

(Arts, spells and Knowledges), and in their excessive abstraction such that only the best single available book on a subject had any value.

The single greatest conceptual advance that can be attributed to *ArM4* lies in its treatment of books. They now have texture, feel and individual value. This “individual value” poses a serious problem, however, for library design rules, as these must now be based on the likelihood of multiple books on a given subject. Lots of books have to be designed (which is time consuming), and clear rules are needed on how these books interrelate with one another.

Erik Dahl and Bjarke Roth have taken a stab at new Covenant and library design rules in Erik’s “Covenants as Characters” in *HP4*. But their rules do not appeal to me for a number of reasons. They take the analogy between player characters and Covenants too far, in my view, by trying to make the design mechanics essentially similar. I don’t think this does justice to the subtle complexity of a Covenant. “Covenants as Characters” justifies its high level of abstraction as a response to the time and effort previously required for Covenant design. I don’t see why, however, Covenant design should be either quick or easy. The Covenant is not just any “character” to be designed as quickly and simply as an NPC or a PC. *ArM3* puts it this way:

“The Covenant is the most important character in your Saga, for the Covenant is the constant character in your Saga. Players’ characters may come and go, but the Covenant remains and is the refuge of those transient people who reside in it. It’s therefore important to understand and develop every aspect of your Covenant, for it is the foundation of your game.”

A case in point can be found specifically in Erik and Bjarke’s proposed new rules for library design. Not only is the richness brought to the game by the *ArM4* rules on individual books set aside, but we would not even be left with the clear “we have this, but we don’t have that” library descriptions that were available under *ArM3* or *ArM2*. Planning a mage character’s long-term course of study based on the contents of his library is, or at least was, one of the pleasures of running a mage. I also have a low tolerance for requiring die rolls in character or Covenant design, and a strong preference for a clear “you get what you pay for”.

It follows inevitably from this discussion that the Covenant and library design rules I will be proposing in this article are going to be more complicated than those proposed by Erik and Bjarke. This does not mean that I don’t think that they have advanced the argument significantly, because in fact they have. In the same way that I am going to draw on insights from Michael Schloss (consolidated Characteristics leavened by Virtues and Flaws), I will also be drawing insights from “Covenants as Characters” (integrating the concept of Virtues and Flaws into Covenant design and making it generally closer to character design) as well as from Erik’s “Seasonal

Characters” in *HP5* (linking the number of Virtues and Flaws to the character’s, or in this case the Covenant’s, season). I also freely admit that my reservations concerning “Covenants as Characters” do not apply to NPC Covenants that do not have to be described with the same degree of loving detail and attention as player Covenants.

But “nuff histry”, let’s get down to the actual new heretical rules I want to propose. But first I want to thank my corps of playtesters: Gary Barber, Matt Ryan and Michael Schloss, of course, and even Erik Dahl who was kind enough to comment even though I have just publicly strangled his babies at birth, and finally the indispensable Bjarke Roth who must be well on his way to apotheosis as the muse of heretical rule writers. Enjoy!

Covenant Characteristics

Each Covenant has four consolidated Characteristics: Library, Aura, Resources and Relations. All the Covenant attributes in the standard *ArM4* Covenant design rules are meant to fit under one or another of these Characteristics. Here I am taking a leaf from Michael’s proposal. A Covenant should not have more Characteristics than it really needs, and each Characteristic should be of equivalent value. I think these four Characteristics can readily embody everything about a Covenant players feel is important. A score in each of these four should give a reader a quick appreciation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of their own or any other Covenant so described.

Characteristic scores ranging from -5 to +5 are purchased with Characteristic points according to the standard pyramidal function. Negative scores in some Characteristics yield additional Characteristic points that can be allocated towards higher scores in others.

The number of Characteristic points available and the maximum score a Covenant can have in any one Characteristic depend on its season and the number of resident magi.

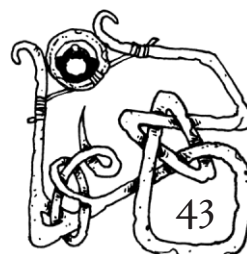
A **Spring** Covenant has a number of Characteristic points equal to 0 + 1 for each resident mage over 3, for a maximum total number of points of 3. The maximum Characteristic score for a Spring Covenant is +3.

A **Summer** Covenant has 4 + 1 for each resident mage above 3, for a maximum total of 9 points, and a maximum score of +4.

An **Autumn** Covenant has 10 + 1 for each resident mage above 3 with no maximum number of points. Its individual Characteristic scores can range as high as +5.

A **Winter** Covenant has less than 0 points a maximum score of +5.

