HEROES' PORTAL

HERMES' PORTAL

Issue n° 4   2002

❈   ❈   ❈

HERMES' PORTAL

Contacting HP

Email
Hermes.Portal@wanadoo.fr

Web site
www.hermesportal.fr.st

Who's Who?

David Chart

David Chart is the Ars Magica Line Editor. He has been writing material for Ars Magica since the first *Wizard's Grimoire*, co-developed the *Wizard's Grimoire Revised Edition*, and wrote *Heirs to Merlin*. In real life, he is a mild mannered teacher of philosophy.

Erik Dahl

His name means "King of the Valley." He is a Cancer, which means that today is a 7. He works as an information architect, which involves applying strategy to web design and drawing up site maps. He has been playing Ars Magica for about seven years, and has been a part of a troupe for almost a third of that time. He and his wife live in Davis, California with a lot of books, theater props, musical instruments and cooking utensils. He also heads his local chapter of the American Association Against Acronym Abuse, Abbreviations and Ambiguity (AAAAAAA). You can listen to the wacky music of his band Volvo Maroon for free at http://www.volvomaroon.com/.

Timothy Ferguson

Timothy Ferguson is 28 and works as a library locum in Thuringowa, North Queensland, Australia. He's currently fossicking about for a new job, as locums do, and studying for his next degree.

Andrew Gronosky

Andrew Gronosky is a scientific programmer living near Boston, Massachusetts. He even knows how to spell "Massachusetts." He has been playing Ars Magica since 1st Edition in 1988. His most significant gaming-related accomplishment has been meeting an unattached, female gamer— a feat heretofore believed impossible— and being fortunate enough to become her boyfriend. And he owes it all to Ars Magica.

Eric Kouris (publisher)

Eric is 34 and teaches mathematics. He began playing RPGs in 1982 with FGU's *Chivalry & Sorcery* (instead of AD&D), then *Space Opera*, *Call of Cthulhu*,… In 1989, he turned to *Ars Magica*, and in 1994, he began publishing a French zine for Ars Magica named *Ars Mag*.

Eric Minton

Eric Minton works as a web designer by day, and as a layabout, freeloader and all-around slacker by night. He started roleplaying over 20 years ago and has been running a diceless Ars Magica saga for the past two years; he may write an article about this someday. He shares domestic bliss with his lovely gamer boyfriend Conn in Astoria, NY. This is his first publication.

Radja Sauperamaniane

Radja is working in a game store in Paris. He worked on the card game *Zoon*. He has been doing illustrations for *Ars Mag* since issue #11.

Angela Taylor

Angela studied English Literature at Clare College, Cambridge, and Mediaeval History at York, taught for some years, then married Neil. She draws and paints, while making rude comments about Neil's gaming (fair enough, really!); she is a non-gamer… almost a "gaming widow" even!

Sheila Thomas (editor)

Sheila Thomas has been editing technical publications for paper and electronic distribution for years. This is her first attempt at doing it for game material. She discovered RPGs about ten years ago but it was a couple of years before she learnt that AD&D wasn't the only RPG system around. She now devotes most of her gaming time to Ars Magica but is still playing in that AD&D campaign.

Alexander White

A scribbler in the spare time between uni lectures and essay deadlines, Alex (who uses the third person all the time) always wanted to sketch a few pictures for a roleplaying game. As someone who likes complements, he takes his sketch pad to all his gaming sessions and is really annoyed when people point out that the perspective is wrong and that the women look like men.

Publisher's corner

Hello!

When I launched Hermes' Portal, I planned to release four issues a year.

It looks like I've been a bit out of schedule. Issue #4 is here and there is enough time to release a fifth before the first anniversary. So you'll see a fifth issue sometime during Summer.

And now, let's concentrate on this issue.

First, I'd like to thank Eric Minton for taking charge of a new column, "Ex Bibliotheca Durenmare", presenting Hermetic books and new spells.

I also thank David Chart, Ars Magica Line Editor, for giving us some insight regarding Ars' future in his "News from the Line Editor".

Of course, you'll also find "Dear Abelard" and "The Heretic's Corner", although Michaël de Verteuil gave the quill to Andrew Gronosky.

Again, don't hesitate to send your questions to the column's authors – if they are published, you'll receive a free copy of Hermes' Portal.

The Mysteries trend continues with David's take on Merinita's secrets. New virtues and new societies.

Timothy gives us two articles, one on information flow in the Order, the second (in two parts) on story ideas for elder magi. Now your SG will have more than enough ways to make your 100+ year old magus shudder.

Erik Dahl takes a new look at Covenant creation, applying to it the concepts behind character creation.

Last, you still have until May 31 to send in your stories for the scenario contest.

Eric
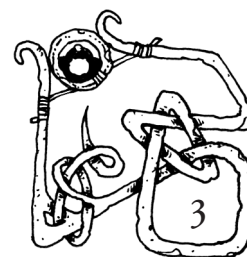
Merinita Mysteries

by David Chart

Thanks to Neil Taylor and Sheila Thomas for helpful feedback on earlier versions of this article.

The Mysteries

This presentation of Faerie Magic is a complete replacement for Faerie Magic as presented in *The Wizard's Grimoire, Revised Edition*. The spells listed there could be converted to standard Hermetic spells, without the magnitude adjustments, if you wanted to keep them in your saga while using these rules.

Outer Mystery: Faerie Magic

Faerie Magic is a +1 Virtue. A character cannot initiate this virtue, or start with it at character creation, unless she has been touched by the fay in some way. Anyone with a faerie virtue or flaw, including Faerie Enmity, qualifies. Lesser contact may also count. Having a faerie lover would be enough, and attending a number of faerie feasts most likely would as well. However, simply fighting a few faeries does not count. The troupe must make the final decision. A maga who is touched by the fay must still be initiated into this mystery in the usual way.

A maga with this virtue gets the full value of faerie auras as a bonus to her magic totals, and does not have to roll additional botch dice. In effect, she may treat faerie auras as if they were magic auras, for most purposes. If a maga with this virtue extracts vis from a faerie aura, the vis is faerie-touched. This does not usually have any game effects, but someone who drinks a longevity potion made with faerie-touched vis counts as faerie-touched, and thus may initiate this mystery.

Magi with this virtue have the Arcane Knowledge Faerie Magic, which starts at a value of one and may be increased like any other knowledge. This knowledge acts as an affinity with all spells invented using the Mysteries of Faerie Magic. It is not possible to learn the Inner Mysteries without a score of at least one in Faerie Magic.

Finally, the maga can use additional Ranges, Durations, and Targets, as follows. These categories may be used in spontaneous magic by magae with Faerie Magic, subject to the limitation that spontaneous magic may not have a duration greater than one month (*ArM4* page 69).

Road (Range): The maga may target anyone or anything on the same road or path as her. The identity of roads and paths is not always clear, and the troupe must decide if things are difficult. Two paths may cross each other, but two paths may not become one. In that case, either one path joins the second, or the junction is actually the joining of three paths. The maga need not be able to see her target, but she must know that it is there, unless the spell is an Intellego effect intended to find out if something is there.

People are only on a road if they are actually between the edges of the path, at least partially.

Buildings are on a road if the primary access to the building is from that road. Plants and small objects must be between the edges of the path.

For purposes of spell level calculation, Road is the same level as Far.

Bargain (Duration): As in *WGRE*, page 137.

Fire (Duration): As in *WGRE*, page 137.

Until (Condition) (Duration): As in *WGRE*, page 137.

Year + 1 (Duration): As in *WGRE*, page 137.

**Bloodline** (Target): As in *WGRE*, page 137.

Arcadian Bridge (+2 Virtue)

Magi who have initiated this mystery have a closer link to faerie regiones, and to Arcadia. The virtue grants two minor abilities and one major one.

First, magi with this virtue may move between the levels of a faerie regio automatically, and may lead others between the levels, just as if they were faeries. They are automatically aware of the presence of a faerie regio, and can see into adjacent levels of the regio if they so choose. (See *ArM4* page 245 for more details.) If the maga enters Arcadia from a regio, she may choose the relative rates at which time passes in Arcadia and the mortal world, and may lead others there as normal. (See *Faeries*, pages 85-88 for details on Arcadia.)

Second, the maga may use Int + Faerie Lore + Faerie Magic to navigate in Arcadia. The extra bonus means that she rarely gets lost.

Finally, she may create 'gates' to and from Arcadia. To create a gate to Arcadia, she must perform some artistic task, and generate stress die + Com + Faerie Magic + Artistic Ability + Aura. Aura bonuses and penalties are taken from the Faerie column of the realm interaction table. The Ease Factor for opening a gate to Arcadia is 18. For every full three points by which she exceeds the Ease Factor, the maga can take another person to Arcadia with her.
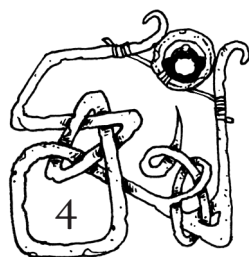
Creating the gate takes as long as performing the artistic task, generally about two minutes (Diameter duration).

The artistic task may be of any sort, and need not be performed well. If the maga has no artistic abilities, she gets no bonus, but she does not get a penalty for working unskilled. Magi might draw the gate on some convenient surface, or play music that seems to lift you to another world, or dance faster and faster until they vanish. The art must be made public in some way, but quietly reciting a poem would be enough. It is not possible to see where a gate leads before you use it.

Gates are not usually passages that open and wait for people to pass through. Rather, the people targeted by the maga are caught up by the magic and taken to Arcadia. Thus, it is not normally possible to sneak through an Arcadian Gate. Of course, on a botch the gate may stay open as long as it takes the wild hunt to pass through.

The gate opens at a place in Arcadia chosen by the maga. She must make an Int + Faerie Lore + Faerie Magic roll against an appropriate Ease Factor to see if she gets it right. On a failure, she is simply somewhere else. On a botch, she arrives somewhere dangerous.

If the gate creation roll fails, the maga may try again. Botches on the gate creation roll may have a number of effects. The gate may open to somewhere other than Arcadia, or the maga may summon faeries to the mundane world, rather than travelling to them.

When creating a gate from Arcadia, the total is the same, but uses the aura of the target location rather than the aura of Arcadia. The process takes the same time as opening a gate in the other direction. The Ease Factor is, again, 18. The roll is penalised depending on how well the maga knows the place she wants the gate to reach. If she knows the place intimately (e.g. her sanctum), there is no penalty. If she knows it very well (e.g. the area around her covenant, the village where she grew up), the penalty is -1. If she knows it well, and has visited several times, the penalty is -3. Examples might include a faerie forest near the covenant, or the town nearest to the covenant. A place that she has visited a few times imposes a -6 penalty. The area around another covenant, or a local city, might qualify. A place she has only been to once imposes a -9 penalty. It is not possible to deliberately open a gate to a place you have never been, but that is a likely result of a botch.

Merinita magi with this virtue do use Arcadia as a shortcut between places. It is possible to create a gate out of Arcadia before you are challenged by a guardian, as long as you do not fail the first roll. However, if you would have to beat a certain magic resistance to affect the target place with a spell, your gate total must exceed the same amount. Note that the magic resistance does not penalise your roll. For example, creating a gate from Arcadia to a covenant you have visited a few times has an effective Ease Factor of 24. If the Aegis of the covenant is level 24 or lower, any roll that succeeds in creating a gate will open a passage to the covenant. If the Aegis is level 25 or higher, the total must exceed that level, rather than the Ease Factor.

Lesser Glamour (+3 Virtue)

Lesser glamours are illusions with a significant amount of reality. A glamour of a thing has all the effects that a real item of the same type would have. Thus, a glamour bridge can support weight, a glamour fire can ignite parchment, and glamour wine can quench thirst. However, glamours are not real, so their effects are not long-lasting.

All glamours are Creo or Muto Imaginem spells. They should be noted as glamours when invented or recorded; only magi with this virtue can learn or cast such spells. The basic level for a lesser glamour is 20 for an unliving thing and 30 for a living thing (either target or effect), whether it is Creo or Muto. A level 20 Creo Imaginem glamour affects all five senses, and is physically tangible. It behaves as a real item of that type would behave, so that flames flicker and spread, and a glamour sword can be used to strike opponents. A level 30 Muto Imaginem glamour could make a rock look like a horse. The horse would move, make noises, smell, and possibly allow itself to be ridden (it would also tolerate magi). Changes to the range, duration, and target modify the level normally.

Lesser glamours are no more flexible than normal formulaic spells, and tend to be less flexible than normal Imaginem spells. Thus, while the Hermetic spell *Phantasmal Animal* creates any animal, there are many lesser glamours, one for every species of animal. However, *Glamoured Horse* (CrIm 30) can create any kind of horse, with tack and harness if desired. In general, use Creo and Muto spells of other forms as guidance for how broad lesser glamours should be, but remember that lesser glamour creates effects rather than duplicating other spells.

A glamoured object is 'really' whatever it is underneath. Thus, a Creo Imaginem glamour is actually Imaginem, and responds to Intellego spells appropriately, while a rock glamoured to appear as a horse is still not a horse, and can be detected as such. Second or Faerie Sight also allows characters to know that something is a glamour, if they make a Per + Sight roll against an Ease Factor of half the spell level. Note that, even if you know that something is a lesser glamour it will still affect you as normal. Realising that something is a glamour does not make it vanish, even for you.

Glamours disappear under a number of conditions. Most obviously, they vanish when the spell duration ends. However, they also disappear if brought into contact with iron, or if blessed by someone in Holy Orders (subdeacon, deacon, priest, or bishop). Finally, if a glamour enters a Dominion Aura it disappears. Glamours cannot be cast in the Dominion, or in Infernal auras. They can be cast in areas with no aura, and a glamour cast in another aura could enter an Infernal aura without vanishing.
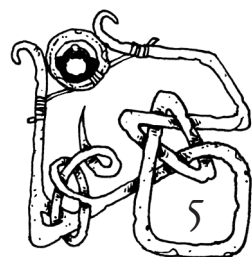
For obvious reasons, glamours cannot be cast on iron. However, it is possible to cast glamours of iron.

The effects of a glamour do not disappear at the end of the spell duration. So, if a scroll is burned by a glamour fire with Momentary duration, it remains ashes after that time. However, the effects of a glamour do disappear under the other conditions. If a priest blessed the ashes of the scroll, it would reappear undamaged. This will require some judgments on the part of the troupe.

The disappearance of the effects of a glamour never causes immediate death. Thus, someone who ate and drank nothing but glamour for two weeks, and was then blessed by a priest, would become extremely hungry and thirsty, but would not die. If the glamour is no longer having an effect on someone, then the disappearance of the effects has no effect. Thus, if someone crosses a chasm on a glamour bridge, and is touched with iron on the other side, he does not disappear down the chasm. (On the other hand, someone standing on the bridge when it is touched with iron would fall.) Wounds caused by glamour disappear completely, without leaving even scars. Lesser glamour healing (which would be Muto Imaginem, because you are changing the image of the person being healed) prevents normal healing as long as it is in effect, just as non-Instant Creo Corpus healing does.

If someone is killed by glamour, or takes real injuries that only kill him because he had previously taken glamour injuries, then his soul and spirit are held in Arcadia. No time passes for him, until his remains, or part of his remains, are blessed, touched with iron, or taken into a Dominion aura. At that point, he appears where his remains are, all glamour injuries gone. If he was also suffering from real injuries, they remain.

Greater Glamour (+4 Virtue)

This mystery allows the maga to invent and cast spells with a new Duration, Aura. Aura is equivalent to Sun duration for the purposes of determining the level of the spell, and Aura duration spells may normally be cast spontaneously and without vis. They are invented according to the normal guidelines for the Technique and Form involved. A magus without this virtue cannot even learn spells with Aura duration, much less cast them.

A spell with Aura duration lasts as long as the effect is within a magical or faerie aura. As soon as the effect leaves such an aura, whether because the effect moves or because the aura changes, the spell comes to an end. As long as the duration of the spell lasts, the effect counts as natural. This means that it cannot be dispelled, that food nourishes, and that created animals can reproduce. Further, being under the effect of such a spell does not warp the target beyond the effect of the magic. Thus, a person transformed into a bird by a greater glamour would appear to be a natural bird, but would change back to a human being if he left the aura. Once he had changed back, there would be no further ill effects.
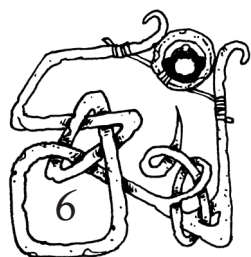
The secondary effects of Aura duration spells do not disappear when the affected things leave the aura. The results of the spell are real, so their effects are real. Their effects were not created with Aura duration, so they persist. Thus, someone killed with a greater glamour sword stays dead, barring a miracle. A person who lives on greater glamour food for a year does not feel hungry when he leaves the aura, although if he tries to take greater glamour supplies, they vanish. Healing from Aura duration spells is a special case. A person healed with Aura duration heals naturally 'underneath' the greater glamour, as if he had rolled 18+ on the wound recovery chart (*ArM4* page 178). When he leaves the aura, any injuries which had not healed appear.

Greater glamours can be cast outside magic or faerie auras, but they end instantly. This does not even produce the effects of Momentary duration; the effect is gone before it is really there. However, a greater glamour can be moved from one magic or faerie aura to another, provided that there is no other aura, or lack of aura, between them. Thus, greater glamours can be moved between the levels of a regio, or from a magic aura to a faerie aura which directly abuts it.

It is possible to invest greater glamours into an enchanted device. Such devices can be used by anyone, but they are very rare, because the few magi with this virtue do not spend much time making enchanted items.

It is not necessary to learn to use Lesser Glamour before learning Greater Glamour. It is possible to create lesser glamours with Aura duration. Such lesser glamours are still subject to the other limits of lesser glamours; they disappear when touched by iron, and so on.

Quendalon's Gift (+5 Virtue)

This mystery lets the maga become a faerie.

The mystery teaches a special ritual, which takes a whole year and must be performed in a Hermetic laboratory located in a faerie aura. The maga generates a lab total equal to Int + Magic Theory + Faerie Magic + Muto + Corpus (Vim requisite) + Aura, and expends a number of pawns of faerie vis, of any Art, equal to the lab total. (This expenditure is still bound by the normal limit of Vim + Magic Theory per season, but as the ritual takes four seasons this should not be a problem.) Faerie vis includes any vis gathered in a faerie aura, and vis extracted from a faerie aura by a maga with Faerie Magic. It is not possible to be assisted in this ritual.

After the ritual, the maga is mostly fay, with elements of humanity remaining. This change has a visible effect on the maga. Initiates of this mystery say that Quendalon was the first magus to learn it, and that his eyes became gems when he performed the ritual. Other changes that are known to have occurred include hair turning to grass, fingernails turning to ice, and blood turning to wine.

As a result of the change, the maga now has a Faerie Might equal to the lab total. This Might can be

used to grant magic resistance, but it is not cumulative with resistance due to Forms, spells, or Parma Magica. A maga must decide at dawn and dusk on the source of her magic resistance for the next twelve hours. If the maga is unconscious at the relevant time, her resistance defaults to her Faerie Might. The maga can suppress her Might resistance in the same way as she can suppress that from her Forms and Parma Magica. The Faerie Might can be used in a number of other ways. If points are spent, they regenerate at a rate which would restore all the points over a twenty four hour period. Thus, a maga with Faerie Might 24 regenerates one per hour, while a magus with Faerie Might 53 regenerates one every twenty seven minutes or so.

- Subtract (Faerie Might)/5 from each aging roll. On a failed aging roll, the maga gains a Twilight Point, but there are no other effects.
- Magi with Faerie Might do not need to eat, drink, or breathe.
- Faeries do not tire, and the same applies to magi with Faerie Might. When casting a spell which would cost fatigue, the maga instead spends a number of Faerie Might points equal to the number already spent for each fatigue level that would have been lost, or one if the maga is at full might. Thus, a maga with maximum might 32 and current might 27 would spend five points to substitute for a fatigue level, bringing her current might down to 22. If she waits 45 minutes before casting another spell, her might would rise to 23, and it would cost nine points. This expenditure cannot take the maga below zero might; any effect which would have that effect automatically fails. Physical fatigue has no effect; the magus effectively has no fatigue levels, and no penalty.
- Faeries do not sleep. This gives the maga an additional two seasons per year. However, these may not be spent on laboratory activities, as these are tied to the rhythm of the seasons. It is possible to study books, or to write books, or to learn spells from a text, but not to invent spells, create enchantments, or study from vis.
- Faerie magi may subtract their Faerie Magic score from the number of Twilight Points gained in a Twilight. This subtraction may reduce the number of points to zero. However, the maga is still in temporary Twilight. Faerie Magic does not add to rolls to control Twilight.

