how wise and brave warriors would be trusted with this power. A more contemporary Vesten sees this as a useful tool in his quest to dominate the rest of Théah.

Those who know the futhark and how to use its magic are called *vala*. Some in modern Vestenmennavenjar think that anyone claiming to be vala is nothing more than a charlatan, an opportunist using a powerful word to cow those around him. In a way, they are right—but vala itself is not the word of power they invoke, and when the power

of Galdr reveals itself, none but the most obstinate deny its potency.

The people who call themselves The Seekers of the Word of Ekerila (see the **Secret Societies** section) do what they can to police those who claim to be vala, but they have their work cut out for them. A vala generally has no interest in subjecting himself to the rule of the Seekers, whose political influence is dubious at best. Besides, one has only to look at Vestenmennavenjar's greatest political enemy to see what happens under a ruled and regulated Sorcery, and no vala envies a Vodacce *Strega's* status.

How It Works

Each time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, you learn two runes of the futhark and can call upon their power to aid your allies or hinder your enemies. These runes have two words and thereby two effects—*stort merke* (great mark) and *litet merke* (small mark). Writing either merke of a rune requires no magic itself. Any child can manage to scribble out a shape. A vala weaves runes together and works her will into the script, infusing the rune with magic.

It is not the drawing of a rune that creates magic, however—it is *breaking it*. A vala often carries small clay tablets with common runic inscriptions and snaps them or throws them to the ground in order to activate their magic. A vala also learns to draw runes quickly into dirt using nothing more than a stick or finger or to quickly scratch out a rune's shape onto



THE THIRTEENTH RUNE

Some vala speak of a thirteenth rune, one hidden deep away by Ekerila before she ever shared the futhark with her brethren. They say this rune has power over life and death, a rune so powerful that even to speak it invokes its power. While most vala know the story of Ekerila and her futhark, many interpret it differently. Some believe this powerful rune is simply the magic of the runes themselves, a warning against using runes too often or for frivolous purposes and the severe drawbacks to those who abuse them. Others believe Ekerila had tapped into the very magic of myth and could commune with the gods. Still others believed that this final rune has the power to kill or give life, or both by taking the life of one to give to another.

Few vala actively seek knowledge of the thirteenth rune. Regardless of what they think the rune may represent, they collectively agree that Ekerila hid the rune for a good reason. Even the most foolhardy vala knows not to play with Galdr lightly. Only the eldest and wisest Ypperste Prest should have access to that kind of power, and few of today's vala claim that kind of knowledge. Those who have practiced Galdr for years know especially the dangers of utilizing runes out of spite or for frivolous reasons.

stone with chalk. In such a case, simply destroying the runic script (by kicking the dirt over the rune or wiping a hand over a chalk drawing) releases the magic of Galdr.

The litet merke always modifies the stort merke, and a vala weaves the two runes together in the script, almost inseparably tangled. But there is a third element to the magic of Galdr, a third rune as well—the vala's name, written by her own hand. Because of this, the drawings or tablets written by another contain no magic. By writing her name into the script, alongside ancient words of power, the vala binds the magic to her own will and shapes it to change the world around her.

Each time a vala activates her Galdr, she spends a Hero Point and chooses the stort merke for any rune she knows and gains its effect. Then, she chooses the litet merke for any rune she knows and gains its effect. If she wishes, she can choose the same rune

twice. Activating Galdr during an Action or Dramatic Sequence costs a Raise in addition to the Hero Point.

Many litet merke add another effect onto the target of your stort merke. If the stort merke you activate does not have a specific target (if the stort merke doesn't say "choose one character," for example), then your litet merke can target any character in the same Scene as you. If your stort merke does specify that you choose a character to affect in any way, your litet merke always affects that same character.

The Galdr "Curse"

Galdr is a magic of balance. The futhark represents both an ideal and its opposite. Using a rune for prosperity eventually leads to a loss, using a rune for love eventually leads to heartbreak. Even if the loss is not the same, the rune always ends in balance. As such, using Galdr against your enemies may eventually lead to good fortune for them. Those uninitiated in the magic of Vestenmennavenjar fears a vala and his power, afraid of having a rune used against them. While the initial effects may be painful, it almost always ends in a boon for the target. Few know that any good fortune that may come their way is the fault of the Galdr, and few vala admit to such.

Of course, the toll on the vala for using his magic is lesser known and more disastrous. If a vala uses his Galdr without the specific will to do so—meaning he uses it in the heat of passion, or for a petty purpose—the rune's balancing effect ends up coming back on him. The mystical power that binds the world together will not let him disrupt the balance, and is often more punishing than normal.

A vala trains for years before he begins creating runes for the purpose of using Galdr. When he creates his runes, he does so with a purpose of will, instilling his own life force into the runes. When he uses the runes he has created, he breaks that will, turning it into a force that changes the world. The vala knows inherently if the Galdr has been used correctly or not and can feel the magic working through and from him.

If your character uses Galdr in an act of spite, passion or for thoughtless reasons, the GM may spend a Danger Point to inflict the stort merke's drawback onto the Hero. She does not gain the positive benefits of the merke, only the negative.



Futhark

The runes of the futhark number twelve in total. Each rune has two marks, or words associated with them, totally twenty four words all together. Each rune represents a duality, often something and its opposite, but not always.

These are the words that Ekerila discovered and translated, and legend says that from these things the gods made all of existence, human and beast, mountain and sea alike.

They are, quite literally, the words that created the world. These runes are found throughout Vestenmennavenjar etched into stones and woven into fabrics, telling the stories of those who came before. Each one has multiple meanings, but the vala know their most primordial and base meaning.

Beast

The Beast rune governs hunting prowess, primal instincts and creatures, both natural and unnatural. The rune names great Heroes with a connection to the wilds. Common people use it to protect against ambush.

Stort Merke

Choose one character in the same Scene as you (including yourself). That character is immune to the Qualities of any Monsters that specifically targets her until the end of the Round, but any Wounds she takes from a Monster or wild animal are increased by 1.

Litet Merke

The target of the Rune can speak to and understand Monsters and animals for a Scene. This does not guarantee that such creatures have anything useful or insightful to say—it is still an animal or Monster, after all, and may be uninterested in a dialogue.