Season	Point Range	Maximum Score
Spring	0 - 3	+3
Summer	4 - 9	+4
Fall	10+	+5
Winter	< 0	+5





A Characteristic score serves two purposes:

- 1 It is cross indexed with one or more tables to determine the number of purchase points used in fleshing out the features of a Covenant associated with that Characteristic. For example, a Covenant's Library score will ultimately determine how many Book points will be available for allocation between the various books on Arts, Knowledges, Spells and Lab Texts in the Covenant library.
- 2 It also determines the base number of Virtue and Flaw points that can be applied to those features. These Virtues and Flaws help give the features of the Covenant their unique qualities. (See **Virtues and Flaws** below.) Where Erik proposed applying Virtues and Flaws to a Covenant as a whole, I prefer to treat them as an opportunity to reinsert the variety that bundling the Characteristics tends to dampen, by applying Covenant Virtues and Flaws specifically to each Characteristic. It also leaves scope for a lot more Virtues and Flaws in total, but without opening the door to all or most of them being applied to only a narrow range of Covenant features.

Positive scores yield an equivalent number of Virtue points for that Characteristic. Negative scores yield an equivalent number of Flaw points. These Virtues and Flaws do not have to be counterbalanced by equivalent Flaws and Virtues. Five additional Virtue points can be acquired for each Characteristic, but these extra points must be compensated for by taking on a matching number of Flaw points.

Having set the general rules, we now proceed to the specific rules for the Library Characteristic. Future articles will deal with the other three.

Book Points

A given Covenant's Library score corresponds to a number of Book points that can be used to purchase books on Knowledges, Arts, Spells and Enchantments (Lab Texts).

Library Score	Book points
-5	0
-4	30
-3	60
-2	80
-1	90
0	100
+1	200
+2	400
+3	700
+4	1100
+5	1600

Subject Ratings

Book points are used to purchase books within a limited number of "subjects". Each of the Arts is a subject, as is each Knowledge. These consist of the Academic Knowledges including Christian, Islamic

and Jewish Theology, Speak Greek and Speak Hebrew, as well as the probably rarer and more esoteric Speak Armenian and Speak Coptic. They also include the Arcane Knowledges, though I do not use Hermetic Law, preferring to subsume that in Hermes Lore as described in "Less is More" in *HP1*.

There are also the Casual Knowledges which include varying Area Lore and vernacular languages as well as Common law and Strategy mentioned in *Ordo Nobilis*. The two main types of Organization Lore that might be found in a Covenant library would be Church and Hermes Lore, of course. There might be some books specifically on individual Houses, Hermetic secret societies or religious orders, but I would tend to just consider these Hermes and Church Lore respectively.

A particularly well endowed or unusual Covenant library might also include works on Exceptional Knowledges such as Alchemy and Herbalism or, if you are using *The Mysteries*, Craft Automata, Hermetic Astrology, Oneiromancy, Augury, Theurgy and Ars Notoria, though these latter books may only be for the initiated. Finally, each individual spell or enchantment also counts as a "subject".

Each subject in a library has a rating. This rating can be 0 if the library has no books in that subject. Ratings can be used to compare the coverage and depth on a subject between different collections, but it can also be used to determine the combined study or research value of a collection of books on a given subject. Book points are not spent twice, once on subject ratings and then a second time on books. Instead, points allocated to a given subject are used to buy individual books or, alternatively, points used to buy books on a given subject are then totalled up to produce a rating.

Rating	Point Cost	Research	Knowledge	Art
2	3	+1	2	5
3	6	+2	3	7
4	10	+2	4	9
5	15	+2	5	11
6	21	+3	6	13
7	28	+4	6	15
8	36	+5	7	16
9	45	+5	7	17
10	55	+5	8	18
11	66	+5	8	19
12	78	+6	9	20
13	91	+6	9	21
14	105	+6	10	22
15	120	+6	10	23
16	136	+6	10	24
17	153	+7	11	25

Point Cost: This is the old familiar pyramidal function and indicates the Book point cost of a given rating in one subject. As new books are added or old ones lost, the subject's rating rises or falls correspondingly.

Research: This is the bonus applied to a relevant Knowledge roll made while consulting the collection.



It is based on the optional rule described on page 75 of *Ordo Nobilis*, but the underlying formula is slightly different. The main text (usually a summa or, if using the *Ex Libris* rules, possibly an LQ) contributes its level in ep equivalents. All other works contribute one point each. The pyramidal function is then applied to the total to produce the research bonus. In theory this bonus could be applied to this type of research on other subjects such as a spell or device enchantment. For example, a successful research check against a spell might determine alternative usable foci, or optimal environmental or astrological casting conditions. A successful research check against a device enchantment could answer a question relating to possible material substitutions in the enchantment, identify the specific magical tradition of the original designer, or determine what form the designer's sigil might take when applied to a different magical effect. It is possible that some such "research" applications could exist for Arts as well, though I can't think of any off hand. I would recommend leaving the maximum Research bonus at +7.