A maga with Faerie Might gains no benefit from a longevity potion, but does gain any bonus to aging rolls due from faerie blood. It is possible to repeat the ritual to increase Faerie Might. However, the rules are the same as if it was being performed for the first time: a number of pawns of vis equal to the lab total are consumed, and the Faerie Might granted is equal to the lab total. The rituals do *not* add to one another. So, if a maga first performs the ritual when she has a lab total of 60, it costs sixty pawns of vis

to do so, and her Faerie Might is 60. If she performs the ritual again when she has a lab total of 70, it costs seventy pawns of vis, and her Faerie Might increases to 70.

If a maga has faerie blood, or a similar virtue, before the ritual, all benefits of that virtue are cumulative with the benefits of the ritual. Thus, a maga who had the virtue Faerie-raised Merinita would not need to spend Might points to power her spontaneous magic, as such magae never spend fatigue for spontaneous casting.

The main disadvantage is that the maga is a faerie for the purposes of magical defences. She cannot pass through Aeges of the Hearth if their level exceeds her might, unless she is given a token, and wards against faeries ward against her in the same way. People with Second Sight or Faerie Sight can tell that she is not human on a Perception + Sight roll of 9+, even if her unnatural feature is hidden.

As long as the maga has fewer than 24 Twilight Points, she is not completely a faerie. The spark of humanity still burns, so she can learn, change, and create. Once she has 24 Twilight Points, she is entirely fay. Her statistics do not change, but she can no longer learn, and thus no longer improve her Arts or abilities, nor can she learn new spells. She cannot invent spells, nor create new enchantments, although she can duplicate enchantments based on a lab text. She can still use spontaneous magic, but not to do anything truly new. Such a character is still playable as a player character, as long as the saga is full of immensely powerful magi. However, she would be a difficult roleplaying challenge, as she cannot learn from experience. She can learn names of new people, but will always assume that they will behave just like other people she knows, even if faced with great evidence to the contrary. It would probably be best to retire such a character from active play.

The Mystae

The following mystery cults are merely suggestions. In a canonical saga, with about 800 magi in the Order of Hermes, there are not enough magi for them all to exist. Indeed, in such a case there are probably only enough magi for one of the societies to be active, if that. If you play with a larger Order, more of the cults could have a reasonable level of membership.

The Four Courts

Symbol: A quartered circle, sometimes with symbols of the four courts of faerie in the quarters.

Motto: *In Varietate Iunctio* (In diversity we are joined)

Patrons: The four great faerie monarchs of Bright Winter, Dark Winter, Dark Summer, and Bright Summer. Or, at least, very powerful fay who claim those roles.

House Affiliations: Almost entirely Merinita, with some Ex Miscellanea.

Origin Myth: When Quendalon entered Arcadia to seize the secrets of the fay, he learned the greatest
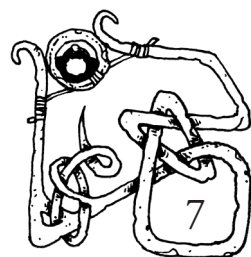
secret of all: that humans all have the power to become faeries, and leave mortality behind them. He brought that knowledge back with him from Arcadia, and turned the House of Merinita towards the fay, so that magi would be ready for the greater secrets taught by this society.

Levels of Initiation: Members of the Four Courts take a feudal rank upon themselves. There is no central authority to hand them out, but members are expected to assume ranks commensurate with their level of power. The rank of King or Queen is reserved for those who have become faeries through initiation.

Goals and Practices: All magi have the power to leave mortality behind and join the fay, and this society guides magi along the path. As human beings are diverse, so are the members of this society. Nevertheless, members are required to accept one another — internecine squabbles are not tolerated. The society has no shared goals other than that of helping its members to reach faerie.

Any magus who has been touched by the fay may seek initiation into this society, and any maga who has been initiated may guide the initiation of another.

Virtues: Cyclic Magic (Var.), Faerie Magic (+1), Affinity with Faerie (+2), Arcadian Bridge (+2), Lesser Glamour (+3), Greater Glamour (+4), Quendalon's Gift (+5).

Affinity with Faerie: This affinity adds to all spells cast on faeries or faerie items. It does not add to spells cast in a faerie aura if they are cast on non-faerie things. Characters with faerie blood count as faeries; merely being touched by the fay does not qualify.

Preferred Ordeals: Good Works, Initiation Quest, Prohibition, Sacrifice of Power (flaws relating to iron or the Dominion, Cyclic Magic)
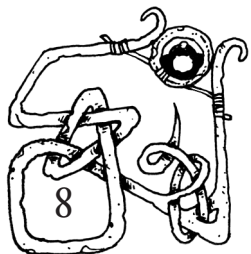
The Iron Rule

Symbol: An iron measuring rod.

Motto: *Unus Regulus Sub Deo* (One Rule Under God)

Patron: St Dunstan. (An English saint who worked as a blacksmith and forced the devil to leave him by using iron tongs.)

House Affiliations: Tremere, Tytalus, Flambeau, Jerbiton, Ex Miscellanea.

Origin Myth: In the beginning, God set man at the head of all creation. Some of the angels resented this. Lucifer, and the angels who became demons, actively plotted the downfall of man. Others, who became faeries, merely refused to serve. When Adam ate the apple, God cast man from Eden, and the rebel angels from heaven. The Incarnation of Christ once again linked the human and divine natures, and now man can once again establish his dominion over the rebel angels. Once this dominion is complete, even the winds and waves will obey mankind, as was intended at the beginning. The Gift is a sign that a particular person has a stronger touch of the divine nature than others, as is seen in the way that sinful people find it hard to bear the presence of the Gifted, and so magi should lead the way in the reclamation of man's birthright.

Levels of Initiation: The Iron Rule uses degrees of ordination. In order, they are doorkeeper, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, priest, bishop.

Goals and Practices: The Iron Rule aim to bring all spirits, other than the angels, under the control of man. They are a Christian group, but would be regarded as deeply heretical if the Church were to know of their existence. At present, the society strongly discourages any attempt to bind demons. Demonic spirits are regarded as actively hostile, and thus extremely dangerous. Faeries merely resent control, and are therefore the preferred targets. However, the society does believe that its members should ultimately control demons. The Quaesitores do not know this, and would not be happy if they found out.

Recruitment is normally of filius by parens. However, the society does accept new members who prove themselves worthy, normally by binding several spirits to their will.

Virtues: Faerie Magic (+1), Hermetic Theurgy (+1), Affinity with Faerie (+2), Arcadian Gate (+2), Affinity with Rego (+4)

Preferred Ordeals: Initiation Quest, Good Works, Sacrifice of Power (weakness in the Dominion, signifying humility before God)

The Last Commission

Symbol: Two trees growing entwined together, often with leaves of two types and a golden fruit growing on a common branch.

Motto: The Art is Unifinished.

Patrons: Bonisagus, Quendalon.

House Affiliations: Bonisagus, Merinita.

Origin Myth: Before passing into Final Twilight, Bonisagus spoke to the magi gathered around him. He spoke of a life's work only half done. Flambeau

replied first, swearing to bring every wizard into the Order. As he left, Bonisagus shook his head sadly. Then Jerbiton promised to bring the benefits of the Order to the mundane world. As he left, Bonisagus remained grieved. Tremere promised to forge the Order into a tool of virtue. But still Bonisagus was saddened. The other Founders all made their promises, but Bonisagus was unmoved. At last, Quendalon alone remained.

"What are the mundanes, the wilderness, or control, compared to the Art? But how can the Art be unfinished? It touches everything." In reply, Bonisagus shook his head, and closed his eyes sorrowfully. Quendalon remained silent, thinking as the greatest of the Founders slipped further into Twilight. As Bonisagus released his last grip on this world, Quendalon looked up and spoke.

"The whole realm of Faerie is beyond us. I will bring the fay within the Art." Bonisagus's face lit up in a smile as he vanished from mortal realms. Quendalon left, determined to carry out the last commission of the Founder.

Goals and Practices: The Last Commission aim to bring the powers of faerie within the ambit of Hermetic Magic. They are unusually open for a mystae group, as their aims are perfectly acceptable to the rest of the Order, and they welcome help. Most of their members are drawn from Houses Merinita and Bonisagus, but other researchers are welcome.

Levels of Initiation: The Last Commission has no formal ranks. Members are respected based on how much they have achieved.

Virtues Taught: Faerie Magic (+1), Affinity with Faerie (+2), Lesser Glamour (+3), Greater Glamour (+4).

Preferred Ordeals: Good Works (items and texts which advance the union between Hermetic magic and faerie power), Initiation Quest (to discover information leading to insights into a possible union)

News from the Line Editor : April 2002

I'd like to start this column by thanking Eric for giving me the forum for it. I shall try to bring you the latest and greatest Ars Magica news from Atlas, and provide some insight into what I'm thinking about the line. I would also be happy to answer questions: send them to:

arsmagica@dchart.demon.co.uk

and mention that you would like me to answer them in this column. This didn't work for either of the last two Line Editors, but I guess it's worth a try.

The first bit of news is that I (David Chart) am now the Ars Magica Line Editor. I started a one-year freelance contract at the beginning of this year. The contract is for one year so that Atlas and I can both see how it works out, as even in this information age there are still difficulties involved in managing a line for a company located several thousand miles away. Since I have yet to turn over my first book as Line Editor, neither of us really knows how things will go, although there have been no real problems so far.

Talking of books, fans of Ars Magica may have noticed that it has been a while since Atlas published any books for the game. That is about to change.

First, Michaël de Verteuil's adventure, *The Bishop's Staff*, is at the printers as I write this, and should reach stores in May, barring disasters. I don't know much about this book, as it is not one that I have had to deal with as Line Editor. So I'm quite looking forward to seeing it as well.

The next Ars Magica product will be *The Black Monks of Glastonbury*, by David Chart. I signed the contract for this book before Atlas offered me the Line Editor's job, and I will not be responsible for editing and project management on it. Part of the reason is that this book will be part of Atlas's Coriolis line, which includes statistics for d20 alongside statistics for one of Atlas's game lines. I should emphasise that this is not the way that future books will go — there may be more Coriolis books, but there are, at present, no plans to include d20 statistics in most Ars Magica supplements, and we are certainly not planning to take the game to d20.

Timothy Ferguson's *Sanctuary of Ice* is still on the schedule to be published, but we don't know when. It has run into delays in the final edit, and it will be published when it is ready, as a nice surprise for all our fans.

After that, we move on to the books for which I am responsible as Line Editor. My contract calls for four books, most of which will be published in 2003. One of those books will be *Living Legends*. The first, however, will be *Blood and Sand: The Tribunal of the Levant*, by Niall Christie. This has now completed playtest, and it's looking good. We have yet to write the advertising copy for it, so I'll spare you that, but I think this book will finally do justice to a long-neglected part of Mythic Europe.

Although the *Living Legends* deadline will probably have passed before you read this (it's April 30th 2002, just in case it hasn't), the *Covenants Project* will still be open for submissions, and I'm always interested in supplement proposals, especially ones that follow the guidelines. The guidelines and any special projects are on the Atlas website, at http://www.atlas-games.com/arm_submit.html
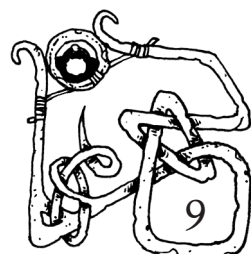
Stories for Elder Magi

by Timothy Ferguson

One day, your magi will become so powerful that, together, no mundane force can stand against them. Many sagas collapse at this point, because it is difficult to coax such powerful characters out of their laboratories. Drama requires conflict, and combat is always the easiest style of conflict to write sagas around, but if your magi have reached this exalted age, you need to get sneaky, and design conflict that isn't simple hostility over resources.

You need to strike at the character's ego.

Legacy

Although their motivations vary, it is a rare elder who does not dream of an accomplishment which, deliberately or co-incidentally, will illuminate their name in the history of the Order. Legacies form the basis of extended story arcs, as the magus first seeks the means for, then the realisation of their dream. Sometimes an entire covenant of Elders will co-operate to produce their opus, but it's not unusual for a group to assist each other in a basketful of projects, each of which has significance to a particular magus.

The Research Project

Projects are great works of magic that will change the future of the Order. Generally the project is envisioned by a research magus, and requires an extensively resourced covenant. Stories for those completing the Project include:

Excavating guaranteed insight

The area of Roman influence, and Hermetic settlement, is large and contains layers of history, in which cultural and magical practices change. Magi can develop guaranteed insight by seeking out traces of magical traditions that could perform effects similar to those that they are researching. This is difficult, because it's not enough to know that an effect was possible; the magus needs to watch the process that brings it about. Since so many traditions have been driven to extinction, the magus may need to rediscover the lost techniques of another theory of magic. If this is impossible, they may find elements of material culture reflecting, esoteric symbols concerning or cautions against self-destructive applications of, the power they seek.

Maintaining their resource base

Many magi neglect their covenant's resource base, wrongly believing that once their breakthrough is complete, their current problems will become insignificant. Others know that their covenant is falling into Winter, but believe its resources are sufficient for them to complete their project, then rebuild their economic position. This places additional strain on their sodales, who need to take time away from building their own legacies to patch up the covenant. They may also need to restrain their sodales, since magi working on projects are sometimes thoughtlessly destructive, ruining renewable sources of income to give them the few extra rooks of vis they need to proceed towards their goal.

Covenant founding

Founding a covenant is difficult, dangerous, thankless, and slows the rate of the magus's development. Younger magi often desire the relative independence of living in a young covenant. Since they are used to the genteel penury of apprenticeship or a rough living as dogsbodies to a council of elders, they aren't giving up the luxuries of an Alpine life to seek personal satisfaction on the frontier. Elder magi
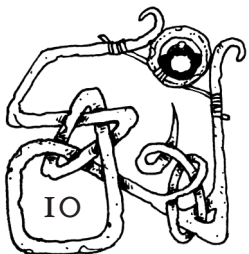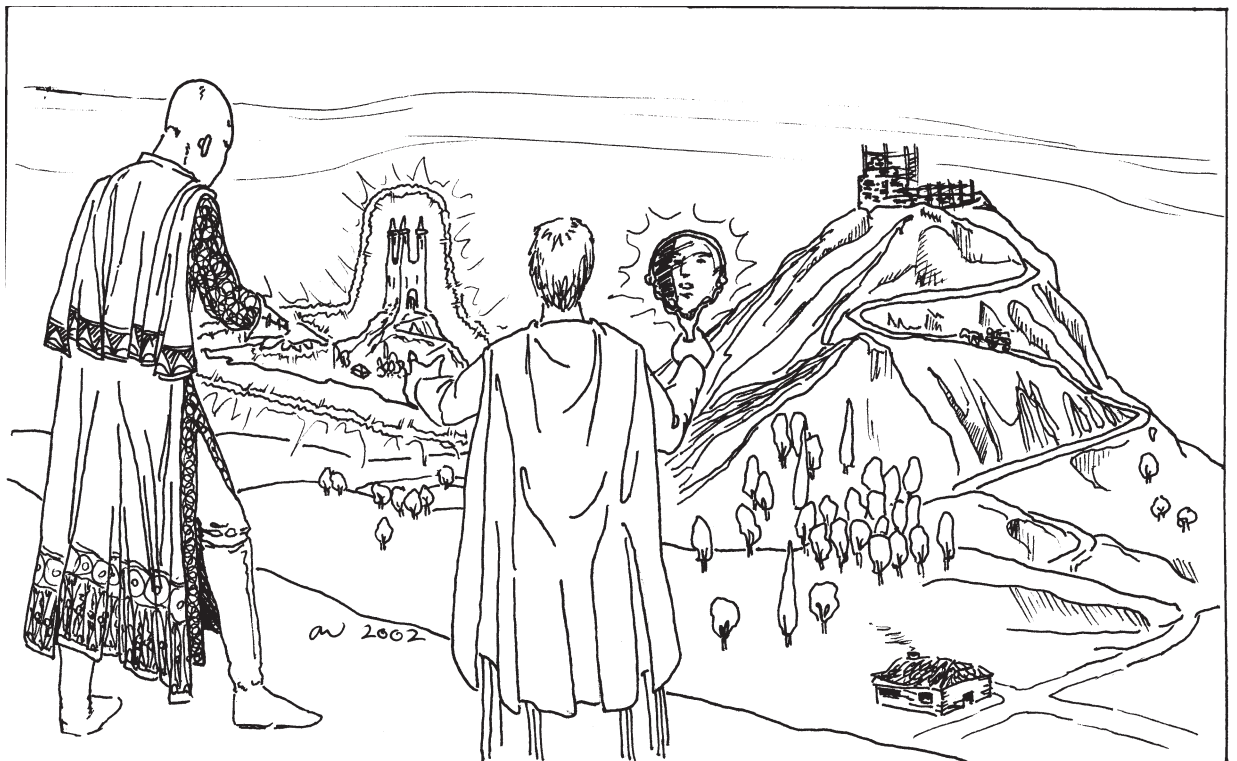
take a little more prompting before they put their possessions in a wagon and seek the wilds.

Elders found covenants for a variety of reasons. Some Elder magi found new covenants because they have no other honourable choice. An ostrakon (a magus expelled from the Greater Alps Tribunal, see the upcoming supplement *Sanctuary of Ice*) could seek a powerful covenant in the frontier Tribunals and ask for membership, but would then be the servant of those less than his equals. An experienced magus whose covenant is destroyed, or falls, faces similar problems. Others discover a resource that they wish to exploit to the exclusion of all others, and this requires the protection offered by a covenant of younger, disposable magi. Some wish to ingrain a new lifestyle into the culture of the Order, and found new covenants as experiments in social engineering. These often fall into traditional patterns after the first few generations.

The most popular "new culture" is the spring rabble, which has the social structure of a street gang. Ostensibly democratic, spring rabbles are actually led by a single, forceful, personality. These usually collapse after a decade, as personality conflicts deepen, and nearby Summer or Autumn covenants offer positions to their neighbour's most effective members.

Another popular form is autocracy with a particular elder at its head. Strongly territorial, or highly misanthropic, magi often found new covenants on the flimsiest of pretexts. They surround themselves with useful, but unthreatening sodales, and their covenants rarely long outlast them. The structures they leave behind are prime sites for later attempts at covenant-founding, provided one of their underlings records how to bypass their magical defences. Otherwise, these become Hermetic wastelands, where only the brave tread, in search of lost treasures.

There are other social structures possible, and many have been attempted at various times in the history of the Order. The basic flaw in many of these systems is a failure to understand the pressures that lead most Hermetic covenants to adopt a sort of apathetic, aristocratic style. Other systems continue only through the goodwill of those aged magi with sufficient power to remake them, and the conventional style is a common compromise between the people with the ability to reshape the covenant's culture. Other compromises are possible, and some are successful, but in many of these covenants, once the social visionary dies, even those who support the basic scheme differ about who has the wisdom and authority to interpret their charter properly. Successful new covenants are rare, not simply because their neighbours would often prefer they fell, but because their success requires an intergenerational consensus about what is important in the life of an Hermetic magus, how to get it, and who rations happiness when it is in short supply.

Parents and Children

Some magi seek atavistic immortality by training apprentices. These subunits within a house are called lineages. Most are simply based on filial interest and affection, but some contain formal structures that emphasise the political position of a chosen member. Often the favoured member is the most senior, but sometimes the one most similar to the founder, or the founder's ideal, as measured by traditional tests, is preferred. The founder of a lineage is often substantially weaker than other magicians of similar age, because they invest so much of their time and other resources into the training of their apprentices. Simultaneously, these apprentices are usually more powerful than other magi of equivalent age.

Developing a lineage is a difficult process, for several reasons. The magus needs to locate suitable children for training. These children need to survive not only apprenticeship but also the arduousness of early Hermetic life, including victimisation by the master's powerful enemies. These filii must then be prevented from seeking a personal vision, incompatible with the founder's. Finally, a system of succession


Nature or Nurture?