Blood

The Blood rune is related to family, kinship and the power of community. The rune names Heroes that follow great lineages, or those whose families do great deeds. Common people use it to ensure communal health and safety of their loved ones.

Stort Merke

Spend any number of your Hero Points. You may give those Hero Points to any other character in the same Scene.

Litet Merke

The character you target can immediately spend a Hero Point to gain 2 Raises.

Courage

The rune of Courage is most often associated with legitimacy of kingship, nobility and rule. The rune names Heroes who sat once as the high ruler of the land and those with noble hearts. Common people use it to ensure truth and honesty in business dealings.

Stort Merke

Spend any number of your Hero Points. The GM loses the same number of Danger Points.

Litet Merke

Choose another character in the Scene with you. That character can immediately activate an Opportunity without spending a Raise.

Storm

The Storm rune speaks of unpredictability and sudden change. The rune names Heroes who fell to Villainy or Villains who redeemed themselves. Many people use the rune as a request for rain in dry seasons.

Stort Merke

All characters in the current Scene gain 1 Raise. Choose a character—that character instead gains 2 Raises.

Litet Merke

The character you target can immediately change his Approach.



Iron

The Iron rune is one of trial and tests of will, as well as perseverance. The rune names Heroes who overcame great setbacks. Many use it to ward off disease and misfortune.

Stort Merke

Choose one character in the Scene with you (but not yourself) and apply Pressure to that character. If that character chooses to overcome the Pressure (by paying 2 Raises for an Action) he gains 1 Hero Point. If that character does not overcome the Pressure (by choosing to take an Action in line with the Pressure you apply), he heals a number of Wounds equal to his highest Trait.

Litet Merke

The character you target can choose to gain 1 Raise and take Wounds equal to his highest Trait.

Light

The Light rune has implications in revelation, truth and sight. The rune names Heroes who lived true and just lives. Common people use it to attract wealth and prosperity.

Stort Merke

Choose one character in the Scene with you. Until the end of the Scene, that character cannot tell a lie. Until the end of the Scene, that character always knows when anyone else tells a lie.

Litet Merke

The character you target can immediately take an Action without spending a Raise, but that Action must use the Notice or Empathy Skill (though she does not have to pay Improvisation).

Spirit

Spirit is a rune that governs freedom, emotion and empathy. The rune names Heroes who gave of themselves to help others. Its most common use is as a love charm.

Stort Merke

Choose one character in the Scene with you currently under Pressure. The Pressure is immediately removed, but until the end of the Round that character must pay 2 Raises to overcome any further Pressure instead of 1.

Litet Merke

Choose a second character in the Scene with you. That character is affected by the stort merke of your Galdr, exactly the same as the first. If your stort merke affects multiple characters, this litet merke has no effect.

Star

The rune of the Star governs mysteries and hidden danger, as well as deception. The rune names Heroes whose origins and natures were mostly unknown. Most people use the rune to ward off danger.

Stort Merke

Choose one character in the Scene with you (but not yourself). That character gains the Shapeshifting Quality, as if he were a Monster. Each time the character takes an Action while disguised in this way, he takes 1 Wound. If he takes a Dramatic Wound, his disguise breaks and he loses this Quality.

Litet Merke

The character you target can immediately take an Action without spending a Raise, but that Action must use the Hide or Theft Skill (though he does not have to pay Improvisation).



Stone

The Stone rune is one of endurance and perseverance and sometimes used to characterize stubbornness. The rune names Heroes who fought against all odds, never backing down. Common people use it as a charm to ensure healthy crops and herds.

Stort Merke

Choose one character in the Scene with you. The next time this Round that character is dealt Wounds, the Wounds she takes are reduced by half (rounded up). The next time this Round that character deals Wounds, the Wounds she deals are reduced by half (rounded up). The effects of this merke end at the end of the Round, regardless if the character dealt or received Wounds.

Litet Merke

The targeted character can spend a Hero Point to ignore any penalty resulting from Consequences (such as Wounds, dice penalties, etc) until the end of the Round.

Thunder

Thunder is the rune of boldness, fury and pride in the face of adversity. The rune names Heroes with goodness in their hearts and who brought peace to the land. It is commonly used to designate someone who is too prideful, as a plea to show humility.

Stort Merke

Choose one character in the Scene with you. The next time this Round that character deals Wounds, she deals additional Wounds equal to your highest Trait. The next time this Round that character is dealt Wounds, she is dealt additional Wounds equal to her highest Trait. The effects of this merke end at the end of the Round, regardless if the character dealt or received Wounds.

Litet Merke

The character you target is immune to Fear until the end of the Round.

Time

The rune of Time governs prophecy and destiny and most importantly cycles. The rune names Heroes who have a destiny, regardless of whether they follow it or not. The common use is to ward against idleness.

Stort Merke

Choose one character in the Scene with you (but not yourself). That character immediately loses all of his Raises. Next Round, he gains a number of bonus Raises equal to double the amount of Raises he lost.

Litet Merke

The targeted character must take an Action immediately, spending Raises as normal to do so. If this litet merke is combined with the Time stort merke, the character takes an Action before losing her Raises.

Winter

Winter is a rune of hardship, darkness and inevitability. The rune names Heroes who sacrificed in the name of good, only to lose anyway. Most people use the rune to ward against hardship and misfortune.

Stort Merke

Choose one Opportunity in the current Scene with you. That Opportunity is destroyed, meaning no one can activate it.

Litet Merke

The next time this Round the target takes Wounds, she takes 1 additional Wound.



MERCENARIES AND VESTEN DUELING HOUSES

A Vesten Duelist generally looks down on mercenaries. Even when being hired to use her weapons on behalf of another, the Duelist sees herself as above common sell-swords. Anyone can pick up a weapon and get paid to swing it; a Duelist views combat as more of an art. This warrior dedicates her life to understanding the intricacies of combat and referring to her as a mercenary demeans her and her skill. A blacksmith who dedicates his life to his profession is not a common crafter. In this way, even a Duelist who sells her services is not a common mercenary.

It is worth noting, however, that this viewpoint is not common outside of Vesten. Other nations of Théah view Vesten Duelists as mercenaries. Some are even idiotic enough to refer to a Duelist as such, and learn the hard way that honor is just as important to the Vesten Duelist as any other, maybe even more so, since her word and her deeds are what pay her bills.