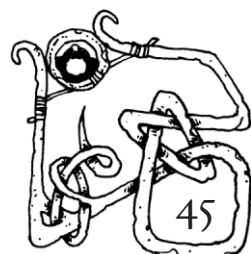
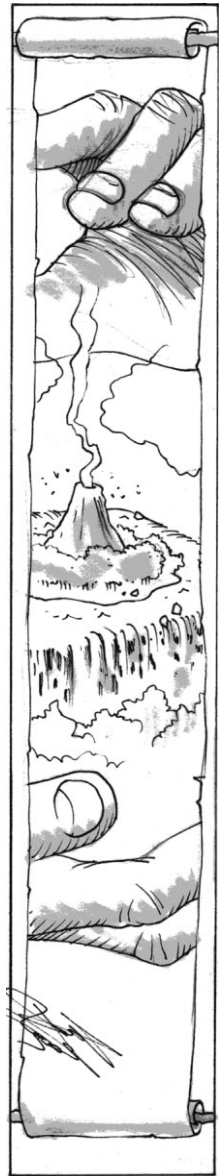
Knowledge: A collection of books on a Knowledge can also be treated as a single Summa with a reduced base Quality of 6. If the collection includes

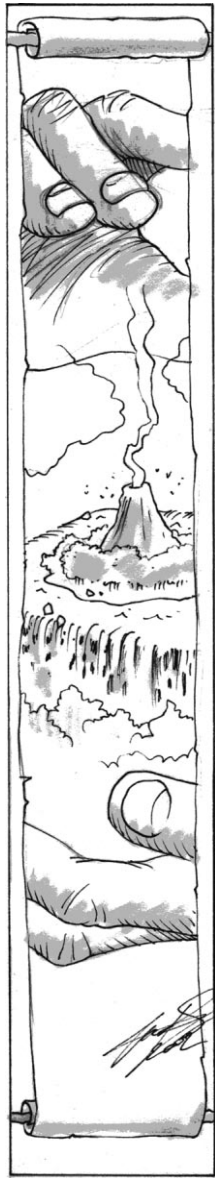
any books with an even lower Quality, the Quality of the collection is that of its lowest Quality book. Because books can be consulted collectively as well as individually, a subject rating can thus act as a shortcut for troupes that would prefer to avoid or defer until later a book by book determination of a library's contents. By and large, however, book by book study is more efficient. There is thus a continuing incentive for players to actually eventually knuckle down and develop a comprehensive catalogue of their collections. Note that the Quality and usability of a collection can be affected by the library's Virtues and Flaws.

Art: If not treating Arts as Abilities as suggested in "Artistic Ability", a given rating in an Art produces the indicated Art Summa equivalent. Otherwise the rule is the same as for Knowledges above.

Books Costs

Each book in the library costs a certain number of Book points. The tables below may appear complicated as there are three sets of them, but this is because they must cater to three sets of rules: the standard rules, and those found in "Ex Libris" HP2 and "Artistic Ability" HP3. Just a quick reminder, the "Ex Libris" rules cap the level of Tractatus and turn





LQs into specialized Summae. “Artistic Ability” scales back Art scores and treats Arts as Exceptional Knowledges.

If Using the Standard ArM4 Book Rules

All Tractatus and LQ cost 3 each when using the standard rules. The level of a spell book is equal to the spell’s magnitude. The level of a Lab text is equal to the magnitude of its enchantment. If more than one effect is contained in the enchantment, treat each effect as if it was covered by a different book. For example, if the enchanted item involves a level 25 effect and a level 15 effect, treat the Lab text as if it were a combined level 5 and level 3 summa for 15 Book points. The minimum cost for a summa, spell book, or Lab text (or Lab text component) is 3.

Table I. Summae on Knowledges, Spell books and Lab texts

Level	Cost	Level	Cost
3	3	7	25*
4	7	8	33**
5	12	9	42**
6	18*	10	52**

Table II. Summae on Arts

Level	Cost	Level	Cost
7	3	16	24
8	5	17	27
9	7	18	30
10	9	19	34***
11	11	20	38***
12	13	21	42***
13	15	22	47***
14	18	23	52***
15	21		

If using the “Ex Libris” and “Artistic Ability” rules

The cost of all Summae on Knowledges, Arts, Spell books and Lab texts is the same as that indicated in Table I above.

Table III. Tractatus on Knowledges, Arts, Spells and Enchantments

Level	Cost	Level	Cost
6	2	14	14*
7	3	15	16**
8	4	16	18**
9	5	17	21**
10	6	18	24**
11	8*	19	27**
12	10*	20	30**
13	12*		

Table IV. LQs on Knowledges and Arts

Level	Cost	Level	Cost
2	2	5	17**
3	5	6	26**
4	10*		

If using the “Ex Libris” but not the “Artistic Ability” rules

The cost of Summae on Knowledges, Spell books and Lab texts is the same as that indicated in Table I above. The cost of Summae on Arts is the same as in Table II. The cost of Tractatus on Knowledges, Spell books and Lab texts is the same as that indicated in Table III. The cost of LQs in Knowledges is the same as that indicated in Table IV.