Affinities emerge in children either naturally, or through training. The problem with this is that a master selecting a gifted child cannot be entirely sure how their wild gift and training will interact. For this reason, many magi prefer to train children yet to express their Gift, selecting them for their "magical air", the property of magi that alarms mundanes and animals, particularly dogs or horses.

Children with expressed abilities are slightly easier to train, provided the magus can find a way to link the child's intuitive understanding of what it is they are doing to the broader Hermetic Theory of magic. In those cases where this is impossible, a child's early experiences act as a psychological block, which impedes the development of a related art or combination of form and technique. Sometimes these children are mind-altered, to remove their memories of their minor magical powers, a process that drives their abilities into latency. They often re-emerge after traumatic incidents, such as Twilight.

Sometimes masters profoundly alter the psyches of their apprentices, for example by removing their memories of life before adoption. In some cases, this is to remove evidence of diabolism or another forbidden practice. As with latent abilities, these memories sometimes resurface after traumatic incidents. Most magi dismiss them as irrelevances, but their re-entry into a strained pater-filius relationship is sometimes cause for parricide.

Characters selecting a child should describe to the storyguide the qualities they seek and the tests they administer. Sagas will vary on how clean a slate the Gift of a child is, with some allowing the player to select all the apprentice's graduation virtues and flaws, while others will allow the storyguide to present
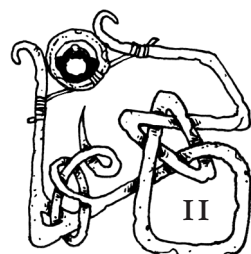
the vast majority. Troupes should be especially careful not to allow characters, other than those with Charmed Lives or appropriate Destinies, to find perfect apprentices. The resistance of the gauntleted apprentices to slavishly following their master's whims is a central source of conflict and drama within stories for this style of legacy. Before designing a magus-offspring, or partially-trained apprentice, confirm which method you are using with the rest of your troupe.

Virtues redux

From the perspective of characters within lineages, a few of the virtues and flaws take on new significance.

Close Family Ties (Hermetic)

Characters with close Hermetic ties have an informal network of "relatives" whom they assist, and who, in turn, assist them. Characters who select this virtue should chose personality trait Family Tie with a value of between -1 and +3 representing the degree to which they support this clan.

Characters within the family will not place themselves in serious danger for each other, but will tend to vote in each other's favour at Tribunals (other factors being close to equal), will trade vis at "family rate" and will occasionally send useful items to each other as gifts. They also gather for infrequent special occasions, and it is unusual for characters to stay away.

Heir

Many magi sign away their individual property to their covenant, as a condition of admittance. Among other advantages, this prevents them from leaving during trying times. Some covenants, however, allow their members to maintain limited or complete rights to property, and these are inheritable. The Heir virtue can be purchased several times.

The Heir virtue should increase in value after the payoff. That is, a character inheriting books or a magic item should gain more than what they would have received had they chipped the point in during character creation. Extremely valuable legacies are possible, but Storyguides should remember that the Heir virtue is a tether. Disobedient children don't inherit, and the testator can change their will at any time.

The most valuable thing most magi might inherit is their parens' body, but this is an uncertain legacy. Since experienced magicians contain vast quantities of vis, their corpses are extremely valuable. If the parens passes into Twilight, their body is sometimes lost. Similarly, if the parens becomes an Archmagus, the Council is willing to demand their corpse with force of arms. Finally, a magus declaring War is allowed to claim the property of his fallen foe in recompense for the slight that led to the declaration of hostilities. In this case, the corpse is also lost. All of these caveats aside, the expressed designation of a magus as recipient of the magus's body is an asset, and is even tradable. House Tytalus's members briskly exchange "corpse markers" as their stakes rise and fall.

In some few Helvetian chapters, a chair has been set aside for the most senior descendant of a notable historical figure. These chairs are rarely founded in the modern Order, because they encourage fratricide, but the handful that remain are covered by the Heir virtue. Magi so appointed are allowed to be present at Greater Alpine Tribunal meetings, but they are forbidden to speak. This is to allow them to get used to the Tribunal setting before they have power to exercise. Such magi are called "footstools" after a pun made in the late ninth century, the exact wording of which has been lost.
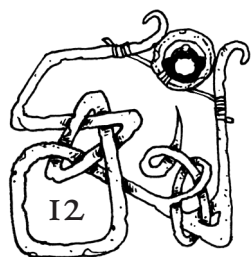
Higher Purpose

A magus cannot select founding a lineage as a Higher Purpose. That's a Driving Goal. Desire to sustain a lineage is a suitable goal for the purpose of this Virtue, but storyguides should be careful when allowing magi to select it for their apprentices. Such a driven, visionary child may notice that his master has feet of clay. After the master's death, they are likely to "reinterpret" the teachings of their honoured ancestor. The most driven Hermetic apprentices understand that some causes need martyrs, and aren't always above volunteering their teachers.

Ghostly Warder (Hermetic)

An Hermetic ghostly warder arises when a magus driven by a Virtue or Flaw (such as Higher Purpose) dies without seeing their work complete. They return to guide their charges, and shape their lives. Hermetic Ghostly Warders can teach the Arts, and the value of this Virtue is dependant on their Art scores. It's important to remember that death trauma may addle spirits, so the character's master may not have all of the faculties they had in life.

A player whose character dies cannot select that character as the ghostly warder for its replacement without the storyguide's permission. Ghostly warders of this type are always NPCs and are unlike-

ly to be characterised in the way their previous player finds accurate. This is because death simplifies, almost caricaturises, spirits. All active ghosts are monomaniacs, because when they cease being driven, they fade away.

An Hermetic Ghostly Warder costs +5 for a magus who died within 30 years of initiation, +6 for a magus who died between 31 and 60 years after gauntlet and +7 for a magus who died more than 60 years after gauntlet. These values assume the Warder has one Art score (of 20, 25 or 30 respectively) that they are willing and able to teach. For every added Art that the warder is willing to teach, add +1. If you want a character that can teach across a broad range of Arts, don't buy it as a personal virtue; select it as a variant of the covenant's library at creation. If the ghost is unwilling or unable to teach any Art, then reduce these scores by 1.

Magic item

Magic items owned by a recently-Gauntletted magus are usually found or produced by their parens. This means that the lab text for creating the item, its powers and triggering actions, are all known to the parens and whoever has access to their memories or papers. A very few parentes, in House Tremere and Tytalus especially, hide additional effects in their magic items, which allow them to execute apprentices who later prove dangerous or uncooperative.

Mentor and Training

Most magi retain only distant contact with their parens for the first few decades after gauntlet. This is one of the stages that magi go through as they grow up, and is recognised and accepted in Hermetic culture. A few retain close links to their teachers, for example by remaining in the same covenant. These can be selected as mentors and trainers, but in many houses this is considered a childish practice, an extension of the infantile stage of apprenticeship. House Tremere is an obvious exception.

A second option, common in certain houses, is entering the mentorship of the character's eldest Hermetic sibling. This allows the heir of the leadership of the lineage to develop strong personal connections with his or her contemporaries. Eldest siblings have less free time, and fewer resources, than their masters.

Protection

Protection is an extension of the reputation of the protector. Where their reputation does not reach, this virtue is of little immediate value. It does purchase you an avenger, should your character be killed. Protectors are not suicidal, but are willing to carry through threats of retribution against those who harm the character, provided the likelihood of success is high.

A character's parens can serve as their protector, provided they are sufficiently belligerent, but they are likely to be influential only among Hermetic magi, and can be called on only in emergencies. Much as a character whose patron is a bishop cannot
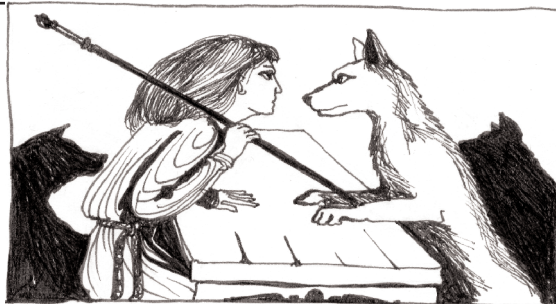
expect this to discomfit a dragon, and can expect it to be of only limited effectiveness when ambushed by faeries, so a character with a magical protector should expect little assistance with problems concerning local nobility or the Church. An obvious exception here are parentes from House Jerbiton, who are of use in mundane settings, but are often less useful than, for example, a Flambeau master during a Wizard's War.

Magical Animal Companion

Recently gauntleted magi who have magical animal companions have often been given them by their parens. These animals are often relatives of the master's familiar. Magi are usually psychologically similar to their parens, so they are suited to a similar familiar anyway. Further, most parentes use familiars as childminders during that athletic, adventurous period during early puberty when apprentices are such a bother, and this tend to imprint deeply.

The large numbers of familiars, Bjornaer magi, faerie animals and breeding programmes which covenants gather have led, in several cases, to the foundation of extended families of intelligent animals, each linked to a House or Lineage. A particularly promising juvenile is paired to an apprentice as a companion, in the hope that they will formalise the bond after the Gauntlet. The oldest animal lineage is the Wolves of Coeris, who are descended from Tremere's familiar. The Black and Tabby prides, centred at Valnastium and Harco respectively, also claim descent from a Founder's familiar, but have kept less conclusive genealogical documentation. They do have far more Bjornaer ancestors than the wolves.

Flaws redux

Black Sheep

The basic flaw for a magus who is trying to escape a lineage, this flaw is only appropriate if the rest of your family has wiped its hands of you, and attacks you only when you make yourself irritating. For vengeful families, review the Enemies flaw.

Driving Goal

The desire to found a lineage is a Driving Goal. Magi whose paters have this Flaw are often Tormented. Some, alternatively, find their masters tremendously self-sacrificing, limiting their own studies to produce magical items, longevity potions and new members for the new lineage.

Enemies

The flaw for those who have annoyed their family beyond simple torment, the Enemies flaw doesn't
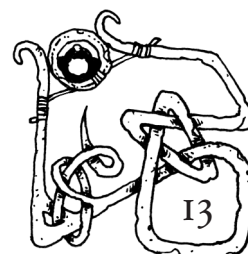
necessarily mean that the character's family are willing to commit murder, but they certainly desire that all of the character's ventures fail. It is important to discuss this Flaw with your fellow players before selecting it.

Favours and vows

Sometimes debts are inherited along with goods. Several lineages owe favours to various powerful individuals or groups. These are recorded in treaties witnessed by Quaesitores, or are noted in the Peripheral Code. They either lie silently waiting for a desperate magus to cash his marker, or are traded openly, as commodities that a line can buy back when it has the resources.

Vows are also passed through the generations, usually because the wording of the original agreement binds the magus to train apprentices who will continue his service after his death. Vows can be forced upon descendants by the founder of a lineage, or can be inflicted as a form of Hermetic retribution. Some vows contain concluding states other than success. For example a vow may force a line of Flambeau to never fight a certain Tytalus magus, or his descendants for seven generations, unless they engage in diabolism, or declare Wizard's War on a magus of the Flambeau line. See the Obligation flaw for another possible Vow.

Storyguides interested in a saga set around fulfilling vows and repaying favours might find *Noble House* by James Clavell instructive.

Haunted

The equivalent of Hermetic Ghostly Warder, this spirit does not like the character it is warding, or feels it should completely redefine the character's lifestyle, to bring out their obvious potential, or help them meet their manifest destiny. These hauntings

cost somewhere from -4 to -6 depending on the ghost's age at death. Add 1, reducing the value of the flaw, if the ghost is possessive enough that it would prefer others not kill the character, and is willing to make minor efforts to reduce the harm they suffer to, for example, torture or permanent disfigurement. Shouting at Hermetic ghosts will not make them go away.

Storyguides should be careful not to allow players to select this flaw, design a haunt similar to a character they'd like to play, and then cave in to the ghost's demands. A storyguide ambushed by this method should make the ghost a perfectionist. No amount of "giving in" is sufficient for a driven ghost, and the dead are not always rational.

Obligation

Certain lineages enforce quasi-feudal loyalty to a primary descendant of the Founder, a mixture of the Obligation and Vow flaws. A character taking this flaw loses about a season per year to his duties. Once the character matures they are likely to be consulted by the line's ruler about major decisions, although the form and degree of the consultation vary by line. Unlike the Tremere, who turn their lack of a sigil into a virtue once they succeed at overcoming their masters, elder obligatees do not lose this flaw, unless they become the ruler of the line, or make a deal with the ruler to reduce their service to token.
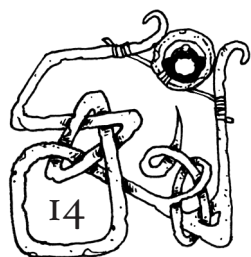
Lineage Plagued by Supernatural Entity

A family plagued by a supernatural entity can keep better track of their foe than an individual, and can arrange re-enforcements for decisive strikes against sites which the foe values. For a magus with a Plagued lineage, subtract one from the cost of this flaw.

needs to be developed which neither incites intrafamilial hatred nor encourages patricide.

Mortal politics

Some magi want to remake European politics. For various reasons, mortal institutions are surprisingly resilient. Killing a single nobleman will delay a policy, perhaps, but the rationale for his decision acts almost like a living thing, hovering over the vestments of his office, waiting for a new vessel to possess. Once a new nobleman takes office, then, far more often than not, the policy will also seem wise to him, and the magi will either have to depend on serial murder, corrupting the institution or creating new institutions.

Serial murder is cheap, difficult to prove, and, used appropriately, buys a great deal of time. Killing kings is more difficult than murdering minor nobility, but child-rulers are particularly useful for most Hermetic purposes, since regency councils are either conservative or wracked with infighting. In those states where a single relative acts as regent, civil war following succession is usual, which gives Hermetic assassins additional cover. Sometimes magi are fortu-

nate, and churn through noblemen until they find a fellow interested in some other policy, which distracts attention from whatever the magi are defending.

Corrupting mundane institutions is difficult, because most of them are already debased. Trying to influence the selection of royal officers is a popular sport, but is difficult precisely because so many people are meddling that no plan can encompass all variables. Influencing the selection of local religious officials is even more difficult, because even minor nobility are players at this level, and sometimes the Holy Spirit makes its presence felt and turns all plans to ashes, by apparent co-incidence. That being said, magi have some success as puppeteers.

The most valuable lure offered by covenants is the longevity potion. Many covenants lie about its effects, suggesting that if their pawn betrays them, the suspended age will crash down upon them in an instant, withering them like an autumn leaf. Other magical favours, minor to the Order but of intense significance to mundanes, include charms against misfortune (often spurious), love philtres, contracep-

tives and scrying devices. The Venice Agreement, which limits the power of magical items that can be traded to mundanes, has developed widespread acceptance in the Order. Items which breach it are sometimes designed with Watching Wards which destroy the object, the puppet, or both, should Intellego spells be cast upon them. Although this gives evidence of Hermetic involvement, careful application destroys evidence effectively.

Creating new institutions is difficult, because mundane political structures reflect underlying economic principles. Medieval Europe's economy is based around the provision of a professional class of warriors, supported by the peasantry. A new institution needs to economically support defensive military force, and entrust the tools of war with a segment of the population. The most popular, and longest lasting, solution is to go back to the tribal system, where every farmer is expected to own a weapon and know how to use it. This style is popular in the Western Alps, since the excellent defensive geography makes knights less useful than elsewhere.

The second problem is that the Church supports the concept of the division of society into those who work, those who war, and those who pray. Democracy, although theoretically practiced in the selection of bishops, is anathema to the Church, and the teaching of democratic principles is, with certain exceptions, considered heretical. Other institutions developed by magi are likely to be equally impure.

House politics

Each House distributes power differently, although most have a system that allows some sort of

consultation with house members. Status is built up by publicised, meritorious activity and through personal alliances. The main barrier to attaining political influence within your own House is that it's filled with equally powerful, equally determined, equally intelligent egomaniacs.

Many Houses have officers who deal with some element of the House's administration. Most of these officers live at the Domus Magnae. In other Tribunals, some Houses select, or approve, the leader of house covenants, and many have a single officer who acts as a representative of the Primus, sorting out local difficulties and arranging blocs of votes for Tribunals. These offices are as difficult to attain as each House makes them, and have the powers that are assigned by the Primi.

Gaining office is only the beginning of the difficulties faced by magi seeking political influence within their House. They also need to gain the attention and respect of their fellow members, which is made difficult by geographic spread, the Hermetic habit of equating power with wisdom and, in some Houses, uniformity of focus. Finally, in some Houses, it is only possible to climb upward by treading on the crushed reputations, or charred corpses, of one's rivals.

To gain power within their House, magi need to work toward some goal, other than political power, that the members of their house value. They need to choose a second legacy, and then play double-or-nothing, progressing both toward it, and toward power in the House, their progress in one fuelling their progress in the other. This parallel programme is a weakness that the magus's political rivals can exploit, but each of them also has a second programme, which the player character can disrupt, threaten, or assist. Coalitions, based either on genuine respect or convenience, are common, and the shifting network of alliances and the relative power of each of the players need constant monitoring.

Hermetic politics

The Order acts as a cohesive whole only rarely, but on those few occasions, it is a nigh-irresistible force. Every seven years, a Tribunal-wide project can be implemented. Every thirty-three years, the basic rules that govern how magi interact with each other, and with the powers of the mythic world, are reinterpreted or changed. A magus seeking to influence Hermetic politics needs to lay substantial groundwork before these key meetings take place.

The counteractant for extraordinary political victory is conciliation. For maximum effect, the Grand Tribunal needs to put the majority of its moral and legal force behind a single grand scheme. Allowing the Tribunal to place equal emphasis on the 50 matters that are bought before it ensures that no judgement will have the force to sweep the Order along a new course. Context problems, described below, sometimes sharpen the focus of the Order, allowing for a unified response, but generally the vast political
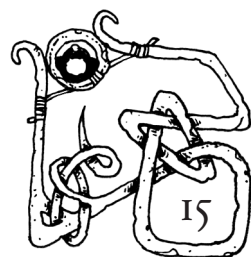
might of the Grand Tribunal is exhausted on minor decisions which keep the Hermetic peace, reducing friction between the lesser Tribunals.

Most Grand Tribunals end with a handful of serious modifications of the Peripheral Code. Each of these is extremely important, and to sponsor such an action to fulfilment is an accomplishment, but usually these have the effect of maintaining the status quo. It's not a minor thing to maintain the peace within the Order, but it's unlikely to be something that will see the magus remembered for generations.

Some Grand Tribunals conclude with a series of tiny, intensely personal, victories for an incoherent cluster of magi. Although these are not, of themselves, significant to the history of the Order, they regularly grant resources, or remove obstacles, toward one of the other Legacies. Politics becomes an investment, almost a gamble, where the magus slows their progress toward their real goal, instead cultivating political power, in the hope that this will make later progress, on the legacy, sufficiently quicker that the delay is justified.

The archmagi

Of the magi in the Order, some thirty are acknowledged as having achieved a special mastery of the Arts. Although their position lacks any formal power, it carries vast implied menace. To be an archmagus is to be a member of the Hermetic equivalent of the local business club. Although it has no formal powers, it has tremendous influence through the concerted action of its members. It allows unparalleled opportunities for networking: the construction of alliances with those powerful enough to make their will extant.

To become an archmagus is extremely difficult: such clubs are useful because they are exclusive. Many archmagi never grant the title to another, demonstrating peerlessness in a single facet of magic. Others grant the title so often that they flavour the entire Council, hence the gradual rise of an etiquette

that limits the number of successors one can induct to six, or even five. It is possible for a magus who has selected their challenge foolishly to protect their reputation by arranging dummy challenges.

Since they need to face only one challenger, of their own choice, annually, it's simple to slip a cat's paw onto the list, preventing a loss. Challengers often fight or bribe each other, to encourage withdrawals, so the cat's paw must be able to defend himself from other, more ardent, competitors. The response of the Council's members to this behaviour varies with the popularity of the transgressor, but is sometimes covertly encouraged. It isn't in the Council's interest to have a cluster of substandard entrants initiated, since each of these would also engender inferior initiates. The Council persecutes, and individual members sometimes declare war upon, mediocre magi who achieve membership. Potential challengers are aware of this, and seriously consider not only if they can defeat a certain magus, but also if their peers will accept them afterwards.