Dueling in Vestenmennavenjar

To those unfamiliar with the political culture of Vestenmennavenjar, two powerful entities in the nation, the carls and jarls, work together to govern. None doubt that the jarls certainly rule the land while the carls represent the nation's vast wealth. However, a Duelist of Vesten finds himself in an interesting position. He does not need the protection of the jarls, and his income sufficiently allows him to stand apart from the carls. This places the Dueling Houses in a unique, third echelon of power in Vesten. While the carls and jarls often employ a Duelist, none but the most foolish consider themselves to hold power over him. The Houses work *with* the carls and jarls, never *for* them.

While it would be improper to publicly announce that information, no jarl would ever dispense justice against a criminal Duelist—the Dueling Houses police their own. No carl would break a deal with the Duelists, even if doing so would earn her more wealth—the repercussions of such an action may not be immediate, but would be definite.

The Dueling Houses do not have ruling power as it were, in the cities of Vestenmennavenjar, but they do have the power of their word and honor. City officials often employ Duelists to oversee dispute settlements, to keep the peace and sometimes simply as showy honor guards. Jarls and carls do not pay for Duelists in such a fashion, though one is expected to donate handsomely to his local House if he frequently requests their aid.

The Dueling Houses of Vestenmennavenjar are well known for hiring out their Duelists. Anyone in Théah can submit a contract (along with a generous hiring fee) to the Houses. These contracts can be long term—over the course of years—or for a single event. However, the House determines which Duelist, if any, to send. Requests for a specific Duelist are ignored. If the House declines the contract, the petitioner receives a sealed letter of rejection along with half of the hiring fee.

Rather than considering themselves mercenaries, the Houses simply offer a ready supply of well-trained Duelists to meet the demand of the nations of Théah. However, the Houses never accept a contract that

they feel beneath them and, once on assignment, each Duelist receives the power to interpret the contract as he sees fit.

The Dueling Houses of Vestenmennavenjar are unique amongst the other nations of Théah in that they do not require their students to pay a tuition of any kind. While the high standards mirror the most elite and exclusive Academies anywhere else in Théah, the Houses welcome anyone from the lowliest peasant to the richest noble to enroll without financial cost. Unlike a Duelist from other nations, however, a person trained in Vestenmennavenjar is contractually obligated to send a portion of his income back to Vestenmennavenjar so long he uses the skills gained in the academies. This accounts for a large amount of income sent back to the nation each year and is one of the reasons that Vesten Duelists can afford the ability to stay outside of the nation's normal power structure. Since the implementation of the Vendel League, these Duelists also insist on payment in Guilders. This is just one more way that the Vendel Guilder dominates the currency in Théah.



Hallbjorn

Hallbjorn Ulfson, a legendary Vesten raider who retired from the seas to join a Vesten Dueling House, created this style. These warriors master the shield and use it not only to defend against enemy attacks, but as a weapon. A Duelist who has mastered the style creates openings that other Duelists take advantage of while simultaneously slamming her opponents with her shield.

Unlike the shields used by soldiers in other Théan nations, the Vesten round shield is made of wood, and although reinforced with metal, these shields are not as durable as many others. This is by design, as having a lighter shield allows for Hallbjorn users to more easily maneuver the shield for strikes. However, these shields rarely last long when committed to combat. Because of this, many Hallbjorn Duelists master shield crafting.

A Duelist of this style never uses a shield crafted by someone else and believes that through the crafting of her shield she imparts some of her own ferocity into her creation. A Hallbjorn Duelist also decorates her shields with images or runic designs based on her life. If one gathered up every shield used by a single Duelist and laid them out in chronological order, her life story would be easy to see.

Style Bonus: Hallbjorn Slam

When you wield a heavy weapon (typically an axe, but sometimes a longsword or hammer) in one hand and a shield in the other, you gain access to a special Maneuver called Hallbjorn Slam.

When you perform Hallbjorn Slam, you deal Wounds equal to your Ranks in Brawn. The next time your target is dealt Wounds this Round, she suffers additional Wounds equal to your Ranks in Brawn. You may perform Hallbjorn Slam only once per Round.



Myths of Vestenmennavenjar

The people of Vestenmennavenjar hold to old beliefs and religions, making myths more than just stories, but the telling of a life or a lesson. The spoken word is important to the Vesten people, and they tell their myths to each other, passing down stories from mother to son, father to daughter and so on. Sometimes the stories gain embellishment in the telling, but often the meaning and lesson remain the same. These lessons, not mere hyperbole meant to keep children obedient, serve as real warnings about and praises of the people and creatures whom have lived in this land for ages. Vesten do not just tell their myths, they believe them, and their myths are as real as the rocks and trees that also inhabit Vestenmennavenjar.

Sinterklaas

Sinterklaas may manifest anywhere, but appears most often in quiet, open spaces. Most people claim to spot him during the winter months, though some have claimed he visited them on cool summer nights. Sinterklaas rarely pays individual visits, unless it's on his special day of the year.

Legend

Each year, on the same day, a Vesten child receives in her stocking a toy (and it is always a toy) carved out of pinewood. This is Sinterklaas' doing; Vesten say a Vaticine missionary came on a boat from Castille with a pocket full of winter oranges to spread the Vaticine faith in the early days of the Church. His commitment to dogma, however, was less tenacious than his commitment to kindness, and though the faith never spread, he stayed in Vestenmennavenjar and made it his special mission to bring joy to Vestenmennavenjar's children. Vesten call this Sinterklaas Day or sometimes just Klaas Day. Of course, Sinterklaas, finicky as any other Jotun, only gives his gifts to good children, punishing naughty children by hitting them with a switch. Sometimes other Jotun accompany him, to tell him who has been bad, taking enjoyment out of seeing him punish others.

Sinterklaas defines children as those who have not yet married—which means bachelors and

JOTUN (VÆTTIR)

In Vestenmennavenjar, it can seem every brook and boulder is named after someone long-gone. Piece by piece, the land has been remade into a memory palace constructed by a populace intent on preserving ghosts. And these are not turns of phrase, no mere insistent sentiment; in Vestenmennavenjar, a man who protected his village from a rabid bear may serve as that same town's ghostly guardian centuries later, should his name still be remembered. Foreigners call these phantoms "living legends," or "living myths." Vesten more often call them Jotun, or simply giants, though that term is somewhat confused. In remote parts of the nation, they refer to them as Vættir, to mean any kind of spirit.