Table V. Tractatus on Arts

Level	Cost	Level	Cost
14	2	33	15
16	3	34	16
18	4	35	17
21	5	36	18***
23	6	37	19***
24	7	38	20***
25	8	39	21***
26	9	40	22***
27	10	41	23***
29	11	42	24***
30	12	43	26***
31	13	44	28***
32	14	45	30***

Table VI. LQs on Arts

Level	Cost	Level	Cost
5	2	11	13
6	3	12	16***
7	5	13	19***
8	7	14	23***
9	9	15	27***
10	11		

* Only available for Knowledges if the Exceptional Books Virtue is chosen

** Not normally available for Knowledges, and only available for Arts, Spells and Enchantments if the Exceptional Books Virtue is chosen.

*** Only available if the Exceptional Books Virtue is chosen.

Book Quality

Unless affected by Virtues or Flaws, all books have the following standard Qualities

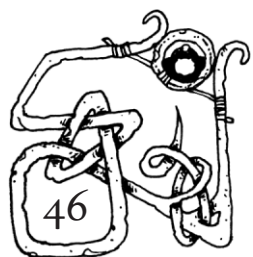
Tractatus: 6; Summae: 9; LQs: 12

Authorities

As previously mentioned in “Ex Libris” there is some confusion as to what exactly an Authority is under the standard rules. I am using the following “standard” definition:

An Authority in a given field consists of the collective major works on the subject written by all those authors (auctores) who are deemed to have defined it.

Thus an Authority is rarely, under the standard rules, a single book. For example, the Authority on *Artes Liberales* as described on page 57 of *ArM4* consists of the writings of Priscian and Donatus, the



Logica vetus and *Logica nova* of Aristotle, the works of Cicero (notably his *De inventione*), Boethius' *De arithmetica* and *De musica*, Euclid's *Elementa* and *Optica*, and Ptolemy's *Libri almagesti* (themselves a set of several books). Because of their complexity and their highly limited use under the standard rules, Authorities are not purchased like normal books, but are instead acquired through the Authoritative Works Virtue described below.

The "Ex Libris" rules offer a different definition and different mechanics for what they describe as "Authoritative works". These consist of any book written by an Auctor for a given Art or Knowledge, and costs +5 Book points more than an equivalent "normal" book.

Enchanted Books

We are not just talking about any library here, but the library of a Hermetic Covenant. Previous rules have neglected the possibility of low magnitude magical enhancements to books. Here are a few ideas:

- 1 "Illuminated" books that cast a CrIg Moonbeam effect when they are opened and thus can be read in the dark;
- 2 "Masked" books that cast a CrIm illusion over their pages so as to make them seem blank or covered with gibberish (very useful for disguising Occult Lore books from prying eyes);
- 3 "Responsive" books endowed with a ReAn effect such that if opened they automatically turn to the next page containing a word mentioned in their presence (triples their value for research purposes and creates added incentives for keeping quiet in the library);
- 4 "Cursed" books that cast irritating effects on anyone displacing them from the library, such as MuIm blue skin (MuIm), CrIm stench of rotting fish, or PeCo clap or severe anal itch.

All these effects would be 1st magnitude, and so far too weak to bother a mage wearing a Parma. They would, on the other hand, be quite effective against potential light-fingered mundane "long-term borrowers". Each such enchantment raises the cost of the book affected by +10. As most smaller medieval books were bound two or more to a volume, a single enchantment could affect several books, though only one could be read or studied at one time.

Virtues and Flaws

Virtues +1

Multiple Copies: Up to an additional 10th of the total book points can be assigned to multiple copies of existing books in the library. These extra copies are free, but must be at least one Physical Quality level less than the originals. This Virtue can be taken more than once. These multiple copies may not be automatically traded as part of the Exchange Agreement Virtue, though they can be traded as part of an adventure. They also obviously do not affect the library's subject ratings. The Physical Quality of these extra books can be reduced by more than one to satisfy the -1 Poor Physical Quality Flaw.

Authoritative Works: If using the Ex Libris rules, this Virtue negates the +5 cost for 10 Authoritative works in any fields. If using the standard book rules, it grants a free Authority in one field. This Virtue may be chosen more than once.

Enchanted Books: This Virtue negates the +10 cost of any five book enchantments (as described above). This Virtue may be chosen more than once. Note that the enchantments apply to "volumes" and not "books", so several books bound together can benefit from the same enchantment. A given volume can also benefit from more than one enchantment.