The Council of Archmagi forms a catalogue of aptitude, from which the Order can select agents in times of crisis. Although the archmagi do not take orders from the Quaesitores, it's not unusual for them to request assistance with a certain matter related to the archmagus's challenge arts. Many magi find it difficult to refuse pleas that begin by emphasising that the Order faces a threat, and that the magus has been asked to assist because all know that no other is his equal.

Many other things are rumoured of the archmagi. An activity that seeds many myths is their custom of removing the corpses of initiates. At a minimum, these corpses would contain substantial quantities of vis, and might be Honoured Dead, corpses which produce vis. Their ghosts might be used as a panel of experts, consulted much as the Criamon Primi are. Even more fanciful stories, about reincarnation, ghosts bound in familiars, demon worship, and other
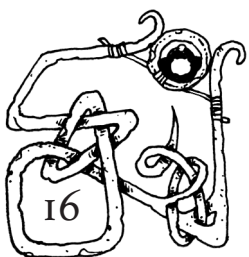
exotica, circulate amongst the apprentices of the Order.

The archmagi have no badge of office, or formal symbol for their grouping used to identify it to outsiders. This is a form of inverse ostentation: the archmagi are so powerful they need no symbol, and others are expected to know who they are. Persistent gossip indicates that they have ceremonial garments that adorn them during their meetings. Robes of various colours and animal masks, possibly Egyptian in appearance, have been pictured in poetic and fictional works describing Conclaves of the Council. These, it is further supposed, mark some form of internal hierarchy. If such robes exist, the Legates who take possession of the body of a dead archmagus remove them. The Legates have some private system of knowing that an archmagus has passed on, which leads, again, to speculation.

## Context Problems: Tentatively Identified

Context problems, to borrow a term from Iain M. Banks, are those that arise from outside the paradigm, or worldview, of the magi. They are difficult to counter because they include elements which make

no sense to the magi, or which exceed the experience of the Order. Magi who resolve context problems are the heroes in the history of the Order, but this is a legacy for which it is difficult to prepare. Those defending the Order from unknown threats are, necessarily, reactive.

Forward thinking, or morbid, magi have identified a handful of long-term context problems which the Order might be facing. None have demonstrated that these are brewing crises, and many, more optimistic, magi feel that specific, preventative preparation in one or more of these fields is a waste of resources. In those few cases where consensus is broad, no magus has yet made the revolutionary leap of intuition that demonstrates a solution.

The Old Ones

Many magi believe that they are descended from an ancient race that is gone for now, but not forever. They see not only threats, but also opportunities, in seeking out, and possibly awakening, these antediluvian progenitors. This legend becomes a solid context problem when someone finds a clue or hint that makes the return of the Old Ones more than a theoretical scenario. Characters overcome this context problem by working out what the Old Ones are, how
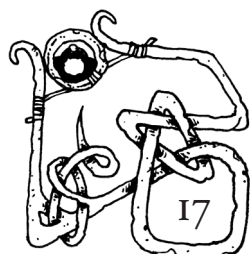
Cumulative representation

Remember, when running a Grand Tribunal, that it is a representative body whose members are selected by lesser Tribunals or House tradition. This means that each delegate is usually of one of four types: consensus, charismatic, representative, primus.

Consensus candidates are the terrain around which other magi fight political skirmishes. Since the decisions of tribunals enter the Peripheral Code, consensus delegates sometimes have little manoeuvring room. The other candidates know what resolutions were passed in the lesser Tribunal that sent those candidates. They know what issue the consensus candidate will place before the Tribunal, and what arguments they will use to re-enforce their position. Consensus candidates are unable to surprise their political foes, and may not be able to trade votes for support, preventing them attracting allies.

Charismatic candidates are selected because they have the ability to persuade others. Although the motion they are to put before the Grand Tribunal has usually been dictated by their own Tribunal, they have usually played a role in the drafting process, and in the preparation of the evidence which support it. The most skilled charismatic candidates have the trust of their constituents, who often give them sufficient discretion that they can trade their vote on issues their Tribunal considers unimportant for backing on the Tribunal's proposals. Some charismatics are visionaries, and add a degree of unpredictability to tribunal proceedings, since even if their votes are tied by the Peripheral Code, they usually have the right to speak on issues, and swing the mood of the meeting.

Representatives arrive from Tribunals that are dominated by a single political force, and they represent that force on all issues. If this is a single covenant, like Doissetep in the Provençal tribunal, the representation of that covenant overshadows the wellbeing of the lesser Tribunal, in the representative's mind. If the force is larger than a covenant, these magi form the core bloc of votes within a primitive political party. The most obvious examples are the representatives from Normandy and Transylvania, who almost always support the Primi of Tytalus or Tremere. Such candidates need not declare their motion in advance, which makes them surprising, but they can usually be dealt with as a group, which makes them valuable allies.

Sometimes demagogues arise by chance, favouring an idea that is held by all-powerful parties in a lesser Tribunal. For example, a population control movement might form about the representatives from Novgorod and the Alps, simply because both Tribunals are solidly in favour of population control.

Primi are similar to representatives in that they don't need to show their hand before the Grand Tribunal convenes. Primi generally speak on behalf of, at minimum, a loose coalition of magi of similar view. The motions put by the Primi are requested and discussed last, which allows them to wait and see if someone else brings up one of the matters they'd like to discuss. Few Primi are answerable to anyone for the motion they put, and if they decide not to change their mind, or modify their initial proposal, they are not in breach of the Peripheral Code.

---

they are related to Hermetic magi, and what the effect of their return will be. They need then to resolve the crisis by either releasing or containing these enigmatic ancients.

The Myth of the Mundanes

The Dominion is erasing magical aurae and vis harvesting sites as it swells with the mundane population. This might become a serious context problem when senior Hermetic magi begin preying on their weaker sodales, to accumulate the scarce resources that remain. To overcome this problem a magus would have to develop a new Hermetic lifestyle, or a new way of accessing vis. Examples of solutions toward which magi are already working include: the Order embracing Pious Magushood; the Pope declaring that Hermetic magic is not evil and retempering the Dominion; mass migration to uninhabited lands; flight into Arcadia or the Magic Realm; development of spells which work well in the Dominion and colonisation of the Undersea or Upper Airs. To resolve this dilemma requires first the formulating of a solution and then convincing all other Hermetic magi to adopt it.

Cestus Numina

Certain Hermetic magi believe the fae will eventually be so disturbed by the predations of their sodales as to strike back against the Order. Characters can overcome this threat in two ways. The first is to so thoroughly understand the fae that they become slaves to Hermetic power, much as the elements are. The second is to successfully promulgate a new Hermetic culture that irritates the faeries less. A third option is to ally with the faeries and turn renegade.

The Return of the Druids

It can be safely assumed that were the followers of Diedne to return in belligerent frame of mind, they would strike without warning, and with overwhelming force. Presumably they'd disguise the motive for, and method of, their attack. This would give them the initiative in their Crusade against the other Houses, until someone developed an understanding of them.

A subtler context problem lurks within the Diedne threat. Most of those concerned about their return believe that the Order, once it had recovered from the first wave of assaults, would overcome the Deidne using the same methods employed during the Schism War. This is an incorrect and dangerous assumption. The Mercurial wizards who formed the core of the Flambeau forces were destroyed in the final major battle (see *The Tempest* for details) and
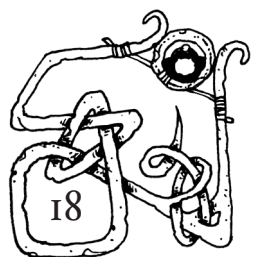
their descendants may not be capable of performing the conflagration rituals that were essential for victory. Also, were the Druids to return, it would demonstrate that the methods used during the Schism War did not effectively exterminate the foe and at best could purchase a second, similarly limited, victory.

A New Bonisagus

The Hibernian covenant of Cirricus Ruber claims to use a new Theory of Magic, startlingly superior to that of Bonisagus, which they refuse to release, fearing another Schism. This highlights the duality in the nature of the House of Bonisagus. While continuing to defend the genius of the Founder, many of them are doing their best to sabotage the Hermetic paradigm from inside, trusting that someone else, the Trianomans for example, will ensure that the transition between phases is smooth.

When a magical breakthrough is made, complex political forces crystallise about the researcher. In the short term, those with the breakthrough prosper best if they do not share it, provided none know they have it, developing skills superior to their sodales. They prosper least well if they do not share the breakthrough but others know they have it, since this arouses both fear and envy in their sodales, each of which waters the ever-present seed of Hermetic violence. House Bonisagus charts the middle course, strengthening themselves then their sodales, and then working to maintain the status quo.

That knowledge is released to everyone doesn't mean that it has no effect on the political balance within the Order. If, to use the example given in the Wizard's Grimoire, a magus discovers how to halve the cost of studying from vis, the economy of the Order shifts in response. Tensions in Rome and Normandy would recede. Fewer people suggest the imminent need to flee the Dominion. The violent houses have more vis to waste on certamen and extending spell ranges, while the Verditius can create items more cheaply. Other breakthroughs are of little interest to many Houses, but strongly favour one.

To use another example from the *WGRE*, consider the political effects of the discovery of a method for creating elemental fire, lowering all Creo Ignem spell levels by 5. This would strongly favour the Flambeau, since enhancing spells with vis would be cheaper; favour the Verditius, since they could squeeze more effects into each item; but have no real effect on most other magi. The Merinitans would consider the development negative, even if they were provided with the new magic theory.

To overcome this context problem, characters need to determine the effects the research will have on Hermetic culture, decide on a new balance of power within the Order, and smooth the transition to that neoteric state. For militarily applicable discoveries, the characters have to ensure that those with access to the materials don't purge the Order of their foes, using legal, but now disequilibrate, Wizard Wars.

Covenants as Characters

by Erik Dahl

The covenant in **Ars Magica** can be seen as more than a setting, since it is the common link to all characters in a saga. Indeed, it might be seen as a character in and of itself: a collection of stats and traits that helps to define all those who live within it, played as a whole by the entire troupe, much like a grog that always interacts with the characters.

It seems most appropriate to me that as a covenant has elements of character about it, it should be designed in a way that more closely resembles a character. Perhaps the rules for designing a covenant could be more similar to the rules for designing a character, and perhaps there is no need to complicate the process by introducing different kinds of points and traits.

Since the first read, the canonical rules for designing covenants have felt extremely complicated to me, and yet still oddly lacking in detail. Thus, I have designed new rules for designing and running covenants. They attempt to simplify the existing rules, but also to develop them more deeply, to allow for richer descriptions and a greater feel for the mythic qualities of a covenant.

I have condensed the eight Characteristics and their respective traits into values that represent more general aspects of the covenant, in the spirit of characters' Characteristics. I have also designed a method by which a covenant can grow and change over time without modifying these standards, using Virtues and Flaws and a flexible scale for measuring the Seasonal model.

I would like to thank Bjarke Roth for his help with this article. Besides the improvements he made to the whole of the text with his insightful comments and testing, he has spent a lot of time with the library rules and was able to provide incredibly detailed data, as well as excellent suggestions on how to simplify it. I hope that he continues to share his thoughts and ideas in the future.

Covenant Characteristics

Covenants, as I have outlined them, still have eight Characteristics, much in the same way that characters do. They can be broken into four groups of two, with both attributes in a pair generally related to each other. These are Access/Relations, Extent/Defenses, Income/Inhabitants, and Library/ Magic. The values you initially assign to these can range from -3 to +3, with 0 being the average.
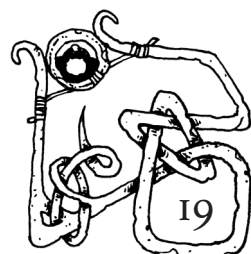
These values are the backbone of your covenant. Typically, they do not change over time, for they represent what makes your covenant unique. In unusual situations, such as when a covenant passes from one season into another, the covenant may effectively become a new character, building a different setting upon an older one. In such cases these Characteristics may be altered, but for most covenants the basic Characteristics will remain the same from its founding until its destruction.

If you anticipate a covenant changing greatly during a season, you may want to rate it with the expected characteristics rather than the actual characteristics, and make up the difference with temporary Virtues and Flaws, as explained later. For example, a spring covenant may have no library or structures at all to start with, but as it will soon acquire them, you should project these scores when designing it.

Keep in mind that these Characteristics represent the general environment of the covenant, and while the specifics may change and grow or fade, they describe a foundation upon which the covenant is built. When designing a covenant, you can assign these values as you would a character, either by rolling dice and giving them a random score, or by starting with seven points and assigning them in a pyramid fashion to each of the different sets of values.

The specifics of what each covenant Characteristic represents are described below. If you are familiar with the covenant rules in **Ars Magica Fourth Edition**, these may seem very similar, but they are not simply the traits of each Characteristic summarized into one category. You may want to read them carefully to determine how they vary from the previous covenant rules.

Access

This rates the location of the covenant, addressing the difficulty it will have in obtaining supplies, and how far removed it is from the rest of the world. A covenant with high Access will have necessary resources readily available, and a fairly high profile. A covenant with low Access will be more difficult to reach, and thus will receive less timely information and have difficulty obtaining important materials.

The value of the Characteristic determines the frequency of visitors to the site, according to the following chart, and also determines the distance the covenant's inhabitants must travel in order to obtain the covenant's supplies. These are described as inexpensive, standard and expensive. Inexpensive goods include such necessities as water and firewood. Standard goods are usually found in a village or hamlet, and require simple labor to manufacture: food, clothing, beer, etc. Expensive goods, such as lab equipment, usually require more substantial work and are typically found in larger cities.

Relations

Relations addresses the opinion that the covenant's neighbors have of it and its members. Poor

|	
+5	immediate access to all goods, visitors twice a day
+4	immediate access to inexpensive and standard goods, expensive goods within half a day, visitors every day
+3	immediate access to inexpensive goods, standard and expensive goods within half a day, visitors every two days
+2	immediate access to inexpensive goods, standard goods within half a day, expensive goods within one day, visitors every few days
+1	immediate access to inexpensive goods, standard and expensive goods within one day, visitors every week
+0	immediate access to inexpensive goods, standard goods within one day, expensive goods within two days, visitors every two weeks
-1	immediate access to inexpensive goods, standard goods within one day, expensive goods within several days, visitors every month
-2	immediate access to inexpensive goods, standard goods within two days, expensive goods within several days, visitors every two months
-3	immediate access to inexpensive goods, standard goods within two days, expensive goods within a week, visitors every season
-4	half a day to inexpensive goods, standard goods within several days, expensive goods within a week, visitors twice a year
-5	half a day to inexpensive goods, standard goods within several days, expensive goods within two weeks, visitors every year

Relations indicates that the covenant is not well-liked; perhaps it even has enemies who seek to undermine its success. Good Relations means that the covenant enjoys a good reputation or has many surrounding friends and allies who will come to your aid when needed.

Much like Presence can affect a character's social interactions with others, Relations modifies how visitors and outsiders treat the members of the covenant. When making social rolls associated with the covenant, such as when negotiating on its behalf or dealing with locals, you may add this characteristic. This value might also be applied to rolls that determine the quality of information about current events that is available to your covenant as a whole, based on the willingness of others to pass on news to you.

Extent

An average covenant has enough space for magi and their custos to live and study comfortably. It usually can accommodate at least one impressive structure, like a library or a council chamber. Covenants with large Extent can accommodate many more inhabitants, while a covenant lacking in Extent will have much less space, due to physical boundaries or considerations like the weather and natural features of the land.

Generally speaking, each point of Extent corresponds to space for an impressive structure, two laboratories or specialist's shops, individual living
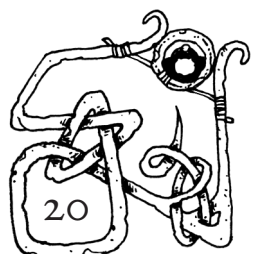
quarters for up to ten people, or a common area for up to 25 grogs. The average covenant has 15 of these points to spend, which are added and subtracted in a pyramid fashion. Thus, a covenant with -3 Extent would have only 9 points of space as a baseline.

This characteristic applies more to space in use than actual structures or available space. A covenant with a network of unexplored caves would not need to buy additional points of space for the potential room, unless it expanded into them beyond its usual living area.

Defenses

Because of the threats that assail a typical covenant, Defenses is a gauge of how defensible the location and buildings are. A covenant with poor Defenses will have dangerous weaknesses that can be exploited by an enemy, such as crumbling walls or secret means of approach. Good Defenses indicates heavy brush, steep slopes, strong walls or elaborate structures that could help to hold off attackers.

The value of this Characteristic is added or subtracted to all rolls associated with defending or protecting the covenant from physical attack, such as identifying a threat or withstanding an assault. In addition, each pyramid point indicates a structural or natural defense that may be exploited by either the attackers or defenders.

Income

A covenant's income is the source of its comfort. A covenant with high Income has many renewable resources, be they vis or silver or raw materials. Wealthy covenants often keep a store of items and weaponry with which new members can be outfitted, or stores of silver to be used to purchase such things when they become necessary. Impoverished covenants must go into debt to survive.

The average covenant earns just enough to support its inhabitants and maintain its buildings. Subtract Extent from Income; any remainder is a yearly surplus if positive, debt or disrepair if negative. Each pyramid point of the total is roughly equal to 5 pawns of vis, 50 pounds of silver, or a store of raw materials or equipment worth about 100 pounds of silver. Thus, a covenant with +0 Extent and +3 Income might harvest up to 30 pawns of vis every year, while the same with -2 Income would come up short 150 pounds of silver a year – if this was not paid, the covenant would probably lose people, space or other valuables.

Most covenants will not have a negative Income, because they will not last long without it. However, a covenant with strong patrons or a large store of silver can probably last a long time, until such time as its inhabitants find something on which they can live.

Inhabitants

A happy covenant will attract and retain many magi and covenfolk, while an unhappy covenant will be unable to get more than a few, and will have difficulty keeping them active. This value represents the general living conditions and the number of inhabitants that the covenant can comfortably support. A positive Inhabitants score means that the covenant engenders loyalty and goodwill among its members. A covenant with negative Inhabitants will have few members, and difficulty retaining the people it recruits.

The value of this Characteristic is added to morale and loyalty rolls. If the total number of people living at the covenant is greater or less than the space available for them in Extent, the difference is also applied to Inhabitants, representing people with extra room or without the space to live comfortably. If Inhabitants is positive, the covenant can effectively support more Inhabitants than it has space for, and is generally a pleasant community to live in.

Having a lot of Inhabitants, or not having very many, is not necessarily a good or bad thing for the covenant. A covenant can always find more people, depending on its Access to them and its Relations with them. Whether or not they can get along with others is what determines their value within the covenant. Thus, this Characteristic describes the loyalty and goodwill among the people at the covenant, rather than being a hard measure of the number of people living there.
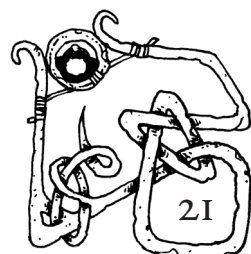
Library

Often more than stores of food and materials or collections of vis and silver, magi place great value in their books. Even a pitiful covenant with a horrible Library will probably have one or two lab texts, a spell grimoire with *Aegis of the Hearth*, and a few summae from which the magi may study. A great Library will consist of hundreds of books on diverse subjects.

As books are considered exceptionally valuable commodities to magi, they receive their own category and are not considered part of Income, above. However, in order for a covenant to improve its Library, it must either acquire new books or invest in the materials necessary to write its own, and thus must have either good Access or surplus Income.

As currently written, I have found the rules for designing a covenant's library incredibly time-consuming. Rather than assigning a number of spell levels and developing specific books, I suggest a more general approach.

Using the following scale, every library is assigned a Level, Quality, and Depth. The Level determines the maximum target level of any given book in the library, and the Quality represents the book's Quality. Depth is used to determine if a given topic would be represented, or if an unusual kind of book would be available.

These numbers can be adjusted based on the strengths and weaknesses of the covenant. You can treat any given subject as one place higher on the scale, but you must balance it with at least one subject that is one place lower. For example, a -2 Library might have a very good Aquam section, and thus would have a book rated Level 7 Quality 9, but its

Ignem books would suffer, being only Level 4 Quality 8.