Some Jotun manifest unpredictably, others when fulfilling certain conditions. Some Jotun manifest insubstantially. The best-remembered manifest as flesh-and-blood figures, indistinguishable from the living except by their actions.

The great majority of Jotun are only locally famous, remembered and revered primarily within one town, one city or one region. However, Vesten everywhere remember a few Jotun, embedded into national legend as detailed in this section.

spinsters, as well as pre-adolescents, receive his largesse. Sinterklaas is one of the few Jotun that people look forward to seeing each year, despite the threat of being hit with a switch.

Manifestation

Sinterklaas appears as an old man with a heavy white beard dressed in the red robes of a Vaticine Cardinal; he speaks with a faint Castillian accent and his enormous, calloused hands often smell of fresh pine. He carries a great red book, which garners some controversy; some say it is the Vaticine Bible, while others say it is an ever-growing list of Vesten children. His pockets bulge with winter oranges, and if you are cordial to him when he has manifested—or if, when manifested, he sees you performing an act of kindness—he slips you one. If you are rude or act poorly, he tries to hit you with his switch.



Angrboda

Angrboda can always be found in the caves under Mount Ragnhild, the northernmost mountain in Vesten. Going to Mount Ragnhild is a notoriously dangerous journey, and storytellers have crafted multiple epics about adventurers who brave Northern perils to seek Angrboda's wisdom.

Legend

Stories say when the first settlers came to Vestenmennavenjar, they wandered among the Allfather Ice Floes because they did not know better. A blizzard blotted out the sky and the settlers, desperate for shelter, fled into a deep cave that wound its way under Mount Ragnhild. In the bowels of the cave, they found a river frozen solid, and frozen in the river, a woman of indeterminate age. They thawed the woman, who received her rescuers lukewarmly; she claimed she had been part of an earlier civilization, and had undergone a process of self-mummification. However, she was enchanted by the woven cloth the new settlers wore (her people, she claimed, wore only hides), and when the settlers gifted her all the cloth they wore, she sang a song of their destinies—including their journey South to found a great city.

Manifestation

Angrboda appears as a woman of indeterminate age with ice coating her legs and arms. She is crotchety and cryptic and prefers solitude but refuses to turn away any who make the journey to her home. Her eyes are milky, but stories say she sees everything that ever was, is or could be. Those who journey to her often do so to discover how she can perform the seeming-impossible or prevent the seeming-inevitable. She sings her prophecies in songs; it is a matter of some metaphysical debate whether she simply sees the future or solidifies what will be by singing. Those who threaten or disrespect her, she curses by singing dire futures. She scorns all gifts but woven cloth and reacts well to reverence and respect, but not to flattery.

Angrboda does not generally attack those who come to her, but she has a temper and those who do not bring her a gift of cloth should beware. She is a Strength 6 Monster with the Monstrous and Powerful Qualities.

The White Witch

The White Witch may appear anywhere with snow or ice on the ground, though she rarely manifests where she can be seen by more than one person at a time.

Legend

The humans in Vestenmennavenjar tell stories of the White Witch as an enigmatic enchanter who was sad and lonely. If she found someone alone in the forest, she would trick him into following her to her ice palace, from which there is no escape. She would turn any who refused her offers or rebuffed her tricks into a puff of snow. Vesten know to always travel in pairs in the snow, for more than just safety from the elements.

Trolls know the White Witch as someone else. She is their cruel and capricious creator, who carved them from stone and then cursed them when they refused to obey her. Now, when she sees one, she freezes it in place and shatters it, out of spite.

Both races wish to forget the White Witch, but she remains a powerful Jotun; their fear keeps her alive.

Manifestation

The White Witch appears as a tall, beautiful woman with long, white hair, wrapped in beautiful white furs and riding an ornate sledge pulled by two white reindeer. She manifests near a lone human, offering him gifts and candy if he comes with her and rides in her sledge; should he accept, he is never seen again. Should he refuse and attempt to flee, she transforms him into puffs of snow with a wave of her hand. The only way to escape the White Witch relatively unscathed is to refuse her entreaties with all possible politeness and then offer her a gift in your stead; thus it is considered the height of foolishness in Vesten territory to venture into the snow without a pocket full of candies or chestnuts, just in case.

The White Witch is a Strength 8 Monster with the Powerful, Regenerating and Shapeshifting Monstrous Qualities.



Trolls

There are two types of Trolls, the Vesten will tell you: Rock Trolls and Green Trolls, and Rock Trolls are stupid.

Rock Trolls are stupid, smelly and savage; they smell of brimstone and will rip you from limb to limb if you accidentally wander into their ill-defined strips of what they call “territory.” If a Rock Troll grabs you while trespassing, only abject flattery, groveling or trickery will save you from a violent death and possibly not even then. To go hand to hand with a Rock Troll is suicide; they are “strong enough to hold a boulder on both shoulders,” as the Vesten saying goes. Moreover, their solid-stone skin renders them impervious to most forms of violence and all but the harshest elements; the latter is fortunate, in a way, as it means most Rock Trolls establish territories in inhospitable peaks where they are not likely to maul more than the occasional passing traveler.

There are two types of Trolls, the Vesten will tell you: Rock Trolls and Green Trolls, and Green Trolls are smart.

Legend has it that the White Witch carved and enchanted the first Green Troll; for its defiance of her orders, she cursed it to ever-wander. Ill-fortune would torture all who welcomed it and any of its descendants should it ever try to find a home. The White Witch in her sledge still haunts Vestenmennavenjar as a Jotun and most Troll rituals exist to lessen the effect of her curse (such that a single or several Trolls can stay in a village for days or even weeks at a time). A few rituals also exist to suppress the White Witch’s ability to manifest near Green Trolls, for stories say if a Green Troll ever sees the White Witch, it will be compelled to obey her commands.