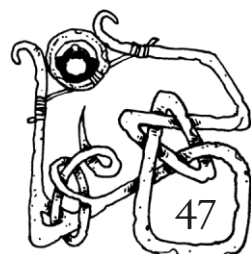
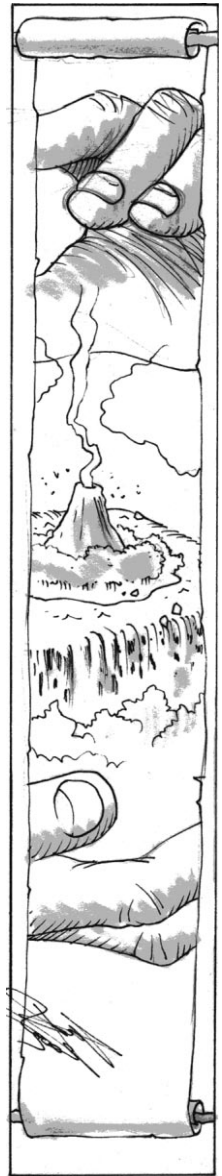
Exceptional Book: Permits the purchase of a book of exceptionally high level as indicated by the asterisks (* or **). This Virtue can be taken more than once.

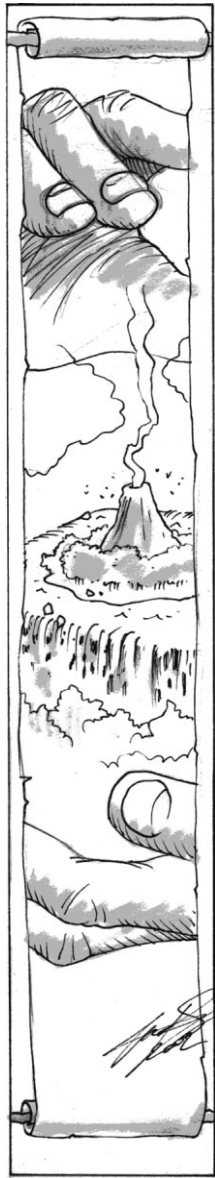
High Physical Quality: This Virtue grants the equivalent of 20% of the total book points towards the improvement of the physical Quality of some of the books in the library. Each time a book is "repurchased" with these extra points, its physical Quality improves by one. This Virtue may be taken more than once, and is compatible with the -1 Poor Physical Quality Flaw.

Clearly Written Books: The collection specializes in unusually well written masterpieces. This Virtue grants the equivalent of 10% of the total book points towards the improvement of the underlying Quality of some of the books in the library. Each time a book is "repurchased" with these extra points, its underlying Quality is improved by one. This Virtue may be taken more than once, and is compatible with the -1 Poorly Written Books Flaw.

Virtues +3

Exchange Agreement: Any new high or standard quality copies of books from the library made





by the Covenant can be automatically traded with for new books of equivalent value from other libraries.

Flaws -1

Lending Obligation: A long-established and binding policy of lending books to other Covenants means that not all books may be available for a season when needed by a player character. Roll a stress die with a single botch possibility. On a 0 the book is “out”. On a botch, the book is permanently lost and no return or compensation can be expected. Needless to say, perhaps, but taking inventory while subject to this Flaw is not recommended.

Divided Collection: The books in the library are held in two separate collections of roughly equal size under the control of different NPCs, or alternatively are kept in separate locations one or more days’ journey apart. Individual players normally have easy access to only one or the other, and must normally exchange favours with the relevant NPC or travel to obtain access to the other collection. This Flaw may be taken more than once. If taken twice, the library is divided into three collections. If taken three times, it is divided into four collections, and so on.

Poor Physical Quality: This Flaw imposes the equivalent of 40% of the total book points towards a reduction in the physical Quality of some of the books in the library. Each time a book is “repurchased” with these points, its physical Quality is reduced by one. This Flaw may be taken more than once and is compatible with the +1 High Physical Quality Virtue.

Poor Underlying Quality: Many of the books in the collection are by authors with poor writing skills. This Flaw imposes the equivalent of 20% of the total book points towards a reduction in the underlying Quality of some of the books in the library. Each time a book is “repurchased” with these points, its underlying Quality is reduced by one. This Flaw may be taken more than once and is compatible with the +1 High Physical Quality Virtue.

Non Standard Language: Some of the books in the library are written in a language and script not

normally used at the Covenant (which usually means some language other than Latin). At least 10% of the library’s book points must be assigned to works in Greek, Hebrew, or Arabic, or 5% in some other even more esoteric academic languages (such as Coptic, Syriac, or Armenian). This Flaw may be taken more than once.

Double Cost Lab texts: The Covenant library never made a point of collecting copies of lab texts, leading to their relative rarity within the collection.

Flaws -2

Double Cost Grimoires: The Covenant library never made a point of collecting copies of spell books, leading to their relative rarity within the collection.