Level	Quality		Depth of library
-5	1	6	Essential
-4	3	7	Essential
-3	4	8	Basic
-2	6	8	Basic
-1	7	9	Common
+0	9	9	Common
+1	10	9	Common
+2	12	10	Uncommon
+3	13	10	Uncommon
+4	15	11	Rare
+5	16	12	Rare

Other Books

It is easiest to assume that a covenant has only summae. However, if you would like to be able to study from other kinds of books, you can use Depth to determine if those kind of books would be available. Low-level libri quaestionum might be found in a Basic library, and higher levels in a Common or Uncommon library. Commentaries or tractatii might be part of an Uncommon library, and authorities might be found in Rare libraries.

The numbers for Level and Quality must be modified a little for other types of books. For libri quaestionum, the maximum target is half the Level of summae, and you should add 3 to the Quality. For commentaries, double the summae Level and subtract 3 from the Quality. Tractatii have Quality equal to the magnitude of the spell.

Spells

When a character wishes to learn a spell, you must determine whether or not the spell could be found in the library. Generally, the covenant's Depth indicates if the spell would be available. It is up to the storyguide to rate a given spell according to its rarity, but generally speaking, low level spells are more common, Ritual spells are rarer, and spells in books other than the main rulebook are rarer still. Any specialties or weaknesses of the library should also be applied to the spells – the sample library above would be less likely to have Ignem spells, but more likely to have Aquam.

Knowledges

You can also study Knowledges in the library. Knowledges must be assigned a rarity, just like spells, to determine whether there is a book available in your library. For summae, the Level should be divided by 3, or by 2 if it concerns Magic Theory.

Note that additional books and spells may still be added to the library later. These additional works should be considered separately, though, rather than by attempting to adjust the characteristic. This system is only intended to reduce the difficulty in creating a starting library.

Magic

Also of primary importance to magi is a covenant with a high Magical component. This is one of the greatest indicators of the quality of their labs, for it determines the strength of their Magical aura, and often colors the general nature of the covenant. A covenant with negative Magic will have little or no aura, poor labs, or perhaps supernatural phenomena, any of which could severely curtail its magical activities.

The average covenant has a Magical aura of 3. The value of this Characteristic is added or subtracted from it, so that a covenant with Magic -3 will have no aura at all. Since most lab activities require an aura, the magi in a covenant without an aura will have to travel at least an hour to find one whenever they wish to conduct their studies. If this Characteristic is reduced below -3, it becomes a Dominion aura.

There are Flaws, below, that describe other kinds of auras. If you would like the covenant to have access to a Magic aura, but be located within another aura, take the characteristic that describes the level of the magical aura to which you have access.

	Covenant aura	Other aura
-5	Dominion 2	Magic 1
-4	Dominion 1	Magic 2
-3	no aura	Magic 3
-2	Magic 1	
-1	Magic 2	
+0	Magic 3	
+1	Magic 4	
+2	Magic 5	
+3	Magic 6	
+4	Magic 7	
+5	Magic 8	

Covenant Virtues and Flaws

Characteristics can be used to give a general feel for the flavor of a covenant. Especially when describing a distant covenant or a place the characters are visiting, only general indicators are necessary to understand how it compares. In more detailed situations, however, Covenant Virtues and Flaws can provide atmosphere and allow for unique settings that break the mold, so to speak. Like a character's Virtues and Flaws, these traits provide depth to the covenant, and balance themselves out to create a well-rounded setting.

Over time, a covenant will improve or decay, gaining or losing different advantages and disadvantages. Covenant Virtues and Flaws can be used to represent this cycle. While the ideal covenant would have a balanced number of each, through play these totals may change significantly, resulting in a covenant with few (if any) Flaws, or even one with no Virtues to speak of.

Covenant Virtues and Flaws may be gained and lost using a method similar to the way characters gain and lose Virtues and Flaws. Many troupes allow significant story events to achieve this end, or use rituals and ordeals similar to those described in **The Mysteries**.

As covenants follow a seasonal metaphor, beginning in Spring and growing through Summer into Autumn and finally dying in Winter, the following

table of guidelines is given as a suggestion for the ratio of a starting covenant's Virtues and Flaws, to better represent the differences between the various stages of its development. For example, a Summer covenant might begin with as many as 10 Virtues and 10 Flaws, but a Spring covenant might have only 5 Virtues balancing 10 Flaws.

Season	Maximum	Ratio
Spring	+10/-20	1:2
Summer	+10/-10	1:1
Autumn	+20/-10	2:1
Winter	+20/-30	2:3

Using this chart, it is easy to determine at a glance a given covenant's Season, since the ratio of its Virtues to its Flaws will give some idea of its relative strength. A covenant with two points of Virtues and five points of Flaws is probably late spring, while one with 30 points of Virtues and seven points of Flaws might be described as early autumn.

Here are a number of ideas for Covenant Virtues and Flaws that you might use to uniquely describe your covenant, but you are also encouraged to invent your own. Generally speaking, the value of a Virtue or Flaw is equal to a number of pyramid points, which can then be applied to the value of one of the Characteristics, or compared to other Virtues to determine how much it would help a given character living in the covenant. For example, a holy relic belonging to the covenant would probably be a +3 Virtue, since its value is similar to the character Virtue of the same name. If the relic generated a yearly income, due to pilgrimages and the like, that effect might also be described with an Increased (Income) Virtue.

Many Virtues and Flaws may be taken multiple times, and I advocate "stacking" these rather than adding up them as separate values. For example, a covenant with 75 pawns of vis in storage could take three separate +1 Virtues to represent this, each indicating 25 pawns. Instead, I suggest you consider each duplicate Virtue as a number of pyramid points in a stack, and use the total to determine the final cost of the Virtue. In this case, three +1 Virtues would equal one +2 Virtue. This may also be appropriate for Virtues or Flaws that are not identical, but are similar enough to warrant stacking.

Variable Virtues

Allies: The covenant has an ally or several allies, outside entities that actively support it and work towards its success. They might do so because they like the covenant, because the covenant pays them, or for even more sinister reasons. The cost of this Virtue is determined by the ally's relative strength and the amount of time it devotes to your aid. A friendly villager who passes on information once a year might be worth +1, while a secret society of elder magi devoted to the covenant's success might be +10.

Cyclic Aura (positive): Your covenant's aura is attuned to some cycle of nature and is therefore stronger at certain times. When those conditions are met, a number of points equal to the cost of this Virtue are added to your magical aura. When dealing with lab work, unless the cycle is greater than seasonal, the average of the normal and increased value is used, to represent the varying aura as a whole during the time that magic is being applied. For example, only the average between night and day cycles is applied to a season of lab work, even if the character works only at night (the changes during the day affect his experiments, distillation, etc.).

Increased (Characteristic): Because of your efforts or beneficial circumstances, one of your covenant's Characteristics has been temporarily increased. Break the cost of this Virtue into pyramid points and add those to the points that make up the Characteristic; for example a +3 Increased (Extent) Virtue would effectively raise a -2 Extent to a +2.

Magic Item: The covenant owns one or more magical artifacts, rated with a pyramid point for each 50 levels of spell effects invested in them. Thus, a covenant with up to 150 levels of spells would be a +2 Virtue, and one with up to 500 levels would be +4. These items may be portable, to be used by anyone in the covenant. If they are built into the covenant, so that they can only be used on the premises, halve the number of spell levels they require.

Varying Aura (positive): Your covenant's aura varies in strength, radiating out from a central feature of the covenant. In a specific area, the size of a point of Extent, the aura is increased by the cost of this Virtue, though it can be stacked multiple times to cover a greater amount of space.

+1 Virtues

Accessible Covenant: The covenant has temporarily gained greater access to its trade supplies, perhaps because of a road or bridge or some other improvement. Treat the covenant's Access as if it were one value higher for the purposes of travel time and finding the distance to materials.

Contested Vis Source: The covenant has access to a source of 10 pawns of vis each year, but it is contested in some way. To collect the vis, they need to win it in a competition, such as by outwitting a faerie or besting the representative of a rival covenant in certámen.

Efficient Buildings: Due to Hermetic rituals or physical improvements, the covenant's labs or other work spaces are better than average. Three of the covenant's rooms gain a bonus of +1 to all magical or craft work done within, or one room gains a +2 bonus.

Good Supplies: The covenant has better access to supplies of a particular type, such as armaments, food, people or exotica. Treat the covenant's Access as one greater when buying supplies of that type.

Quality Library: Special attention and care has been paid to the books in the library, many of which have been glossed or given physical improvements over the years. Add 1 to all book Qualities.

Secluded: The covenant is more difficult to find than its location would suggest, and thus has fewer
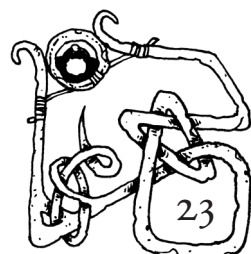
visitors than it would otherwise receive. Treat it as if its Access were one value lower for the purposes of determining the frequency of visitors.

Stored Materials: The covenant has accumulated a large store of mundane equipment, supplies or other raw materials, worth about 500 pounds of silver. This can include any kind of mundane resource to which the covenant typically has access.

Stored Vis: The covenant has a store of surplus vis, up to 25 pawns' worth. It may have been saved up from the covenant's supply, given to the covenant as a gift, or perhaps collected as part of a previous adventure.

Watchful Covenant: The covenant is less likely to be taken by surprise because of good intelligence. Assume that the covenant can protect one of its structural or natural weaknesses during a conflict because of advance warning, and treat the covenant's Defenses characteristic as one greater when making rolls associated with the watch.

+2 Virtues

Good Reputation: Because of the circumstances of your covenant's founding, other magi admire and envy its inhabitants even if they haven't done anything to earn this respect. All magi who join your covenant gain a positive Reputation at level 3 among the Order.

Great (Characteristic): This Virtue raises one of the covenant's Characteristics from +3 to +4. This adds four pyramid points if the characteristic is measured in this way.

Quality Buildings: The covenant's buildings are made of exceptionally good craftwork, with an inventive or simply aesthetically pleasing design. Treat the covenant as if its Extent were one higher for the purposes of determining the morale of its Inhabitants, and as one lower when determining surplus Income.

Specialized Library: The covenant has an impressive collection of books in a particular field, such as a particular Art or a type of Knowledge. Treat the Library characteristic as one greater when studying that topic.

Trained Animals: Several of the covenant's animals are very cunning (but still mundane), and have been taught to follow simple commands. These animals are very valuable, and probably will be mourned as fellow covenfolk should they die or become injured.

+3 Virtues

Guardian Spirit: The covenant is watched over by a benevolent presence, angelic, ghostly or in some other way supernatural. This spirit serves the better interests of the covenant, and may teach, guide or warn its inhabitants when they need its aid. While it has otherworldly powers, it can only manifest under certain circumstances, or perhaps can only be seen by some of the covenant's members. The more powerful it is, the less often it can help.

Land Charter: The covenant has worldly control of the land upon which it is built, and while it may owe fealty and service, it is effectively self-governing on a day-to-day basis.

Magical Regio: The covenant resides on a level of a regio, determined by its aura. There may be higher or lower levels, but they are not generally accessible to the inhabitants or regular visitors, who presumably know a ritual to enter and leave the regio without becoming lost. This Virtue pairs well with Secluded +1.

+4 Virtues

Incredible (Characteristic): This Virtue raises one of the covenant's Characteristics from +3 to +5. This adds nine pyramid points to Characteristics that are measured in this way.

Magical Resources: Many of the covenant's plants, animals or children are magically enhanced, so that they have unusual powers or make excellent apprentices, familiars or enchanted items. Produce from the covenant often has the Gift, or are plants and animals of Virtue, perhaps with strange and magical effects.

+5 Virtues

Mythic (Characteristic): This Virtue raises one of the covenant's Characteristics from +3 to +5. This adds nine pyramid points to Characteristics that are measured in that way. In addition, once per year, the covenant may enable an incredible feat associated with the Characteristic. For example, a Mythic (Income) might bring in a bumper harvest, adding six more points' worth of materials, while a covenant with Mythic (Inhabitants) might gain three extra points of training experience each year.

Variable Flaws

Cursed Item: The covenant owns magical artifacts with baneful effects, rated with a pyramid point for each 25 levels of spell effects invested in the device. Thus, an item with up to 75 levels of spells would be a -2 Flaw, and one with up to 250 levels would be -4. This may be combined with the corresponding positive Virtue, or it may apply to items that are built into the covenant, but it should not be too easy to get rid of it or avoid its effects.

Cyclic Aura (negative): Your covenant's aura is attuned to some cycle of nature and is therefore weaker at certain times. When the conditions are met, a number of points equal to the cost of this Flaw are subtracted from your Magical aura. When dealing with lab work, unless the cycle is greater than seasonal, the average of the normal and decreased values is used, to represent the varying aura as a whole during the time that magic is being applied.

Decreased (Characteristic): Because of neglect or unfortunate circumstances, one of your covenant's Characteristics has been temporarily decreased. Break the cost of this Virtue into pyramid points and subtract those from the points that make up the Characteristic; thus a -3 Decreased (Relations)

Virtue would effectively lower a +3 Relations to a +0.

Enemies: The covenant has one or more enemies, outside entities or internal spies that work toward the covenant's harm. The cost of this Flaw is determined by the enemy's relative strength and the time it devotes to your ruin. A spy in a nearby city might be -1, while a powerful demon consumed with the desire to ruin the covenant might be -10.

Overlapping Aura: Your covenant's aura overlaps with another aura that waxes and wanes, occasionally gaining dominance. The cost of this Flaw is determined based on the type of aura and the frequency of its increasing, as indicated below.

Circumstances

Common (-1): The aura gains dominance in common circumstances, such as during the day or when it is raining.

Uncommon (+0): The aura takes over in relatively uncommon circumstances, such as on particular holidays or in response to a ritual.

Aura

Faerie (+0)

Dominion (-1)

Infernal (-2)

The difference between the covenant's Aura and the level of the overlapping aura is also added to the cost of this Flaw. For example, a covenant with Magical aura 3 and an uncommon Faerie aura 4 would have a -1 Flaw.

Varying Aura (negative): Your covenant's aura is not as strong in outlying areas, as it radiates outward from a central point. This may be due to some kind of supernatural interference or unusual features of the aura. Whatever the case, your aura is one less within the outer third of your covenant's area, and this Flaw may be taken multiple times to represent a larger amount of space or a greater variance. Note that it is common for an overlapping aura from another Realm to "show through" in places where the magic aura is weaker.

-1 Flaws

Dark Secret: The covenant has a secret that would bring shame and perhaps revenge if it were discovered. Others who are not associated with the covenant may be aware of your secret, and its inhabitants must often act to make sure that the full truth is not discovered, lest they suffer unpleasant consequences.

Debt: The covenant has taken out a loan, worth about 500 pounds of silver. The covenant probably has about twenty years to pay it back, but if they don't, consequences may ensue. The covenant has no access to this money now, as it has already been spent. If the loan includes interest, that amount is accounted for in this total.

Favors: The covenant owes a favor to someone, and may be called upon to make good at any time. Ignoring this request might have serious consequences to the covenant.

Inaccessible: The covenant has temporarily become less accessible, perhaps because a road has become unsafe or the closest village has been abandoned. Treat the covenant's Access as if it were one value lower for the purposes of travel time and distance between trading centers.

Inefficient Buildings: The covenant's labs or other work spaces are worse than average, making it difficult to get things done. Three of the covenant's rooms suffer a -1 penalty on all magical or craft work done within, or one room suffers a -2 penalty.

Neglected Library: Due to neglect, wear, or accidents, most of the books in the covenant's library have been damaged somewhat over the years. Subtract 1 from all book Qualities.

Obligation (covenfolk): The covenant is required to perform services for someone at least one season every year, such as clearing bandits from a trade route, guarding a wealthy house, or participating in a tournament. Many different people that live at the covenant can do these services, since they require few special skills or resources, but they must be done or the covenant may suffer consequences.

Oblivious Covenant: For some reason, perhaps because of cover or a lack of watch structures, the covenant is less able to recognize approaching danger. Treat the covenant's Defenses characteristic as one less when making rolls for the watch, and assume that enemies have an additional weakness to exploit when moving against the covenant.

Poor Supplies: The covenant has decreased access to a particular kind of supplies, such as food, armaments, people or clothing. When purchasing that type of supplies, treat the covenant's Access as one less.

Poor Seclusion: The covenant is very easy to stumble across, more than its Access would suggest, and thus has more visitors than it would otherwise receive. Treat it as if its Access were one value higher for the purposes of determining the frequency of visitors.

Understaffed: The covenant does not have enough people to maintain its buildings or make full use of the location. Treat its Income as one less when determining the covenant's upkeep and repair.

Vis Debt: The covenant owes about 25 pawns of vis to another party. This may be due to a loan, legal directives from the Order, or perhaps to replace others' vis that the covenant has used or accidentally damaged or lost.

-2 Flaws

Bad Reputation: Perhaps because of circumstances associated with your covenant's founding, or simply its location, other magi accord you less respect than you deserve. The covenant's members gain a negative Reputation by association, at 3 among the Order.

Faerie Aura: Your covenant's aura is not a magical aura, but a faerie aura. For magi without Faerie Magic, this will only add half of its strength to magical activities, and will give additional botch dice.
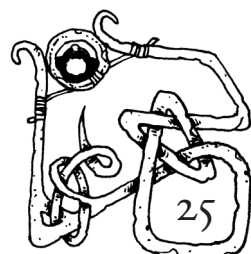
Strange faerie visitors and occasional feelings of disorientation may trouble those who live in the covenant.

Haunted: Ghosts or other spirits that cannot usually be seen haunt the covenant. At certain times, these spirits can become visible or maliciously interfere with the covenant's activities. Because of their negative influence, reduce the effective value of both Inhabitants and Relations by one.

Lacking Library: The library is completely lacking material on an important subject, such as one of the Hermetic Arts or Magic Theory. You cannot study this topic in the covenant's books.

Low Morale: The covenant's inhabitants are depressed and fight amongst each other, creating a very negative environment. Treat the covenant as if both its Inhabitants and its Extent were one value lower for the purposes of determining morale.

Poor (Characteristic): This Virtue lowers one of the covenant's Characteristics from -3 to -4. This subtracts four pyramid points from the Characteristic if it is measured in this way.

Shoddy Buildings: The covenant's buildings are made of exceptionally poor craftwork, allowing in the weather or unpleasant smells, or perhaps it has been badly designed, making it dreadfully inconvenient to live in. Treat the covenant as if its Inhabitants were one value lower for the purposes of determining morale, and as if its Extent were one greater when determining the Income lost to repair.

Weak Library: Your library has less material in a particular subject, and the material it does have is less robust. When studying books within this field, treat the Library characteristic as if it were one less.

-3 Flaws

Discredited Covenant: The quaesitores suspect or have proven that your covenant has participated in terrible crimes in the past, and thus they regard its members with a suspicious eye. You have a bad reputation of the appropriate type among quaesitores, at level 4, and have to watch your step or suffer immediate legal action.

Interfering Regio: The covenant is built in space overlapping a regio associated with another Realm. The covenant's magical aura is generally dominant, but occasionally its members may wander into the regio and become disoriented or trapped. Visitors from the regio are much more frequent; treat the covenant as if its Access were one higher when describing visitors from this regio.

Obligation (magi): The covenant is required to perform services for someone, generally one season each year, and these services require one of the covenant's magi. The covenant can determine which member must actually perform the task, but it must be performed or there will likely be consequences. Magi performing such services will not have time to do lab work during that season.

Outlaws: The covenant does not own the land on which it was built, and the rightful owner has no idea the covenant is there, but will likely disapprove should your presence become known. Legally, you have no right to live there without his permission, and so you must be careful to remain hidden or be prepared to move or fight if the need arises.

-4 Flaws

Dominion Aura: The covenant has a Dominion aura, rated one greater than its magical aura (i.e. a covenant with Magic +0 would have a Dominion 4 aura). The strength of this aura can be increased by taking a greater Flaw, with each additional level added to the value of the aura, i.e. a -5 Dominion Aura Flaw would be two greater, or Dominion 5. Characters wishing to use their magical aura will need to travel at least an hour to avoid the Dominion's influence.

Feeble (Characteristic): This Virtue lowers one of the covenant's Characteristics from -3 to -5. This removes nine pyramid points from Characteristics that are measured in that way.