Green Trolls travel solitary or in bands, sometimes with a bevy of Rock Trolls trailing behind; Rock Trolls obey Green Trolls unquestioningly, though good luck getting a Green Troll to tell you how they manage that. Green Trolls are sharp-faced and secretive; no human can learn their language, which they speak in voices that sound like stones grinding against one another. They travel from town to town with sacks on their backs or in caravans decorated with strange stone charms, working as artisans or peddlers: their stoneworking in particular is renowned. Unlike Rock Trolls, they never settle down; their

possessiveness manifests differently. They drive hard bargains, count their coin, never lose money at dice or cards, and though it takes them a day or a decade, they track down anyone who steals from them and extract twice the price of whatever was pilfered. If you threaten them, they try to kill you.

People tell you meeting a Green Troll is preferable to meeting a Rock Troll and it may be so, but meeting a Green Troll (or a band of them) is hardly a comfort. A lot of them look nearly identical—green skin, high cheekbones and grotesquely wide mouths—and to make matters worse, they all wear heavy cloaks with hoods even on the hottest days. They have a bevy of rituals they do—only on the nights of the waning moon—that they do not let humans come near: you only find out about them afterward when you see boulders marked up with black wax pencil, the stone stained with blood and never any bones—nobody knows what they sacrifice on those rocks, and most folks do not want to question.

What’s True

All trolls are carved from stone.

Rock Trolls are carved from granite; Green Trolls are carved from marble (and no coincidence that most marble mined in Vestenmennavenjar is green). Rock Trolls look like from the stone they are carved from; Green Trolls look like flesh (albeit green flesh) except when exposed to sunlight directly—then they turn to stone, petrified until the sun sets for the day (in darkness, they return to flesh).

Trolls do not die naturally, but injury or trauma can kill them; fleshy Green Trolls take wounds as humans do, and Rock and petrified Green Trolls may be crushed as stone. Additionally, Trolls can starve: to stay animate they must consume a steady diet of gravel, and those prevented from doing so slowly become immobile.

Green Trolls are lapidary magicians; the stone charms they string up, wear and occasionally sell are remarkably efficacious. More unusual still, Green Trolls reproduce by carving more Green Trolls from blocks of Vesten marble. All Green Trolls, when created, thus look identical. It is possible to change a Green Troll’s appearance by using sunlight to change the Troll into marble and then recarving its face. Green Trolls scar when made of flesh, and



scarification is not an uncommon practice for distinguishing oneself—assuming a Green Troll wishes to distinguish itself.

Their method of reproduction means Green Trolls have no gender; they answer to any pronoun, though if asked, most prefer “it” when spoken of in singular. They also do not pair-bond, typically, preferring to travel solitary or in small groups.

Green Trolls tend towards the cautious and taciturn; their reputation for secrecy is well-earned, given their weakness to sunlight and their cursed connection to the White Witch. Green Trolls take some pride in their near-universal policy of taking offense to nothing except violent threats directed their way—those they react to with extreme prejudice. Almost all Green Trolls wield spears made from volcanic glass; some use them as staves and some hide them in their sleeves. It is a rare Troll who doesn't deploy these skillfully.

Every Rock Troll began by being carved from granite by a Green Troll because the Green Troll wanted or needed a servant. New-carved Rock Trolls are unconscious automatons: they have no capacity for independent action and obey the Green Trolls who carved them without question. It takes about a century for Rock Trolls to gain sentience; once they do, they almost always leave their Green Troll masters. Their Green Troll masters almost always let them.

Sapient Rock Trolls tend to be taciturn, stubborn, solitary and territorial—humans stereotype them as stupid as well, but that isn't quite right. Rather, Rock Trolls learn and process less quickly than humans (and Green Trolls) but what they do process and learn, they never forget (elder Rock Trolls are quite wise).

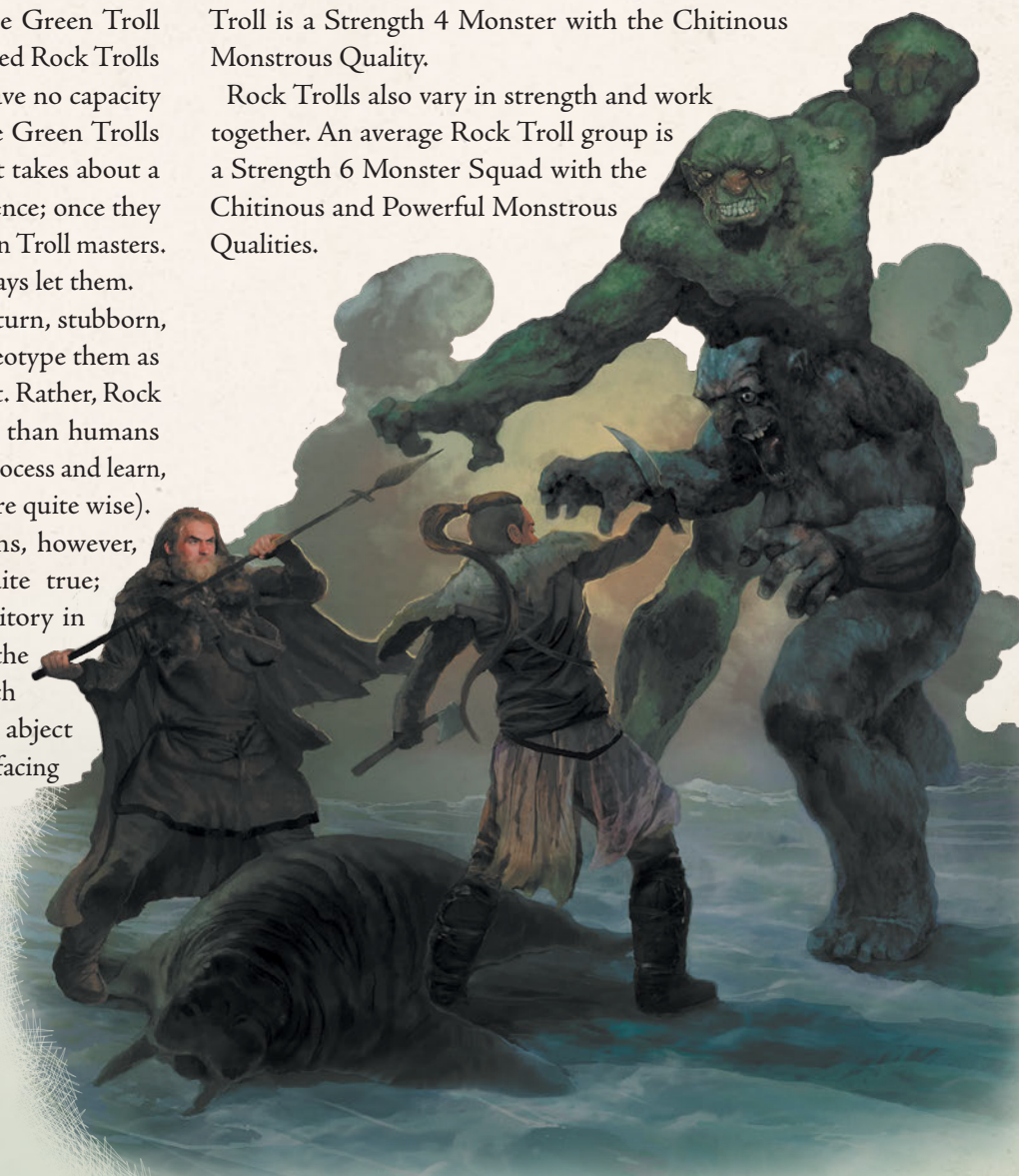
To the misfortune of many humans, however, the territorial stereotype holds quite true; sapient Rock Trolls often claim territory in inhospitable mountains. Woe betide the unlucky traveler who stumbles into such territory unknowing! Only the most abject groveling stops such adventurers from facing rough justice, and tensions typically rise when humans begin blasting roads through the peaks.