Decaying Collection: Because of climate, vermin, a Covenant-wide habit of eating while reading, or just plain bad luck, the physical Quality of the collection is in inexorable decline. Each time a book is consulted, roll a stress die with a single botch possibility. On a 0 the book’s physical Quality has declined by one since its last use. On a botch, the book is now completely unusable. This Flaw can be countered to some extent with labour intensive frequent recopying, though this involves employing extra scribes and librarians and in itself risks damaging the originals.

Flaws -3

Double Cost Knowledges: The Covenant library never made a point of collecting works on Knowledges, leading to their relative rarity within the collection. Note that this Flaw will severely affect a library’s subject ratings. This Flaw does not apply to Arts, even if using the “Artistic Ability” rules.

So that’s it. Next issue we will move on to another Covenant Characteristic. Until then, just remember that any day without slaying some uselessly complicated Ars Magica sacred cow is at least a partially wasted one. Really fulfilling days involve the breaking of Ars taboos as well. And keep those ideas coming. I need them, and they can only lead to better heresies.

Dear Abelard

Translator’s Note:

Dear Abelard is a column devoted to the writings of an elderly follower of Bonisagus who believed the best way to fulfill his duty to the Order was to share all of his advice and research in the form of written correspondence with a network of readers, carried by Redcaps to magi throughout Mythic Europe. If, through the course of your saga or studies, you discover a question that you think could have at one time been answered by Abelard, please forward it to the editor,

Hermes.Portal@wanadoo.fr or to
dearabelard@yahoo.com

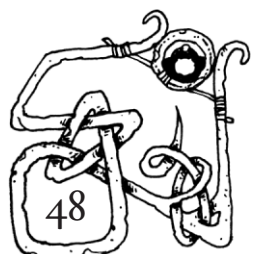
and we will attempt to find a record of his reply.



Salvete Sodales,

My dear and loyal friends, I must beg your forgiveness for my terseness this season, for a foul spirit has seized control of my body, and at intervals of four days I feel its cold touch take over my frame. It is a chilling experience, gentle reader, for as a magus I can see the shape of this ague that besieges me, and yet I am unable to banish him. He is a pale shade, with long nails, and he draws forth my humours even now, so that I can feel them collect in sweat upon my brow, and I burn with fiery fever though I am all shivering ice within.

I am frightened, and in pain and worry I have many times cursed my Arts, for they bring me no comfort. I can see the quartan that ails me, and I can perceive the imbalance within my blood, but I cannot right it, for such magical physicking is only tempo-



rary, and does not allow me time to heal while it holds my body in place. Neither I nor the other magi within my covenant have the skill to banish a spirit of this strength, and so it seems I must endure his touch if I am to overcome his influence. I am forced to rely upon more earthly remedies, and thrice a day I drink a tonic of herbs and fortified wine that will eventually sicken and drive away the spirit that assails me, or so I am assured.

I admit that I have been choleric of late, and I did spend much time in the sun during the waning summer. My thoughts became sad and solemn, and I kept to myself as I watched our fair earth again lose its life and begin to wilt and wither with the coming autumn. I will not tell you of the unkind thoughts that sometimes cross my mind, or of the times I have lied to people in the village, or even the covenant, in order to keep my secrets and my confidence, but these transgressions are now foremost among my thoughts. I confess that I do at times covet and desire, more than for that which I am due (for I am always wishing to regain the time I have lost, among other things), and I keep to myself, hiding behind my letters, rather than going forth into the world and helping others more tangibly in the flesh. These sins make me cold and dry, and yellow in color, and from this drying field the disease spirits may reap great harvest. I am certain I deserve this illness, and that it has come as punishment from God.

Thus, I caution you, my patient reader: live well, but live temperately, seeking moderation and avoiding sin. I would wish this awful malady on no one else, but my illnesses could easily be yours, if you are not mindful of your health and spirits.



Dear Abelard,

A season ago, a maga in my covenant of Ricany was involved in a magical theft, which saw her swap her body with that of another. The body-thief, who was not a Hermetic mage, managed to get away, leaving my sodalis, Aleska, in the thief's body. Apart from the necessity of getting the body back, we are also left with two other pressing questions.

Firstly, we have ascertained that it is truly her in the body, and surprisingly she is still able to perform Hermetic magic, albeit with difficulty. I was taught by my parens that one of the Hermetic limits was that of the Soul, and also learnt that the Gift was contained within the soul. What is your more erudite opinion? My sodalis Elek says that there are two essences within the body: the Spirit and the Soul, both of which can contain the Gift. According to him, the Spirit is tied to the Realms of magic and the fae, whereas the Soul is the spark of life granted by God. My own research has been less fruitful due to a recent calamity that saw the loss of much of our library (and the great hall to boot!).