-5 Flaws

Infernal Aura: The covenant has an infernal aura, rated one greater than its magical aura (i.e. a covenant with Magic +0 would have an Infernal 4 aura). This can also be increased by taking a greater Flaw, with each additional level added to the value of the aura: a -6 Infernal Aura Flaw would be two greater than the covenant's magic aura. Characters wishing to use the covenant's magical aura must travel at least an hour to escape this evil influence.

Pathetic (Characteristic): This Virtue lowers one of the covenant's Characteristics from -3 to -5. This removes nine pyramid points from the Characteristic if it is measured in this way. In addition, once per year, the covenant may suffer some terrible misfortune associated with the Characteristic. For example, Pathetic (Extent) might cause a building to collapse, harming several covenfolk, while a covenant with Pathetic (Access) might be unable to acquire any supplies at all for one season.

Warping Aura: The covenant's aura has a debilitating effect on its inhabitants, causing unpleasant changes over time. Every year, each inhabitant must make an additional aging roll, though if this is failed the negative effects will merely be strange instead of dangerous. Magi, however, must roll for temporary Twilight.

A Sample Covenant: Voluntas

Voluntas is described in Ars Magica Fourth Edition, and here is its write-up, revised so that its Characteristics and general description conform to these rules.

The covenant is described as slightly remote, with a poor reputation. It has some physical defenses and a little surplus income, and while it is lacking a magus, that situation is not negatively affecting the covenant's morale. Its library is very good, perhaps the source of envy and repute throughout the Tribunal, and it also has a very good Magical aura. The buildings are good quality, and the labs have been improved. It has a small debt, and an extremely powerful enemy.
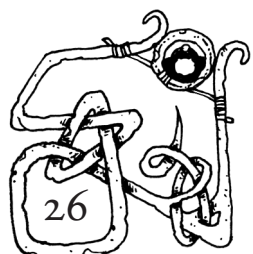
Characteristics

Access: -2

Relations: -2

The covenant's location is kind of off the beaten track, in a swampy moor. Visitors stumble across the covenant every other month or so. It takes a little longer to get supplies, and what is generally on hand is poor quality.

Its neighbors do not think highly of the covenant. The peasants think of it as a home to dangerous wizards, and other magi view it as prone to commit to impossible causes. When interacting with others, these negative impressions precede them, penalizing their social efforts.

Extent: +0

Defenses: +2

The covenant is an average size, with enough room to house a typical number of magi and their servants. Furthermore, its defenses are good, because its location is surrounded with soft ground that is difficult to traverse, and it has two towers that provide some advance warning of approaching threats.

Income: +1

Inhabitants: +0

Voluntas has a small income of silver, and an adequate supply of vis. The magi work together and help each other out, but have no unusual solidarity.

Library: +3

Magic: +2

The covenant has a very good library, probably the source of some jealousy in Britain. It is likely that the magi can learn very quickly when studying from it, and it certainly covers a complete range of topics. The covenant also has a very good Magical aura, at 5. It is likely that magical allies and enemies will be drawn to Voluntas.

Virtues and Flaws

+2 Efficient Buildings

Voluntas has improved two of its labs, making the work of its magi much more efficient. Three +1 Virtues have been stacked to give a +3 bonus to those rooms, making the final Virtue cost +2.

+2 Quality Buildings

Many of the buildings at Voluntas are of particularly good quality.

+2 Good (Library)

The covenant's library is good enough to warrant being increased from +3 to +4.

+2 Allies

The covenant has several sources of information, including an abbot and a merchant. They do not go out of their way to help the covenant, but they do respond to letters and convey important information when time permits them.

-7 Enemies

The covenant's enemy, Blackthorn, is a powerful Autumn covenant, and though it has very little time to devote to Voluntas' ruin, it does have spies there. Most of its negative influence will be political rather than aggressive.

-1 Debt

The covenant still owes about 500 pounds of silver to a lender.

Voluntas is probably regarded as a Summer covenant, with 8 points of Virtues and 8 points of Flaws. Over time, the efforts of its members on the covenant's behalf may overcome some of its Flaws, by defeating or appeasing its enemy. Or, they may improve so much that Blackthorn is no longer such a liability. When that happens, it may come to be considered an Autumn covenant.

Covenant Development

As your covenant grows and changes, like any character it will begin to gather new Virtues and Flaws. As a storyguide, I try to balance new character Virtues with corresponding Flaws, to keep the character from becoming too powerful or one-dimensional, but over the course of a saga characters will eventually begin to gather more of one than the other.
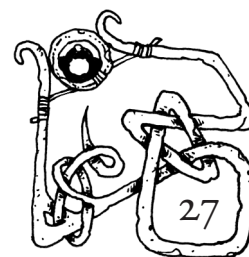
Using this system, I do the same for covenants. When a covenant's efforts give them a new Virtue, I occasionally feel justified in sneaking in a new Flaw during the next session, usually after a major botch or badly handled story decision. However, concentrated effort and adventuring can overcome Flaws or allow new Virtues to be acquired.

Eventually, usually at the end of a saga, the covenant will undergo a drastic change and pass into another season. This is a good time to assign new Flaws or give new Virtues, or to perhaps reassess the covenant's Characteristics in light of its new status.

For story covenants, meaning those that do not belong to the troupe, the number of Virtues and Flaws gives me a general idea of their power levels, and I can approximate their Characteristics fairly quickly to get an idea of their distinguishing features. In most cases, though, non-player covenants get most of their flavor from their setting rather than their stats, and I haven't found the need to introduce detailed changes to them over time. If I need to describe how a covenant has developed using this system, I can just pick a couple of Virtues or Flaws and mention that the covenant has acquired them.

Summary

In short, since my goal is mostly to make designing covenants easier and more rewarding, I hope this article makes you think about how covenants can work in your saga. These rules are admittedly not as detailed as the original mechanics, and they do not have the potential for as regulated simulation of development as those were designed to allow. The accumulation of Virtues and Flaws, and the loss of them over time, may accomplish the same goal, so I hope that you will give this system a run through and let me (and the **Ars Magica** community) know how it works for you.

Dear Abelard

❈ ❈ ❈

Dear Abelard,

Since no one else seems willing to listen, I write to you in hope that you can help me with my predicament.

Three years ago I passed my Gauntlet and was declared a magus of House Ex Miscellanea. The Tribunal of Initiation was held at Occultus Lux in Thebes. My pater, Geoffrey of House Ex Miscellanea, and I were passing through en route to the Levant, when we ran into a visiting quaesitor. One thing led to another, and having been en route to somewhere with my pater most of my life, I was more than happy to accept the subsequent offer of membership at Occultus Lux. Although my duties as a junior member seem no less harsh than my duties as an apprentice, it at least makes me feel like being part of something larger.

The only other junior member at Occultus Lux is Modicus of House Tremere. So we are quite busy doing everything that needs to be done by magi, but that the senior members cannot be bothered to do. Since Modicus rarely make an effort unless it has been spelled out as part of our duties, it is usually me who ends up doing most everything around here. How they ever managed to run this place before I got here is unclear, but I suppose that is just the way such things work. Until recently, I was quite content with my lot.

Then one day last year Modicus started to throw pebbles at me. I told him to stop, but he just mocked me, saying that there was no one around to stop him, and that no one would care about what I said anyway. I kept trying to talk my way out of a confrontation, but it was clear that Modicus would not back down. For the first time in my life I saw no other way than to resort to certámen. So I challenged him with the condition being that he should stop, and by tradition announced my best technique. Seeing the smug grin on Modicus's face, it was clear that this was exactly what he wanted me to do. He picked the form and then gave his own condition, which was that should he win, I would have to copy the spells he was supposed to copy that season. I tried to object to this ludicrous condition, but apparently I had to accept it or allow him to continue to throw pebbles at me.

Needless to say, I lost the certámen, as was to be expected when one like me challenges a Tremere that has had at least a decade or two more time to study the Arts. However, I don't see how else I could have reacted without saying that I also would submit to whatever else he might think of. It seems that only the strong can get justice with certámen, so it is quite useless to the likes of me.

Knowing that Modicus might try to pull a similar stunt again, I have tried to figure out what limits there are to the conditions given in the certámen. I just cannot believe that this is how it is supposed to work. I will not accept that. I did not become a magus just to become a mere servant. I have been unable to find anything to suggest otherwise, though, and time is running out since Modicus is supposed to copy spells again next season. Unless you can help me, I will probably have to leave Occultus Lux to avoid Modicus.

Signed,   Franz in Thebes

My Dear Franz,

Your position is indeed difficult, and in hopes of providing you context for this unpleasant situation, and also to educate others who read these letters, allow me to expound for a few moments upon the intricacies of certámen.

The tradition of certámen among the Order of Hermes is a worthy and noble one. It provides a method for two wizards to settle disputes between them, rather than by requiring the legal authority of a quaesitor, covenant council, or Tribunal. This does not diminish the authority of these higher courts, and if two magi cannot come to terms on the conditions of their certámen, it seems to me that they must seek the intervention of one of these greater authorities.

In all honesty, I have not been involved in many wizards' duels myself, and I suspect that many of our brothers and sisters in the Order have similarly been lucky enough to avoid personal involvement in this aspect of Hermetic law. But after consultation with my learned sodalis Moratamis of House Guernicus, I feel knowledgeable enough to be able to advise you and my many other readers on the complexities of this venerable arrangement.

Here is the complete text of the rules of certámen, taken from the Peripheral Code:

"938th year of Aries (A.D. 799): Rules for Certámen. Certámen is to be respected as a means of settling disputes decisively. In certámen, the challenger must first choose and state the technique to be used, and the defender must then choose the form. Any magus refusing to engage in certámen or refusing to abide by the results thereof is betraying the spirit of the Code and is to be punished. Those who refuse to accept certámen challenges, therefore, or refuse to abide by the decision of a certámen may suffer more violent coercion by the offended magus and shall be punished by their tribunals. No magus who wins may challenge the losing magus to certámen a second time over the same matter; the loser must abide by
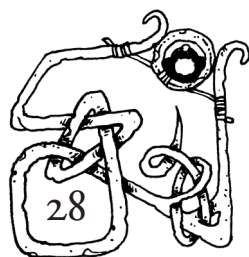
the decision or challenge again. Magi may use raw vis to aid them even in ritual certámen."

A later ruling reads:

"971st year of Aries (A.D. 832): Rules for Certámen. No certámen shall force a magus to give up his rights, nor force a magus to break the Code of Hermes nor the Peripheral Code. The rights protected from certámen include the rights of a praeco leading a tribunal, the rights of a primus ruling a house, and the rights of a quaesitor protecting the Order."

A great deal of confusion about certámen stems from conflicting information. The rules of certámen were added to the Peripheral Code in A.A. 938, but since then an error seems to have occurred in many copies of the text. Some versions mistakenly read "No magus may challenge another magus to certámen a second time unless the magus to be challenged has challenged the first in the meantime." This mistake seems to occur most often in older copies of the Code. I cannot speculate as to how this accident came into being, but I can at least provide the correct passage. According to the law, a magus may challenge another as often as he wishes, so long as by doing so he does not attempt to settle a matter that has already been decided in his favor.

Translator's Note: **Ars Magica Fourth Edition** *and other older sources refer to the earlier rule concerning when a certámen challenge may be issued. The text of the Peripheral Code was changed in* **Wizard's Grimoire, Revised Edition** *to the text cited by Abelard, above. Perhaps this was to prevent the practice of goading another magus into declaring certámen over some unimportant matter, thus making one safe from further challenges from that magus. The change also makes it possible for members of House Tremere to challenge their elders for their sigils more than once in their lifetimes, since they do not have to wait for that elder to challenge them in the meantime.*

Also important to the concept of certámen is the requirement that magi will respect it as a means of settling disputes. As Moratamis says, "Certámen is a method for settling disputes, not for starting disputes, and thus magi are prohibited from seeking out issues to settle through certámen. Those who do not abide by this law will surely be punished when their actions come to light." If you could have seen the fire in her eyes as she spoke this, you would surely agree that this is so.

I have heard it said that the strictures about the challenger declaring the technique and the defender the form are more tradition than law. Moratamis does concede that if the two magi agree to terms, the result is binding regardless of who declared which Arts. If there is no consensus on this variation to the formula, however, she maintains that the standard procedure must be followed, as the Code clearly states what is proper. Other authorities may interpret this passage more liberally, of course.

Furthermore, if the two participants cannot agree to terms, as when one insists on conditions that the other finds unreasonable, or when there are differing perspectives on what exactly is being disputed, the magi may have to seek a higher authority to settle the matter. A quaesitor might help by clearly outlining the terms so that the magi may duel, or a covenant council may decide the matter for its members if its charter gives them that authority. However, during the intervening time, neither party should behave as if the challenge has not been issued; doing so is refusing to respect the authority of the challenge. Certámen may stall on the terms, but if a magus continues the activities that caused the dispute, he is clearly refusing to engage, and his opponent has grounds to seek harsher justice.

So, my dear Franz, I would suggest that you bring the matter to the attention of House Guernicus. There are many in the Thebes Tribunal who read my letters, and one of them may seek you out in response to your plea. With their help, you may be able to demonstrate that Modicus is abusing the Code. His attempts to bully you into certámen on his terms should fail, now that you are more familiar with the law. You may have to challenge him to certámen again if he continues to harass you, but you do not have to agree to whatever terms he tries to include in the contest. Simply remain steadfast, and declare that he has no claim to your time, and thus it is not a fair challenge. If he argues, seek a quaesitor or one of the senior members of your covenant to decide, perhaps the one who assigned him the duties he is attempting to avoid.

One final note: I have heard it is acceptable to nominate a champion to represent you in certámen, though I have never seen this custom put into practice. Our brothers and sisters of House Mercere must employ this method, as those who do not have the Gift are still entitled to justice. A challenged magus may nominate a second to fight in his stead, and this surrogate and the challenger decide the terms. If, my dear Franz, you fear that despite the intervention of others you will continue to be harassed by Modicus or other magi like him, you might consider finding yourself an advocate, either someone like Moratamis who would like to see a bully learn his lesson, or perhaps a specialist with a more mercenary interest.

✄ ✄ ✄

Dear Abelard,

I am writing to you in anger at the answer you gave to "Margaret in Provence" in your last letter. The poor woman was obviously smitten by a magus, and though you advised her that she had little hope of a virtuous relationship with him, you encouraged her to show him signs of affection. Did it even occur to you that she may have been under a spell of his design?

Many men throughout the Order cruelly take advantage of the women who serve them, especially young and intelligent women that otherwise threaten their masculinity. This magus she "loves" cannot dominate the women with the Gift that he is forced to regard as his equals, and so he preys upon those more susceptible to his wiles. By advising her to
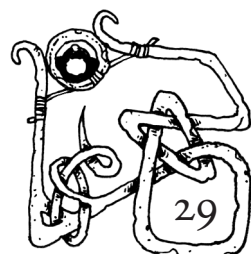
explore his intentions, you play her right into his hands.

This is precisely the reason why we do not encourage relations between magi and mundanes. It is impossible for a wizard to treat someone without his power as his equal. We must care for the mundanes and protect them, but we cannot ever accept them on a common ground. Margaret will find herself used and discarded, with no regard for her position or experience, and this Mentem-man will soon find himself another victim. And if his hold on her heart is very great, despite this callous treatment she may never see him for what he really is!

It is irresponsible of you, Abelard, to overlook this phenomenon. I insist that you correct the problem by copying my letter to those who read your words, so that Margaret may see this and know to seek help from those magae who would be willing and able to aid her.

Signed,   Gloriosa,
follower of Jerbiton, the Rhine

My dear Gloriosa,

Your point is well taken. I did not realize that the poor woman could be in such danger. If that is indeed the case, I hope your cautions will ring true to her and that she will seek assistance wherever she may find it.

But, you might read on for another reader's impressions of the situation.

❧ ❧ ❧

Dear Abelard,

Thank you so much for your beautiful advice to Margaret of Provence! When I met my wife many years ago, I also worried that the distance between us would prove impossible to overcome. Yet I persevered and courted her love, and eventually asked her hand in marriage. Now we live together at our covenant, and I work my magic on both of us, so that we may live beyond our years.

Our children are healthy, and we suspect that two of them have signs of the Gift. It is because of my wife that these children are here, and thus our great Order is continued. My greatest wish is that I may teach them the Hermetic Arts as both their father and their master. I can think of no greater joy than taking one of my own children as my apprentice.

I wish Margaret and the young magus she loves all the best, and I hope that they can find the happiness together that I have been so fortunate to discover.

Signed,   Souvenier of Bonisagus
in Normandy

My dear Souvenier,

Your account is quite heartening, and I congratulate you on your contributions to the Order. Thank you very much for your letter, and I hope to see you and your family at next Tribunal.

Until next issue, my dear readers,

ABELARD

"Dear Abelard" was written by Lanatus, follower of Bonisagus, and his amica Moratamis, follower of Guernicus. To receive his regular correspondence, or to ask for his advice, please send your name, covenant and Tribunal to Dear Abelard, Scriptoris Socii, Normandy. Your confidentiality will be respected.
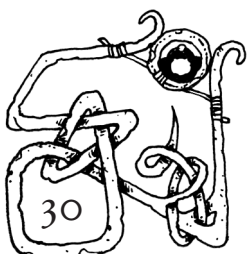
Hermetic Information Storage and Flow

by Timothy Ferguson

This article suggests ways in which Hermetic magi might access, store and trade information. It uses modern information theory to suggest ways of developing collections of materials other than books, much like modern museums do, which can be used for study. This creates a new class of treasure, and makes many of the oddities collected as trophies by Hermetic magi useful, in the absence of books, as study materials.

The second section of the article deals briefly with document flow. Document flow involves the trading of information — usually books — between libraries and individuals. Since Church libraries of the time engaged in document flow arrangements, this article gives brief rules for similar Hermetic agreements.

Observation to Datum to Information to Knowledge to Wisdom

Hermetic libraries collect more than just books. An event goes through several stages of interpretation when scholars attempt to learn from it. First they notice that the event exists. This becomes a discrete bit of information, called a datum, which they make sense of by placing it in a context, which combines it with related data. Contextualised data is called information, and is what is stored in Hermetic books. Information that a reader absorbs, integrating it with what they already know, becomes knowledge, and it is at this point that it increases a character's ability or art scores. Knowledge that is incorporated into an ethical framework is called wisdom, and wisdom, or its lack, is the province of the player.

What this means is that libraries can hold not only books or other vessels of information, they can hold repositories of material from anywhere along the interpretative chain. Most, of course, prefer books, because they are relatively cheap to produce, durable and transportable, but these are not the only options. Alternatives can be considered in three classes: **data repositories** — which store phenomena; **information repositories** — which store descriptions of phenomena; **knowledge repositories** — which store complex, interactive sets of information.

Data Repositories: The Study of Natural Signs

A magus studying from a book, or under the tutelage of another magus, gains experience in an appropriate Art. These techniques use human signs, written or spoken, to convey information. These are the safest means of study, because the source from which the student draws their information is a human being, who acts as a filter between dangerous phenomena and the student. There are, however, methods of gaining information by direct observation of natural phenomena. These yield less experience than book learning, or are more hazardous than studying human signs, so are little used.

The magi of the Houses of Merinita and Bjornaer continue to practice the observation of natural signs. Those wishing to study natural signs can develop the ability after studying a book on the technique for two seasons, or studying an extra season under a master, purchased as a +1 virtue at character generation. To study natural signs, a character must have the ability to observe magical energy, through the use of the Sight, Intellego Vim spells, or magical items. They also need to find a natural sign of sufficient rarity and complexity to make study valuable. Natural signs come in two types: processes and objects
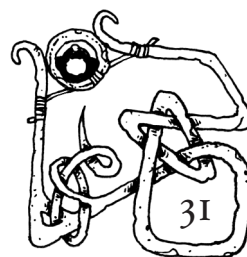
Processes

Processes are unfolding magical events, viewed to understand the interplay of forces which allows them to occur. Hermetic magi tend to avoid lengthy contact with powerful processes, since those exposed to them risk Twilight, distortion and injury. Observing processes is of variable value, since they are dependent on unpredictable underlying factors. Players are already familiar with "burning vis" a process that has been domesticated by Hermetic magi.