The territoriality of Rock Trolls is not wholly without its use to humans, however; merchants and warlords frequently hire solitary Rock Trolls to guard and maintain out-of-the-way bridges and highways (in such placements, the Rock Trolls' imperviousness to the elements becomes a bonus). The nuisance begins, however, when these Rock Trolls' nominal employers die, for immortal Rock Trolls continue to guard such infrastructures indefinitely.

Like Green Trolls, Rock Trolls have no gender and don't pair-bond, preferring to live solitary or in groups (such groups claim large territories commensurate with group size). The “Wandering Curse” of the Green Trolls does not affect the Rock Trolls, and Rock Trolls evince no special fear of the White Witch. Needing nothing for survival but crushed gravel, they rarely accumulate possessions of their own: the closest the majority comes to religion is music, which many feel compelled to create without knowing why.

Green Trolls vary in strength, but an average Green Troll is a Strength 4 Monster with the Chitinous Monstrous Quality.

Rock Trolls also vary in strength and work together. An average Rock Troll group is a Strength 6 Monster Squad with the Chitinous and Powerful Monstrous Qualities.



The Huntsman

The Huntsman manifests in low-visibility conditions between noon and midnight: he and his hounds and horses are only heard, never seen. He always rides west.

Legend

No one knows the Huntsman's story but everyone knows how he appears—racing across the land with a pack of hounds in tow, his hunting horn blaring calls. Thus he remains, paradoxically, unforgotten, his memory only burnished by the mystery of his origins. The only “fact” that popular lore can agree about him is that he hunts the sun. The reason for his hunt is as varied as the descriptions they give of the Huntsman himself. He hunts for a lost love, family, life, money, he hunts those who would do harm to others, those who are in trouble or those who do not pay proper respect to the Jotun. Some say he is a wolf, others a man, and still others say she is a woman. No one really knows, but every town in Vestenmennavenjar has its own version of the Huntsman's story.

Manifestation

Something always cloaks the Huntsman, his horses and his hounds: fog, snow or darkest night. The Hunt is scent and sound and chill and unanticipated feeling, a lone hound's howl answered by a chorus, the thundering of hoofbeats and a smothering, choking sense of dread, the near-unbearable desire to run as the Hunt comes ever-closer. If you can hear the Hunt, the Vesten say, you must not run; should you run, you won't be seen again, but your screams will echo across the sky. If you can hear the Hunt, you must stand still, stay silent until the Hunt sweeps past you, ruffling your hair with a chill wind as they ride by.

The Huntsman is a Villainous Monster with Strength 5 and Influence 6 and the Monstrous Qualities Fearful, Shadowy and Swift. He commands several Strength 4 Monster Squads with the Relentless and Shadowy Monstrous Quality.

Giants

Giants, or Jotun—not to be confused with the living myths that manifest all over Vestenmennavenjar which are Jotun—are humanlike creatures that tower ten to twenty feet over the tallest Vesten, and eat people as a pastime. These ancient children of the Allfather live in the snowy peaks of Vestenmennavenjar and live on the flesh and bone of humans. A giant must remain in icy cold temperatures, else he will melt, as his body is created from ice. He can go years without eating, but doing so makes him violent and unpredictable. A person can trick a giant into eating other meat, and gain an audience with one to learn ancient rites, but such a proposition is risky. A traveler passing through the mountains in winter carries extra meat with her, and leaves it outside her camp at night to feed the giants. Unlucky travelers disappear without a trace, the giant eating them and all their gear.

What's True

The name confusion comes from the various stories revolving around the mythical man-eaters. The term Jotun refers to anything larger than life, and so the myth spirits of long dead ancestors fit that bill. In the mountains, Vesten call these ancestor spirits Vættir, and the giants Jotun. As with most Vesten myths, that of giants is a truth born of story. The ancient origins of Jotun as the children of the Allfather is all story and rumor. These giants are a type of Vættir, living legends born of the magic of Vestenmennavenjar and the superstition and fear of its natives.

Traveling in the winter months is dangerous, even for the most experience traveler, and sometimes people simply disappear on the peaks. When the thaw came, a villager would find the half eaten remains of an animal, assume she had found a person, and blame it on the giants. Over time, the legend of the giants grew, people invented stories about their creation, and the myth of Jotun took form. The tallest peak of the mountains near the Allfather Ice Floes is named Jotun Fjell, and here the Jotun roam. These creatures are not all powerful as the stories say, but they are violent creatures born of fear, and thereby only respond in kind. Stories of their magic are exaggerated, the magic of Vestenmennavenjar being their only aid.

Giants are Strength 7 Monsters with the Elemental (Ice) and Powerful Monstrous Qualities.