Additionally, we are left pondering Aleska's status under Hermetic Law. Neither Elek nor I have any knowledge of the intricacies of the law. Would you be able to consult your sodalis Moratamis of Guer-

nicus? Once again, we are unsure on this matter. The Hermetic Oath seems to place importance upon the presence of the Gift. Is the Oath binding upon the body or soul, or both? Is there precedent for magi being in a different body than the one in which they swore the oath? Can Aleska still vote at Tribunal, and is she protected under the Code?

Yours under the Oath,

Alias, follower of Tremere,
member of the Ricany Covenant in A.A. 1359

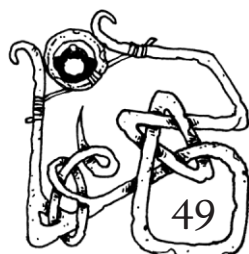
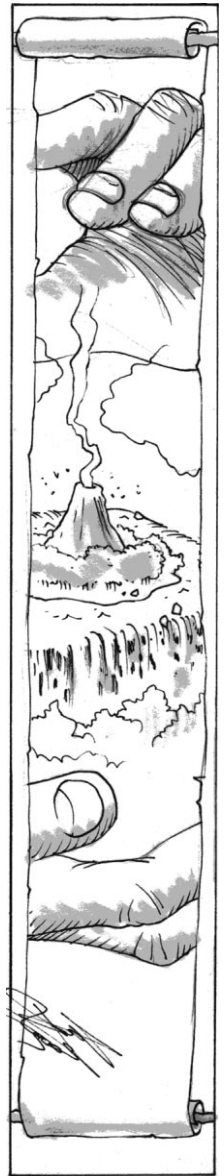
My dear Alias,

Such calamities! My own troubles are nothing compared to the loss suffered by your sodalis and the disasters that have befallen your covenant. The thief must surely be punished, and I suspect you will find many of our Order who would be willing to help you deliver justice. Here we see again the reason for our founders' attempts to introduce all those who practice magic into the Order, for were the miscreant so governed, a Hermetic tribunal could address his crimes. As things stand now he is a menace, a fox among the chickens, and because of his magical ploy, any outside assistance must be handled with extreme delicacy and care.

I have asked my good friend Moratamis (to whom I always turn for answers to difficult legal questions, and who because of the situation was kind enough to waive her usual fee) about her status under the Code. Things are not going to be easy for wronged Aleska. There are apparently few precedents, but generally the Order looks to the body of the magus, and not the spirit. Consider those magi who have died before experiencing Final Twilight, and returned to earth in ghostly spirit form: without their living bodies, they are no longer considered members of the Order. They cannot vote, and they are not afforded the protections that those within our society take for granted.

Your enemy, it could be argued, armed as he is with the body of your sodalis, can exploit all of the rights normally accorded to her while he is controlling her body. Similarly, her situation is perilous, for she is not protected by the Code, and while it would be a regrettable misunderstanding, none of our Order could be faulted or punished for slaying or otherwise treating with her as the hedge wizard she appears to be. It is as if the thief is magically manipulating Aleska while he is trapped in your midst. When the spell ends, or perhaps when he dies, Aleska may naturally return to her own body, but I would not risk her life on this experiment.

You ask some very difficult questions concerning the soul and the spirit. Of course Hermetic magic (and, we must assume, whatever variety of magic the thief practiced) cannot affect Aleska's immortal soul. Therefore, he cannot exchange his fate for hers, and ultimately he will suffer the consequences for his actions. The soul is the beautiful individual unknowable self; I cannot begin to speculate whether it contains the Gift, or if the Gift is part of the spirit, the body, or some of all three. It may be that the Gift is





part of the body, but that as the thief possessed it also, Aleska may use his in lieu of her own. Or, it may be that the Gift is part of her spirit and travels with her (this I think more likely, as many of the aspects of our Gift that animals and others find disturbing are also evidenced by ghosts and magical spirits). The Gift may also be tied to the soul in some way, but we have no way of knowing the truth until we have joined with our Creator in the lands beyond the heavens.

Let us now turn to a letter that concerns one of my previous letters, in essence, and continues our discussion of the practice of certámen and other aspects of Hermetic law among those of House Mercere.



Dear Abelard,
Greetings and salutations!

I am a member of House Mercere. While humbly in the performance of my duties, a young member of another House came into conflict with me over a trivial matter (the right to cross a narrow bridge). He insisted that I resolve the matter through certámen. I conceded his point and allowed him to have his way and cross first. I explained that most members of my House do not have the Gift necessary to conduct this duel. I neither confirmed nor denied my ability to engage in the duel.

Later, this same magus attempted to use magical means to interfere with my personal affairs, namely the recruitment of an apprentice for another member of my home covenant. I responded in kind and destroyed a magical item he was using to control the child in question.