A magical substance called lace is produced when magi burn vis in laboratories as a method of study. Its name is descriptive of its appearance: unfolding patterns of energy that swirl out of vis when treated appropriately. All magi with a Magic Theory score of 3 or more can make artificial lace, since that information has been dispersed across the Hermetic tradition. Lace also appears naturally, but is rarely observed. Outside the laboratory, each magus suffers a -5 penalty on his study total, and rolls (2 × pawns of vis) botch dice if he loses control of the lace he is studying. Multiple magi can study a single, wild lace simultaneously, but if one botches, all botch. Since lace, if discovered early, can be restabilised and harvested as vis, even those who want to study usually prefer to tame it in their laboratories, Stabilising lace "cooks" some of the vis, however, into the solid form that the magical energy embodies, so tiny laces are unharvestable.

A few magi prefer to observe lace. Persistent rumours indicate enormous patterns of lace sometimes form in the highest level of certain magical regiones, and those with, for example, Charmed Lives or Destinies might want to study them, because these intricate laces are said to contain more energy than three pawns of vis. Places where laces unwind are sacred to the Houses that revere mundane wilderness, since they allow study in animal shape, or in natural surroundings. Seekers debate whether spirits taught the earliest magi, or if magi discovered their powers by observing natural signs such as lace.

When a magus from a Roman house discovers a lace-site, a covenant is often founded there. An option for a player-character spring covenant is that it is a lace site, forcing the characters to choose, each

season, whether they study the lace or harvest it for vis. Once the covenant becomes firmly established, and its library becomes properly rounded, the Process is treated like just another vis source. An exception is found in Scotland, which has many known or suspected sites of Natural Symbolism. Wandering magi, called ananoran, migrate between sites, as their studies require.

Less dangerous natural processes also exist, and can be observed in the same way, but they are less informative, and many are singular, rather than cyclical, events. The most valuable are portable, stable, non-terminating processes. These unique treasures, some of which offer flavours of guaranteed research Insight, can act as the focus of a campaign arc, as a motivator (understand it before it fades away or explodes), McGuffin (chase it!) or mystery (where did it come from, can we make more, and what can we do with it?)

Experience from observed Processes is almost always spent in Techniques. Storyguides may also allow Processes to be used to study Enigmatic Wisdom.

Natural Objects

Hermetic magic is sufficiently advanced that most practitioners prefer to study from books or vis, but those in some of the oldest covenants study objects. This is because when several instructive objects are grouped together, into collections, the target and quality scores of the collection are higher than those of any single element. Since collections can be disassembled, a novice can study individual components. Most standing collections have a laboratory built within their displays, since its simpler to move the magus using the collection to a specialised laboratory than to move the collection to the character's sanctum.

An object used as a natural sign has Target and Quality ratings, and is similar to a liber quaestionum. The insight that can be gained by study of an object depends on the complexity of the object and the experience of the student. The benefit is greatest if the student has previously worked with simpler objects but not with more complicated ones. A magus wanting to study the collection at its highest level requires exclusive use of all of the exhibits, but since a younger magus can ignore confusing items, focusing on those suitable for his level of skill, he can use portions of a collection, sharing it with others. Living creatures lose much of their usefulness as natural signs if killed, and many inanimate objects are of reduced value if removed from their natural contexts.

Natural objects can be used to study Affinities. Collections related to broad affinities are rare, and are usually held in older single-House covenants, which have the resources and desire to develop them over time. Minor collections related to specific, narrow affinities are common, but these are often of little use to magi other than the collector and their line of descendants.
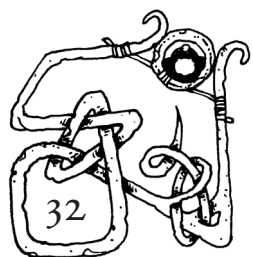
Artefacts

Artefacts, objects made by humans to express an idea, aren't truly natural signs, but form a middle Quality level between books and natural objects. Artefacts can be placed in collections, and a collection can include a mixture of natural and artificial exhibits. Magical artefacts are an exceptional case, and can be used to develop Arcane Knowledge. The finest collection of this type is that in Verdi, which can be studied to develop Verditius Magic.

Information Repositories

Books

Print is the basic way that Hermetic magicians store information. Hermetic books tend to be written in Latin, although some are written in Greek. This demonstrates that Latin is not a sacred language, a necessary part of the process of magical learning or spell casting. By way of comparison, consider Kabbalists, none of whom practice in Greek, because that's simply not how their magic works.

Given that magic can be practised in languages other than Latin, it can probably be written in the vulgar languages of the barbarian states that arose from the fragments of Rome's empire in the West. A limiting factor here is that description of magical phenomena requires a jargon, a series of specialised words that make the transmission of complex ideas, between experts, possible. Mystical writing in the Middle Ages created jargon by metaphor. For example, a chemical might be called the "Red Throne". Another might be represented by the symbol for Saturn. Even if translated, these are gibberish to someone without a Magic Theory score, because analogies do not translate across cultures.

Hermetic magi usually write in a font called Carolingian miniscule, which was designed in the late 8th Century by Alucin, a counsellor of Charlemagne. This was a cost-saving measure, as "tiny" writing used less vellum than the earlier style. Before Alcuin the preferred font was majuscule, block capital letters. Since the Order was founded slightly before the introduction of "tiny" writing, the works of the Founders, their associates, and most members of the first generation to follow them are in majuscule. Genuine books in majuscule are rare and prized; although forgeries that fool magical testing are difficult to make, they are not uncommon. Some magi collect majuscule books.

The rules as written are for books in miniscule. Majuscule books are larger, heavier and more expensive to produce, although they are easier to read (+1 to Physical Quality according to the rules given on pages 130-2 of The *Wizard's Grimoire: Revised Edition*).

Letters

Epistles, letters, are produced in such volume, and are so highly valued, that a whole House is dedicated to their safe delivery. Many letters are written on wax tablets, which are fragile, but can be reused. Their contents are transferred to vellum for archiving, or for travel.

Knowledge repositories: Thinkers

When a master teaches, he is acting as a knowledge repository. Of his knowledge, he selects a coherent, contextualised strand of information, and offers it to the student. The student then assimilates it, creating a copy of the knowledge within him. They, in turn, become a knowledge repository, but they are probably less good as a source for new duplicates due to two factors: some drift occurs in the replication process, so that their knowledge may contain errors, and they are probably less skilled as teachers, so they have a lesser ability to rapidly make duplicates.

Although masters or colleagues are the usual trainers for Hermetic magicians, covenants may have access to other knowledge repositories. These are used as an adjunct to their libraries. Companions, ghosts, familiars, items that learn, and allies can all be recruited as teachers.

Wisdom repositories

In *Ars Magica*, wisdom is something that is disassociated from the knowledge of the character. Players, not the effects of ability scores, select wise actions by characters. If a character was forced to think about why he just performed a wise action, they would suggest either that they followed the dictum of a divine power, or that they were led by what we might term a dissociative personality element: the conscience, the juno, intuition.

In Mythic Europe, wisdom is represented by virtues like Free Expression, Enigmatic Wisdom, True Faith, Intuitions, Common Sense and some Knacks. Most of these require openness to an outside force. This is why they can't be taught from master to student, because they require a level of processing beyond atavistic replication of knowledge. Most require some kind of inspiration, literally a "breathing in" of outside forces, which are not under human control. Libraries, therefore, cannot contain wisdom repositories, but can contain provocative material, works designed to get the character in the right frame of mind for inspiration to strike.

Books on Enigmatic Wisdom don't contain wisdom, any more than bibles contain faith. What they contain are riddles, images, lifestyle hints, pharmaceutical prescriptions and other guides to that mental state in which inspiration, as represented by the answer to the reader's riddle, is most likely to occur.

This means that characters can't study Enigmatic Wisdom without riddles, trances, dancing, drinking, fasting, flagellation or whatever else it is that Criamon do. The Enigma, whose name means "mystery" or "puzzle", cannot be taught like mathematics, because it isn't a knowledge. The best a master can do is offer their student traditional provocations, hoping that they "get it".

Document flow

The reason many of the largest Hermetic libraries seem so comprehensive is that they are part of a distributed collection network. That means that the collection is not static; the librarians from several large libraries co-operate to make their collections more useful than they would otherwise be. Church libraries often make temporary, reciprocal loans of books, in the wealthiest cases to allow copying, and agreements that promote document flow also exist within the Order. A steady stream of high-quality tractatus is vital to elder magi, allowing them to continue to master their Arts without studying from vis. Librarians co-ordinate document flow arrangements using the Redcap network.

Bonisagus magi: the non-reciprocal system

The simplest document flow system is charitable: the non-reciprocal system. House Bonisagus magi are required to publish their researches by the Code, being repaid with privileges outside the document flow system, so a great river of literature flows out of them, eventually permeating the rest of the Order. This is one of the underpinnings of House Bonisagus's Hermetic Prestige virtue.

How information generated by the Bonisagus disperses is entirely up to the Bonisagus. It must be made available, in some symbolic fashion, to every magus in the Order. Some Bonisagus magi use libraries of record, so that, for example, all of their findings are stored in Durenmar and dispatched to anyone who is willing to pay the copying and transport costs. Alternatively, the Bonisagus might only provide a document surrogate (an abstract), and Durenmar redirects enquiries. In either case, House Bonisagus has a duty to circulate information at nominal cost.

Simple reciprocal systems

As an example, consider the need that senior Flambeau magi have for tractatus. One, let's call him
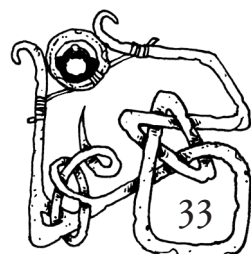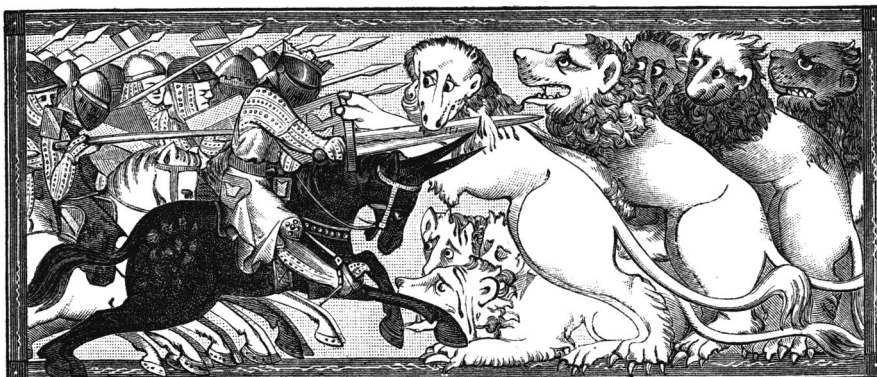
Aurelius, may write a tractatus concerning the *Ball of Abysmal Flame* and make it known that he will lend a copy of it to the next magus who gives him a copy of an equivalent tractatus. Bernadette takes him up on the offer, then each of them make it known that they will lend a copy of their respective tractatus to whomever lends each of them a copy of an equivalent work. The third magus, let's call him Carolus, sends his tractatus to Aurelius and Bernadette, who send him tractatus in return. As this system expands, it generates document flow.

This system is expandable until you include everyone who wants a tractatus of *Ball of Abysmal Flame*, and costs can be reduced if a cap is set on the number of copies new members have to make, so that old members need to wait a few seasons for each new tractatus. As the scheme expands the payoff increases far more rapidly than the copying costs, assuming the magus has a scribe to do the work for him. The costs begin to decline once the first set of magi begin to pass away, since the information they added is still available, it's just that it is now "free", a sort of bonus for purchasing the information written out by the living members of the group.

The system works equally well for other books, and isn't the only document flow system that the Order has, but it's one of the simplest, and one which most player characters could seed. It comes unglued if someone gives the privileged material in the system to an outsider, who then propagates it, but with enough enforcers in the advantaged group, that's unlikely to occur.

Cost of document flow

If a library cycles documents so that, over each period of twenty years, it has had access to 1 point of material, this costs an added point. A point of material is 300 levels of spells, 90 levels of Hermetic books, 60 levels of mundane books.

Remember that as new material cycles in, old material of equal value (as agreed by the storyguide) is cycled out. The collection, in effect, cycles at the rate of 5% a year and can, in theory, be replaced entirely every twenty years. Every added point increases this amount by 5%. If the covenant has the right to copy the material, before cycling it out again, then multiply the cost by five. Covenants may mix copyable and non-copyable documents in a single agreement, at the storyguide's discretion.
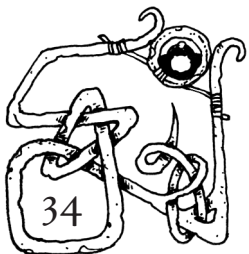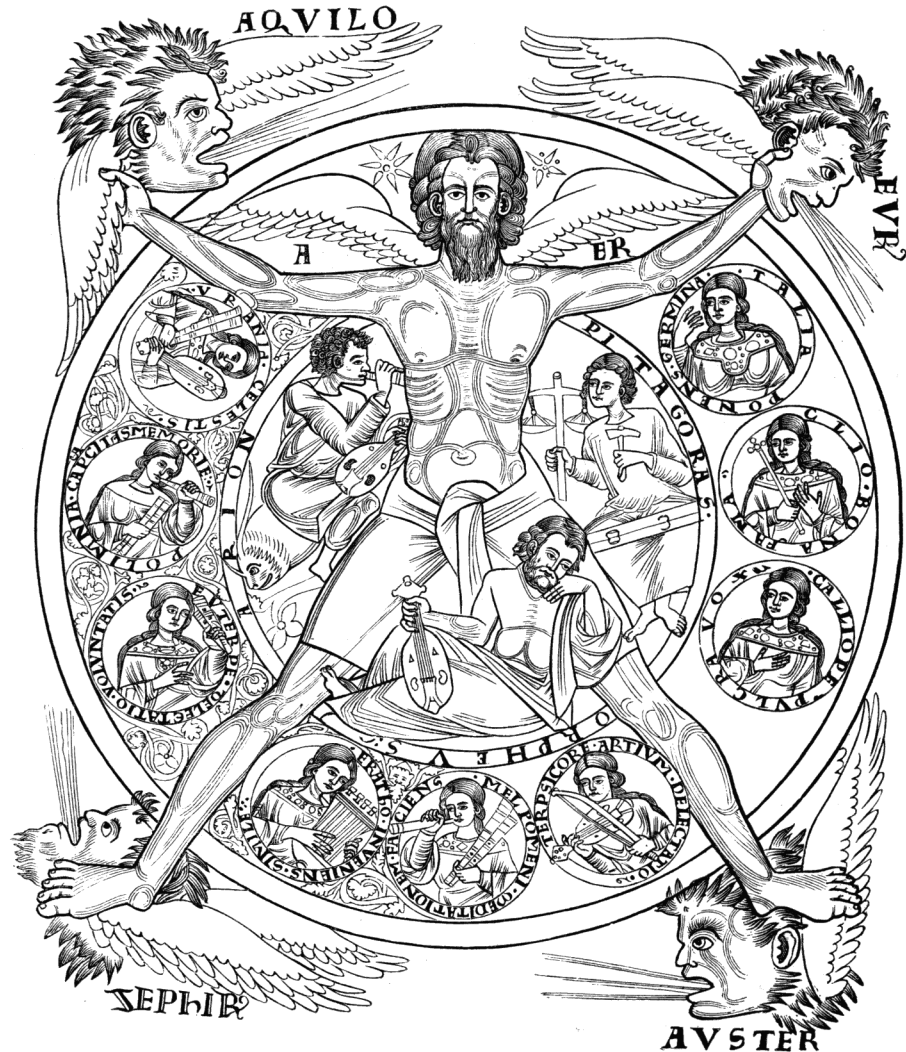
Ex Bibliotheca Durenmare

by Eric Minton

It takes a good bit of time and effort to create a covenant library. Turning that library into something more than a list of names and numbers is much harder. Here you'll find all manner of pre-generated magical and mundane books to flesh out your Saga's libraries. Feel free to submit your own books, scrolls, clay tablets, and so on for inclusion in this column.

To determine a book's point value during covenant creation, use the following formulae:

Liber Quaestionum: Target + Quality

Summa: 2 × (Level + Quality)

Tractatus: 3 × Quality

⌘ ⌘ ✿

Lesser Transformations

By Menda scholae Tytali

Glossed by Invidia Argentata scholae Tytali

Appearance: This book's leather cover bears no markings other than a few scratches and scrapes. A simple leather clasp holds its covers shut. Within, the pages are of inferior parchment, poorly bound, with only a few crude illustrations. The penmanship is blocky but functional, without colored accents of any kind. Elegant glosses in red and black fill most of the available margins.

Description: A poorly written treatise on the practical applications of the art of Muto. While the author seems knowledgeable enough with regard to the subject matter, she spills her thoughts onto the page in no particular order, and rarely explains the methods by which she draws her conclusions. The glosses clear up the ambiguities of the text quite well, though much of the glossator's efforts seem devoted to barbed comments about the author's magical

---

skills, writing ability and odious personal habits. Three spells, unglossed, occupy the final pages of the work.

Mechanics: Muto Summa, Level 6, Quality 7. Contains the following spells: *Eyes of the Cat*, *Eyes of the Eagle*, *Nose of the Hound*.

Cost: 26 points of Arts + 15 levels of spells.

Jupiter's Stone

By Thalassinus scholae Bonisagi

Appearance: The cover of this slim black volume bears the astrological sigil for Jupiter in dull silver paint. Its corner-pieces and locked clasp are of iron coated with tin. The book's pages are dyed purple, with the text scribed in an elegant hand using silver, white and gold inks. The illustrations are small, few in number, and cunningly woven into otherwise abstract decorative borders.

Description: This work dwells on the functions and applications of violet amethyst in Rego magics, with specific attention paid to the spell known as the *Aura of Rightful Authority*. The author provides several examples of how to use this spell to manipulate mundanes, and shows no scruples in toying with human hearts and minds to achieve political ends.

Mechanics: Rego Tractatus, Quality 4, *Aura of Rightful Authority*.

Cost: 12 points of Arts.

Invocations to Faunus

By Maria Acerna doctrinae Merinita

Appearance: This book's leather covers are protected by an ochre-dyed linen slipcase and held shut by a knotted leather thong. The handwriting is oddly styled, with tightly cramped text interspersed with long, floating flourishes. The initial letter of each page is excessively large and wound about with images of legendary creatures and forest scenes in many colors.

Description: This is an elementary work, dealing with a handful of basic techniques for employing the Art of Animál. The author couches these techniques within a metaphorical construct that equates specific words, gestures and forces with specific pagan deities and legendary beasts. The text contains enough information on these mythic elements to make it worthwhile to peruse the text for that information alone.
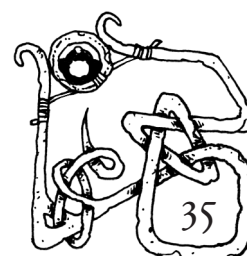
Mechanics: Animal Summa, Level 4, Quality 7; Legend Lore Tractatus, Quality 3.

Cost: 22 points of Arts + 9 points of Knowledges.

On the Efficacy of Pearl, Crystal and Aquamarine in Spells of Aquam

By Caelantea scholae Bonisagi

Appearance: This slim, leather-bound volume is in good condition. It bears a boss, clasp and corner-pieces of tarnished silver, all of which are set with pearls and cabochon-cut aquamarines. Inside, the book reveals an artist's hand: the script flows delicately, with key points picked out in several colors, and vivid illustrations lie scattered throughout the

---

New spells

Eyes of the Eagle

Muto Corpus 5

R: Touch, D: Sun/Year, T: Ind.

Spell Focus: A Eagle's Feather (+1)

Requisite: Animál

Gives the target the eyes of an eagle. An eagle's eyes are keener than a human's, and so the target gains a +3 bonus to rolls based on visual acuity. This bonus does not apply to ranged attack rolls.

(Design: Change a small part of a person 5)

Nose of the Hound

Muto Corpus 5

R: Touch, D: Sun/Year, T: Ind.

Spell Focus: A Dog's Nose (+1)

Requisite: Animál

Gives the target the nose of a hound, allowing him or her to discern subtle distinctions between odors, and to track others by smell. The target gains a +3 bonus to all rolls based on smell.

(Design: Change a small part of a person 5)

text. To serve as a bookmarker, a white silk ribbon is sewn into the upper edge of the spine.