Hulda

Hulda look like beautiful women with tiny tails who cast no shadows, concealing beneath their clothing hollow backs and back-turned feet. During full and waxing moons, they hold bacchanalia by rivers and lakes; impossibly beautiful, they beckon travelers to join them in their festivities. Dance with them and drink their wine (cool and intoxicating) and wake the next morning holding your head, mouth bitter with the taste of stomach acid and river-water—but that is hardly the worst that happens to those who join the dance. Kiss a beautiful Hulda and if she loves you truly, she loses her tail and becomes your true companion. But if she merely puts her mouth on yours for a lark, river-water pours from her mouth into yours and she holds your head till you choke and drown. Travelers can see the faces and forms of those drowned by Hulda on moonlit nights, carved on rock-faces by falling water. Many Vesten refuse to take drink while traveling, for fear of attracting the Hulda and risk death by drowning.

What's True

Most of the common folklore about Hulda is totally on-point. They throw bacchanalia near fresh-water sources, conjure wine from water and drown with a kiss—unless they love who they embrace. If they do, they lose their magical powers, lose their tail, cast a shadow and become almost human (the back-turned feet and hollow back stay, unfortunately for some Hulda, and those who marry into human homes often face discrimination). Those drowned by Hulda don't become natural stone carvings, however; they become new Hulda, after a waiting period of about a thousand years.

A Hulda who falls in love cannot interbreed with a human, and often ends up in a bad situation when her lover finds out. Some live out their days in bliss, while another may return to the water, only to find she is no longer welcome. Moreover, Hulda are not all women—while none grow beards and all display hyper-feminized facial features, they can in fact be of either sex.

Hulda are Strength 5 Monsters with the Aquatic and Nocturnal Monstrous Qualities.

Devil's Bridges

In Vestenmennavenjar, natural bridges are common—so common, in fact, that some say an early Vesten settler made a pact with an old god, goddess or ancient Jotun (identity usually unspecified) to exchange her hand in marriage for the creation of the bridges. The girl, however, went back on her word once the creature built the bridges, prompting the builder to curse the bridges with ill-luck for all mortals who try to cross them. While the bridges appear suspiciously convenient, an unusual number of accidents and strange disappearances do occur when people try to cross them...

What's True

There was never a pact, and nothing supernatural curses the bridges. Sometimes nerves and self-fulfilling prophecies account for accidents on the natural bridges, as do the bridges' own natural tendencies—many shake, freeze and thaw with the seasons or grow slowly narrower and more unstable until one day someone slips and falls or a caravan collapses the bridge.

More often than not, the bridges' accidents result from outlaw gangs who use the people's superstition against them. Detailed maps of the bridges and their surrounding territories sell for small fortunes in the Vesten underworld. Wandering rural Vestenmennavenjar, "devil's cartographers" make a living creating such maps, though more often than not they receive bribes or get blackmailed into rendering certain bridges—claimed by established gangs—topographically inaccurate. A subset of these cartographers, based in Vendel, have begun calling themselves "the Illusionists Guild"; they gain the trust of bridge outlaws, learn the tricks they use to dupe superstitious bridge-crossers, then sell those same tricks to other outlaw bridge gangs, often for an exorbitant price.

Not all bridge gangs are the same, but the average group consists of a mix of Guard and Thief Brute Squads.





Appendix

New Backgrounds

Glamour Isles Background

SIDHE SQUIRE

The Sidhe have returned to Avalon, and it falls to you to make certain their return is as peaceful as it can be.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you go out of your way to bridge the gap between Sidhe and mortal, leading to understanding between the two peoples.

Advantages

An
Honest Misunderstanding
Sorcery (Glamour)

Skills

Convince
Empathy
Ride
Scholarship
Weaponry

Avalon Background

ROYAL CONSERVATIONIST

Avalon is a beautiful land, and the Queen has entrusted you to ensure it stays that way.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you seek to preserve a natural wonder and doing so gets you into trouble.

Advantages

Direction Sense
Sniper
Trigger Control

Skills

Aim
Athletics
Empathy
Notice
Scholarship

Highland Marches Background

SHANNAGARY RUNNER

A skilled sailor can safely guide his ship down the Shannagary in three days. You can do it in two, with a few scratches.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you sacrifice safety for speed and doing so gets you into trouble.

Advantages

Catch the Wind
Married to the Sea

Skills

Athletics
Brawl
Notice
Sailing
Warfare

Inismore Background

DORNÁLAÍ

“Oi, yerrabig fella. I betchaboxa bit, don’tcha?”

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you let bygones be bygones after a fight, win or lose, and form a bond with your opponent.

Advantages

Able Drinker
Boxer
Haymaker

Skills

Athletics
Brawl
Convince
Intimidate
Notice

Castille Backgrounds

BOTICARIO

Science is a beautiful thing.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you doggedly pursue an alchemical secret, and your persistence gets you into trouble.

Advantages

Sorcery (Alquimia)
Sorcery (Alquimia)
Cast Iron Stomach

Skills

Convince
Empathy
Hide
Notice
Scholarship

LA JOVEN PROMESA

You did not win the tournament at el Baile, but you were recognized as someone to be watched.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you complicate a problem to improve your skills with a sword or expand your reputation.

Advantages

Reputation
Student of Combat

Skills

Athletics
Empathy
Notice
Perform
Weaponry

SABUESO REAL

The enemies of the Royal Detectives insist you're just another of the king's hunting hounds, but they all say it from prison.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you refuse to act until you have more information, causing even more trouble for you.

Advantages

Opportunist
Streetwise

Skills

Aim
Empathy
Hide
Notice
Theft



TERCIO

You signed up to serve to make a better lot for yourself. That all fell through, but you have not given up hope.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you take up a cause in pursuit of redemption, a pardon for past crimes or a chance at earning a noble title.

Advantages

Fencer
Survivalist
Whirlwind of Steel

Skills

Aim
Athletics
Notice
Warfare
Weaponry

Montaigne Backgrounds

BALAYEUR

You are a street sweeper by trade, and you bring your own broom that spits metal and eats black powder.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you successfully maintain control of a chaotic situation while you are outnumbered.