This magus now intends to complain before my tribunal that I refused to engage him in certámen on the earlier occasion, and that this refusal, not his foolish interference in my affairs, cost him his magic item, and that I should now compensate him for it and deliver the apprentice to his control. He contends that, had he known I was Gifted, he would have resolved the matter of the apprentice in a more straightforward way (through certámen).

I contend that it was part of my duties as a Redcap to keep obscure the status of my Gift, as well as the Gift-status of my sibling Redcaps whenever possible, as it adds much to our protection when among strangers. If a magus can challenge us to certámen over a trivial matter and thus expose some of the strengths and weaknesses of a Redcap, the security of my House — and the Order — would be compromised significantly.

Even now I refuse to make clear whether I accomplished the destruction of his toy with a magic item of my own, or through the exercise of any



natural Gift. This refusal of course continues to infuriate my adversary.

Do you believe I acted within the Code and traditions of our Order?

Horrace ex Mercere, Novgorod Tribunal

My dear Horrace,

As I wrote in my letter before last, certámen is a method whereby two mages can settle their differences quickly, instead of the more lengthy means of resolution involving participation in Tribunal or quaesitorial mediation. Any magus may challenge another to certámen as a means of resolving a dispute, and both parties implicitly agree that the results of the contest are binding. There are, of course, other methods of resolving these conflicts.

Translator's Note: Abelard refers to the letters published as Dear Abelard in Hermes' Portal issue number 4, which discuss the subject of certámen in much greater detail.

These conditions apply also to followers of Mercere, even if they cannot engage in certámen. While refusing challenges is frowned upon, I believe it is understandable if the magi in question cannot defend themselves, and Tribunals will probably show leniency in such matters. However, I have heard that for this reason (I cannot confirm it in my weakened state) many Redcaps enlist friends or associates (or quaesitores, Gifted Redcaps, or other magi devoted to fairness in principle) to act as their champions in certámen. There is not, as far as I can tell, any formal procedure for this, but it is simple enough to insist upon a champion as part of the terms of the contest, or for the champion to challenge the adversary on his charge's behalf when their roles are reversed.

Moratamis, my learned colleague, writes in response to your letter: "This magus to whom [Horrace] caused such consternation seems to have been nettled beyond his faculties. Had he presented his case to me, I would have laughed at him. [The Redcap] conceded the earlier contest, for whatever reason, and in any case it had no bearing on the later dispute concerning the apprentice..." I have not included the remainder of Moratamis's reply, as I do not wish her more spirited tone to offend anyone. However, suffice it to say that she thinks little of his claim.

My opinion is this: you must admit that your attempts to keep secret whether or not you bear the gift have had their intended effect. Your adversary does not know whether or not you have the capacity to perform magic, and therefore he does not know whether or not it is effective to challenge you on any trivial matters that may occur between you. For how long do you intend to mislead him? I suspect that this magus will continue to throw pebbles at you, to speak analogously, until he knows the truth, and you may come out better if you simply tell him.

I do believe you should be commended for your restraint and your thoughtfulness, for you seem to consider your House and your peers without the Gift in everything you do. I find such consideration quite refreshing in these troubled times. That said, I cannot confirm that I think you acted according to the tra-

ditions of the Order, though you seem to have followed the strict letter of the Code. By refusing to explain why you conceded the certámen on the bridge, allowing a magus to believe that you do not have the Gift, you misled him into thinking you were unable to accept his challenge. I feel this goes against the spirit of the Order, for while it is his own fault that he did not challenge you again on the matter of the apprentice, you must admit that you did not act in an entirely straightforward manner during your dealings with him.

I understand your reasons for wishing to keep your Gift hidden, if indeed you have it, but I think you will find it is more difficult than it is worth. For example, you are aware of the tradition that a Gifted magus must have reached a certain level of understanding in every Art before he may take a new apprentice? If you are planning to teach your new apprentice magic, your Tribunal may require a demonstration of your knowledge, and it would be impossible subsequently to keep your magic a secret. It is true that you could likely teach the child as a normal Redcap for many years without having to answer the question, but as soon as you wished to begin teaching the Arts, you would have to have increased your magical abilities to an acceptable level.

I am, of course, not a member of your House, and you may have traditions and standards of which I am not aware. Perhaps your Tribunal handles these questions differently than mine. If you would take my advice, though, I suggest that you let go of this subtlety and deceit and share your talents honestly with all who have need of them. I believe it would do your peers a much greater compliment should you perform your good works, magical or otherwise, in their name and in service to the Order, rather than keeping them to yourself. Do not hide your light under a bushel; God has given you many virtues, and I believe you must make the most of all of them.

Until next issue, my dear readers,

ABELARDO

"Dear Abelard" was written by Lanatus, follower of Bonisagus, and his sodalis 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.