Description: This work is directed at students of Aquam who already have some knowledge of that Art under their belts. It presents a series of dialogues on the Hermetic properties of certain gemstones, highlighting their different uses and tying those differences to specific techniques employed in Aquam magics.

Mechanics: Aquam Liber Quaestionum, Level 6, Quality 12.

Cost: 18 points of Arts.

Book of Lights

By Ardea Irata scholae Flambonis

Appearance: This is a plain, well-worn leather volume, its title picked out on the spine in flaking gold leaf. The contents are written in a clean, clear hand, but without color and with only a few spare illustrations.

Description: This is a simple, straightforward primer on the fundamentals of applied Ignem. The text deals primarily with the creation and transformation of light, though the author pays some small attention to the application of the same principles to affect heat and flame. At no point does the text expound on the theoretical underpinnings of the art of Ignem. An appendix contains a number of simple light spells for the novice.

Mechanics: Ignem Liber Quaestionum, Target 0, Quality 9. Contains the following spells: *Evoke the Unnatural Radiance, Lamp Without Flame, Light Shaft of the Night, The Many-Hued Conflagration* and *Call the Sidereal Spark.*

Cost: 9 points of Arts + 45 spell levels.

New spells

Evoke the Unnatural Radiance

Creo Ignem 5

R: Touch, D: Sun/Perm, T: Small

Spell Focus: A Firefly (+1)

Causes an object to radiate light equivalent to a torch or a lamp. Casting requisites: appropriate to the object affected.

(Design: Light an area as if by torchlight 5, reduce range to Touch -10, increase duration to Sun +10)

Call the Sidereal Spark

Creo Ignem 15

R: Near, D: Sun, T: Small

Spell Focus: A Live Firefly (+3)

Requisites: Rego

You conjure up a floating speck of twinkling, blue-white light that illuminates an area as if by torchlight. You may direct the spark to stay in one place, to move in any direction, or to follow a person or object. It is not intelligent, however, and cannot act on conditional commands. The spell ends if you become separated from the spark by more than fifteen paces.

(Design: Light an area as if by torchlight 5, increase duration to Sun +10)
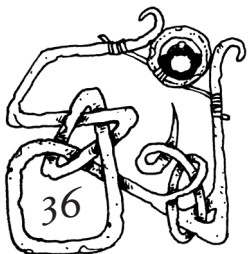
Earth, Metal and Stone

By Latertianum scholae Verditius

Appearance: A tome of average thickness, bound in dyed black leather and capped at the corners with dull iron. The book's handwriting rates only slightly above a scrawl, but colored highlights and some skillful illustrations increase the readability of the text.

Description: Discusses the art of Terram in terms of the magical and mundane characteristics of various earthly materials. The author shows great interest in the subject matter, going into great detail about the effects of a substance's malleability, tensile strength and crystalline structure on its magical properties. While this is primarily a book of magic, the astute reader may glean information on natural philosophy from its pages.

Mechanics: Terram Summa, Level 8, Quality 8; Philosophiae Tractatus, Quality 4.

Cost: 32 points of Arts + 12 points of Knowledges.

The Founders: Twelve Biographies

By Felix Lacertus scholae Bonisagus

Appearance: This lovely work has seen better days. Its tooled leather cover shows much wear, and the pages are dog-eared and flaking. The fine calligraphy incorporates several colors of ink to highlight specific passages, and each page starts with a miniature likeness of the relevant Founder or one of that Founder's works. Black blots obscure the text in several places, and a whole group of pages has been torn out. Sparsely glossed in a rough hand, particularly around the biographies of Guernicus, Tremere and Tytalus.

Description: The author explores what is known of the lives of the Founders of the Order in evocative, meandering detail. Unfortunately, the book was written only a few years before the Schism War, and it bears the marks of the ensuing Quaesitorial censorship. The pages between the entries for Criamon and Flambeau have been removed, and all references to the Nameless House and its founder have been blotted out. The glosses are of unknown authorship; they appear to be the work of a conspiracy theorist seeking evidence of a Tremere plot to seize control of the Order. Just before the missing section, a scribbled note reads, "Now eleven biographies. Shoddy mathematics. Soon to be ten?"

Mechanics: Organization Lore (Order of Hermes) Tractatus, Quality 6.

Cost: 18 points of Knowledges.

Heretic's Corner: Fighting with the Combat System

by Andrew Gronosky

Michael has graciously agreed to let me be the guest author of this issue's Heretic's Corner. I am going to tackle a thorny subject: the combat system.

When most players think of the *ArM 4* combat system, they think of the well-known problem of combat Encumbrance. I think this problem distracts people from deeper issues. Encumbrance is easily fixed by using the rules from *Ordo Nobilis* or a house rule. There are other, more fundamental features of the whole combat system that I feel make it inherently unwieldy. These are the subject of my column.

The combat rules are highly interrelated, making them difficult to reform incrementally. For clarity, I will suggest changes one at a time, followed by the reasons I recommend each change and the impact I think the change would have. This is not meant to imply that each change should be considered independently. Quite the reverse is true: the rules are meant to support each other, so the only way to reform them is to reform the whole system at once.

A Word About Realism

In the context of combat rules for a role-playing game, especially a medieval fantasy game, realism is a matter of taste. Realistically, which should do more damage, a crossbow or a longbow? I don't know, I never hope to be hit with either. Should Encumbrance give a penalty to Initiative and Defense, or Initiative only? One could argue either way. No one knows first-hand what medieval combat was really like. There are modern re-enactments, certainly, but the participants take precautions not to hurt one another — quite the opposite of actual combat!

It is important that combat rules be plausible, but that's about all we can ask for. Even real medieval warriors would probably not have agreed on the relative merits of different weapons and armor. It might be entertaining to discuss "realistic" medieval combat, but such discussions are only speculative.

Now, the proposed changes:

Use a Single Melee Attack

ArM 4 states on p. 168, albeit not very clearly, that when engaged with multiple opponents, a combatant attacks each opponent every round. The same Attack and Defense rolls are used against all opponents, as if that made things simpler. This seems to be true whether or not attacking all opponents is actually to one's advantage.

Change this so each character makes only one melee attack per round.

Rationale

Complexity in combat does not necessarily arise from rolling lots of dice rolling a die is quick and painless but from digging through the rules for lots of modifiers and making lots of comparisons of one die against another.

The "multiple engagements" example on p. 168 is telling. Sir Bors is fighting three bandits, one of whom is trying to engage him at Touch range and the others of whom are engaging at Reach.

Depending on the actual engagement range (decided by the Initiative roll), Sir Bors may or may not have different combat modifiers against each of his opponents. Sir Bors' player needs to independently calculate Attack and Defense modifiers against each opponent as the engagement range and other battlefield conditions change from one round to the next. True, the modifiers might be the same against all opponents, but the point is that the player needs to count opponents and check each one for melee-combat modifiers.

Things would be much more complicated if Sir Bors had an ally in the fight. With one knight on three bandits, there are six Attack-vs-Defense tests each round (three for Sir Bors' attacks, and one for each bandit's attack). With two knights on three bandits — adding only one combatant to the fight — there would be twelve! In general, the number of

37
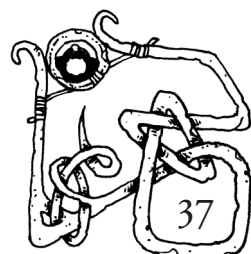
comparisons in battle is $2 \times N \times M$, where N and M are the numbers of combatants on each side, even though the number of die rolls is only N + M. This is without even considering the initiative contests. No wonder p. 167 urges the storyguide to break a battle into sub-melees!

Simultaneous attacks against every opponent is a feature that, as far as I know, is unique to the *ArM 4* combat system. I submit that this is because other games that considered the idea, discarded it as unmanageable.

Impact

Eliminating multiple attacks swings the balance in a "multiple engagement" even further in favor of the more numerous side. The -3 penalty for Attack and Defense due to multiple engagements would have to be changed to give the less-numerous side a fair chance. There are other reasons to fix that penalty, discussed below.

Use a Cyclical Initiative System

By cyclical initiative, I mean a system where each combatant rolls initiative at the start of battle, and then each acts in descending order of initiative. Each round, everyone goes in the same order they don't re-roll initiative. Many readers will recognize cyclical initiative as the system in *3rd Edition D&D* and the *d20 System*.

Rationale

One should experiment with this system in order to appreciate it. At first, I was skeptical, but I found that *3rd Edition D&D* battles flow much more smoothly and efficiently. We should not be averse to borrowing a system that works.

Initiative in Ars Magica is simpler on paper than it is in practice. Reading the Combat chapter, one gets the impression that the combatants on each side line up in neat rows and conveniently pair off into one-on-one sub-melees. In my Saga, the only time this happens is when I decree it does, overruling the wishes of my players and any logical tactics on the part of the NPC's.

If I let the players and NPC's do what's actually to their advantage, all hell breaks loose. The PC's and NPC's each try to crash through and/or around the enemy line to outflank opponents, surround them, and/or engage the enemy commander. We call this situation a "football play," since it resembles nothing more than the line of scrimmage in American football. We end up having to resolve movement in initiative order anyway. This doesn't happen only occasionally: it happens every battle. The "football play" is a logical consequence of the advantage to be gained by engaging one's opponent at superior odds.

As written, the rules call for initiative rolls only occasionally. In practice, they call for them every round because a sensible PC and a sensible NPC do not simply pair off, preferring to take part in a "football play." Simultaneous movement is a real problem here. One could simply make it a rule to roll initiative every round, but cyclical initiative is more expedient because the storyguide doesn't have to continually re-arrange the order in which every combatant moves.

Impact

Cyclical initiative — or indeed, round-by-round initiative rolls — eliminate the need for combatants to declare their actions in advance. A character simply acts when his turn comes up in the initiative order. This means the Initiative total would have to be independent of the combatant's weapon, since at the time of the Initiative roll, one wouldn't know what weapon or action the each combatant would use during his turn.

Initiative would have to become a straight Qik + Enc roll. The First Strike bonus, and the engagement contest itself, would have to go. Both of these changes would simplify combat.

Without planning each action at the start of the round, the whole six-phase combat round ceases to make sense. Everyone simply moves and attacks (or casts spells) on his turn. This would certainly change the character of ArM combat, although I would consider it a change for the better. The most frustrating aspect of *ArM 4* combat is that one must declare one's action at the start of the round, then wait through the next few phases of the combat round, watching one's battle plan unravel, remaining committed to an action that might no longer make sense. As a player, I want instant gratification when the storyguide asks me for my action, I want to make the best move according to the situation at hand, and have it take effect immediately. As a storyguide, I don't want to plan each NPC's action at the beginning of the round, then keep track of each one's plan through all six phases of the combat round.

Magic would become much more effective if it's not relegated to the end of the round. This may or may not be desirable.

Getting rid of the engagement contest would be no great loss. It would leave open the question of how to resolve the case when an attacker with a shorter weapon (such as a dagger) tries to close with a defender wielding a longer weapon (such as a pike).

D&D handles this situation with a rather complicated set of rules called "Attacks of Opportunity." The curious reader can study them in the *d20 System* Reference Document, a condensed form of the *3rd Edition D&D* rules available online at: www.wizards.com/D20.

"Attacks of Opportunity" are a bit more involved than ArM needs. I believe a simple alternative would suffice- whenever someone enters the reach of an enemy's weapon, he must stop moving for the round. This is a quick-and-dirty replacement for several paragraphs of *ArM 4* or *D&D 3* text; only playtesting can determine if it's a serviceable replacement.

The *D&D* system includes rules for altering one's position in the initiative order, for instance, by delaying one's action. A lightweight version of these rules would probably be needed for ArM. I think it's much simpler to use rules of that kind than to untangle a "football play."
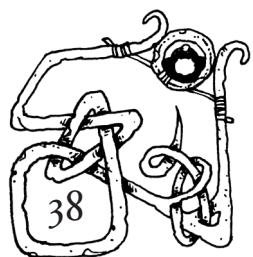
Use Miniatures or Counters

I'm sorry, as much as I like Ars Magica's emphasis on storytelling, combat is no time to improvise details like where everyone is standing. Use miniature figures or counters on a gridded map with a scale of one pace to the inch. I prefer a hexagonal grid over a square grid.

Rationale

Especially when there are more than two or three combatants on a side, I find that using some kind of scale map greatly reduces misunderstandings, mistakes, and needless bickering. Maybe this is a matter of taste, but I find miniatures so helpful that I think they deserve more favorable emphasis in the rules.

I like a hex grid instead of a square grid for two reasons. First, there is no fussing over diagonal movement. Second, only six enemies can surround one opponent, not eight.

Impact

One of the downsides of cyclical initiative is that is pretty much requires the use of miniatures.

On each combatant's turn, the player needs to know exactly where every opponent is so he can decide where to move and whom to attack. Using miniatures does make more practical certain tactics: for instance, it's much easier to determine whether a shield grog can interpose himself between a magus and a charging enemy.

Reform the Multiple Engagement Penalty

Instead of the brutal -3 penalty to Attack and Defense (p. 168) for the second and each subsequent opponent with whom one is engaged, reduce the penalty to -1.

Rationale

By itself, this doesn't simplify much. But it would change how a battle unfolds, assuming the players understand the rules.

The -3 multiple-engagement penalty greatly encourages characters to try to gang up on a single opponent. I believe the many-on-one advantage greatly outweighs the risk that comes from each character in the larger group being attacked at once. Obviously, it's also very important to come to the aid of a friend who finds himself surrounded. The rule encourages the very situation that is the biggest headache for all concerned: a free-for-all where all the combatants belong to one huge melee and everyone attacks everyone every round.

Impact

As I mentioned earlier, restricting each combatant to only one melee attack per round changes the balance of a many-on-one engagement. Keeping the penalty at -3 would be devastating to any character who was unlucky enough to engage two or more opponents.

Separate Weapons from Shields

Things can be simplified somewhat by separating weapons from shields. Make Shield its own Weapon Skill, replacing Weapon and Shield. If a character is using a shield, he attacks using his Single Weapon Skill, and defends using his Shield Skill. Simple enough.

For clarity, the Defense rules should be amended to something like this: against each incoming attack, you much choose one of three Defense scores to use: your weapon's Def score, your Shield's Def score, or your Brawling Def score. Some modes of defense may not work against some forms of attack- for instance, it's nonsensical to parry arrows with a sword, or use a shield or weapon to fend off a pouncing dragon.

Rationale

Separating Shield from Weapon reduces the amount of arithmetic in computing combat totals.

Treating the weapon-and-shield combination as a unique weapon with its own characteristics was innovative and plausible, but it did add some bookkeeping. It takes more than novelty to justify extra lines on a character sheet, especially since shield-users who carry more than one weapon need to compute lots of extra totals (lance with and without shield, sword with and without shield, etc.). I don't think the small "realism" benefit of shield's effect on Init and Atk is worth the bookkeeping it entails.

Impact

Being able to choose one's defense against each attack seems like extra complication, but there are already exceptions that allow one to use one's Brawling defense by choice (p. 167). Which is more complicated, a standard option or an obscure exception?

This rule would also fix my pet peeve about *ArM 4* combat: a character who is a master with Weapon and Shield Skill (say, skill 6) can be totally inept if he's caught without a shield (Single Weapon Skill 0)!

Conclusions

There are many more tweaks one could apply to simplify the combat rules. For instance, I would prefer to replace the Missile Rate Table (p. 164) with a fixed rate-of-fire for each weapon.

I don't see why missile fire and spell targeting use different Ease Factor Adjustments. Such details aside, I think this article points out the fundamental, systemic causes of complexity.

Whatever changes the combat system has undergone from 1st Edition through 4th, it has always retained one defining characteristic: Ars Magica combat is deadly. I think the main reason for this is the stress die: disaster hangs on a single botch, or on a lucky roll by the enemy. This is very consistent with the game's emphasis on magic and the subordinate role of grogs. Combat is something to be avoided when possible, and grogs must protect vulnerable magi. As long as this basic tone is preserved, I think combat rules should be as concise, quick-playing, and straightforward as possible.
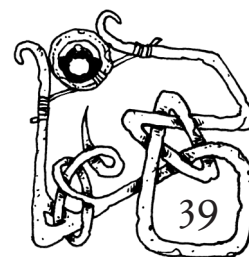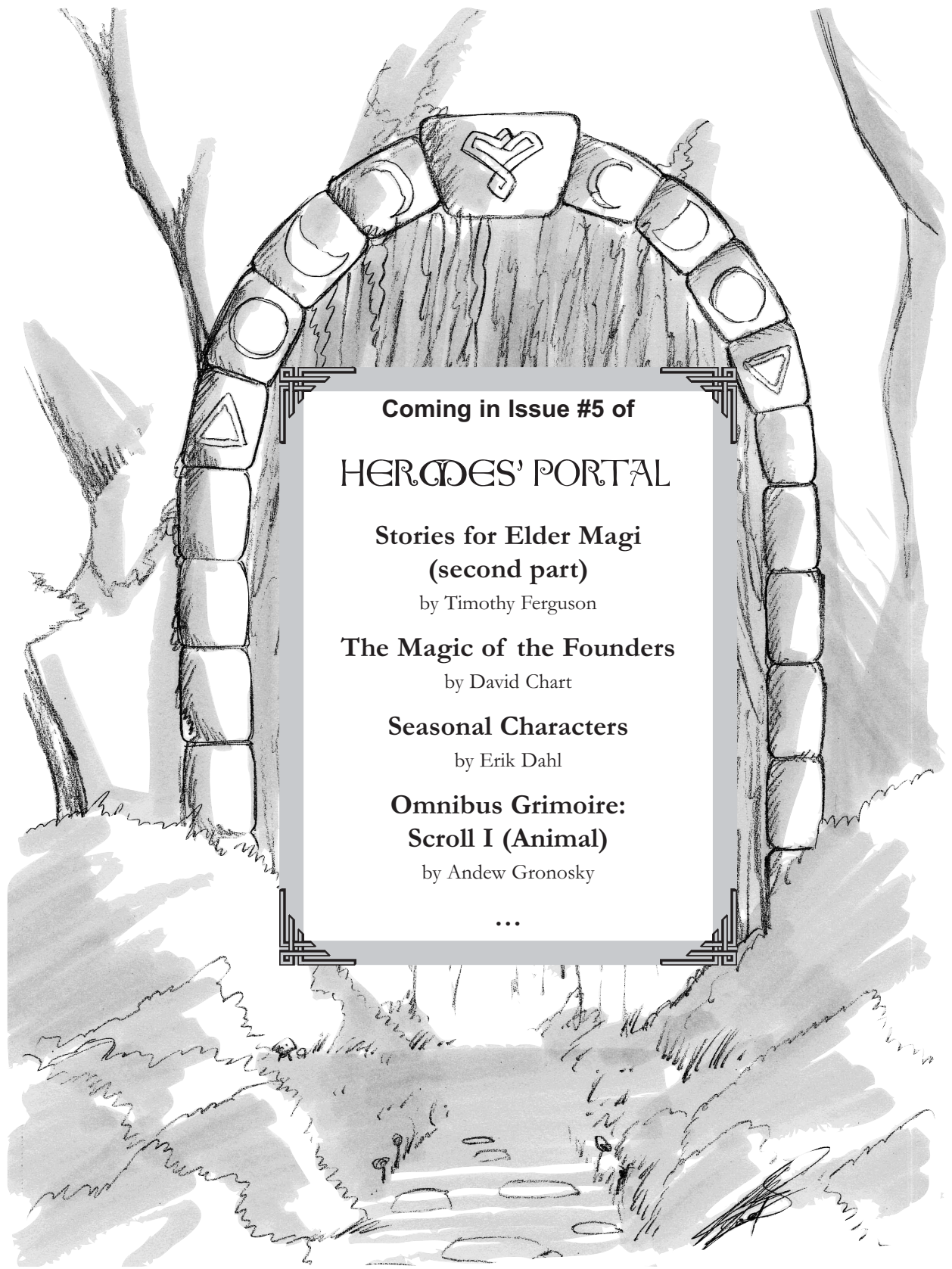
Coming in Issue #5 of

HERMES' PORTAL

Stories for Elder Magi
(second part)
by Timothy Ferguson

The Magic of the Founders
by David Chart

Seasonal Characters
by Erik Dahl

Omnibus Grimoire:
Scroll I (Animal)
by Andew Gronosky

...