Advantages

Deadeye
Direction Sense
Fish in a Barrel

Skills

Aim
Brawl
Empathy
Intimidate
Notice

ÉPÉE SANGLANTE

You learned the art of blade and blood, earning the title of Épée Sanglante along with your peers' admiration and fear.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use your opponent's fear of your ability to avoid a conflict, whether his assumptions about you are correct or not.

Advantages

Duelist Academy (DeVore)
Sorcery (Porté)

Skills

Athletics
Intimidate
Notice
Scholarship
Weaponry

LA SOURIS DU MARCHÉ

You know these streets like the back of your hand.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you choose to share your ill-gotten gains with someone else, because she needs it more than you do.

Advantages

Brush Pass
This Is My Town

Skills

Convince
Empathy
Hide
Notice
Scholarship

LA VOIX DES SANS-VOIX

You speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, too weak or too afraid. You are the voice of the voiceless.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when declining a solution that benefits you personally, but is detrimental for those you represent.

Advantages

Reputation
Scathing Indictment

Skills

Convince
Empathy
Intimidate
Notice
Scholarship

WALKWAY ESCAPEE

You were once trapped in the walkway for an untold span, but you escaped—not that you remember it. In fact, you do not remember your life before that either...yet.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point whenever your past comes back to haunt you, and it causes you problems.

Advantages

Dynamic Approach
Valiant Spirit

Skills

Convince
Empathy
Intimidate
Notice
Temp

Vestenmennavenjar Backgrounds

HRUNGNIR

You do not need a sword to be dangerous.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when someone underestimates you due to your lack of a weapon, and you turn his misconception to your advantage.

Advantages

Bar Fighter
Able Drinker
Anything Can Be a Weapon
If You Hold It Right

Skills

Athletics
Brawl
Hide
Intimidate
Notice

MURSKAAJA

A line of defenders is only as strong as the weakest link. You excel at finding that link and shattering it.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you hurl yourself headlong into a dangerous situation in order to throw your opponents off-guard.

Advantages

Bruiser
Direction Sense
Into the Fray

Skills

Athletics
Hide
Ride
Warfare
Weaponry



PANKKIIRI

Money talks, and you have quite the vocabulary.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use your position or money to bully another character into a course of action, and it gets you into trouble.

Advantages

Patron (Vendel League)
Sweeten the Pot

Skills

Aim
Convince
Empathy
Sailing
Scholarship

VALA

The scribes and politicians of today believe words have power. They have no idea how right they are.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you refuse to solve a problem using magic when it would be easy to do so; the problem is not important enough to wield such power against it.

Advantages

Sorcery (Galdr)
Sorcery (Galdr)
Linguist

Skills

Convince
Intimidate
Perform
Ride
Scholarship

New Advantages

1 Point Advantages

ANYTHING CAN BE A WEAPON IF YOU HOLD IT RIGHT

Your Hero must have the Bar Fighter Advantage in order to purchase this Advantage. When you make a Brawling Risk to fight using an improvised weapon (such as an upturned table, a barstool, a plank of wood, a walking stick, etc), and you spend a Raise to inflict Wounds, you can choose to break your weapon. If you do so, the Wounds you inflict cannot be prevented in any way. You cannot use this Advantage again until the end of the Scene unless you pay a Hero Point to procure a new weapon.

FISH IN A BARREL

Your Hero must have the Deadeye Advantage in order to purchase this Advantage. When you make an Aim Risk using a pistol, blunderbuss or a thrown weapon such as a knife or axe, spend a Raise to reduce the Strength of a Brute Squad by your Ranks in Finesse.

HAYMAKER

Your Hero must have the Boxer Advantage in order to purchase this Advantage. When you make a Brawl Risk to punch, kick, head-butt or otherwise injure another character using nothing but your own body, you can choose to spend all of your Raises on your first Action. You inflict a number of Wounds equal to the Raises you spend. The character you hit loses half of his current Raises, rounding down.

INTO THE FRAY

Your Hero must have the Bruiser Advantage in order to purchase this Advantage. When you make a Weaponry Risk using a claymore, zweihander, battle axe, halberd or similar weapon in both hands, you can choose not to roll dice at the beginning of a Round. If you do so, you eliminate a single Brute Squad regardless of its Strength.

TRIGGER CONTROL

Your Hero must have the Sniper Advantage in order to purchase this Advantage. When you make an Aim Risk using a long-barreled musket, longbow or crossbow, the first time you spend a Raise to inflict a Wound, you may spend a Hero Point to inflict an additional Dramatic Wound. Your victim must be unaware of your presence in order for you to use this Advantage, and once you use this Advantage you cannot activate it again until the end of the Scene.

WHIRLWIND OF STEEL

Your Hero must have the Fencer Advantage in order to purchase this Advantage. When you make a Weaponry Risk using a rapier, dagger, cutlass or similar weapon in one hand, you can choose not to roll dice at the beginning of a Round. If you do so, you reduce the Strength of all Brute Squads in the Scene to half, rounding down.



2 Point Advantages

ADAPTIVE DUELIST

Your Hero must know two Dueling Styles to purchase this Advantage. You can spend a Hero Point to switch your chosen Style in the middle of a round, as long as she still meets the requirements of the new Style she adopts (such as the weapon being wielded). You can only use this Advantage once per Round.

THIS IS MY TOWN

Spend a Hero Point when you are in a familiar area to lose a tail, pinpoint a stranger who does not belong here, recognize whether or not you are being followed or find a shortcut.

3 Point Advantages

CATCH THE WIND

You can spend a Hero Point while piloting a Ship to arrive at your destination more quickly. If you do so, your Ship takes one Critical Hit, but you reduce your travel time by a quarter. If you are being pursued over water, you can instead activate this Advantage (paying the same costs as above) to escape your pursuers in a burst of wild nautical speed that should be impossible.

SCATHING INDICTMENT

Spend a Hero Point when you make an Intimidate or Convince Risk to reduce the Strength of any one Brute Squad in the Scene by half, rounding down.

STUDENT OF COMBAT

You learn the Slash and Parry Maneuvers, as well as one Maneuver (not a Style Bonus) of your choice and can perform these as a Duelist does. The Duelist Academy Advantage is considered a 3-point Advantage for you.

SWEETEN THE POT

Spend 1 Wealth to successfully bribe a character during an Action or Dramatic Sequence without spending a Raise. You can do this once per Sequence.



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