

CastlesTM and Covenants



A Setting Book for Mage: The Sorcerers CrusadeTM

CASTLES
AND
COVENANTS

CastlesTM and Covenants

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Black Moon

By Sian Kingstone

The gate to Hrossheim was no more than a vague outline against the star-speckled sky. Soon the moon would rise.

Mary Prior sat on the hillside opposite the keep. Behind her, a cacophony of night sounds rose from the forest of Charnwood, but these were no more than whispers at the edge of her senses. Her thoughts were focused on the keep and on the girl who had passed beyond the gate into the Otherworld.

Mary breathed deeply. She could not rest. Ever since Kestral and the unicorn had begun the next stage of their journey, something had itched deep inside her.

Her wolf companion, Longshanks, paced the grass beside her, his attention fixed on the keep. His eyes glowed brightly, as if moonlight were trapped within them. When Mary stood up, the wolf faced her and huffed through his nostrils.

"Come on, boy," she said reluctantly, "it's over."

The wolf backed away.

"Longshanks, I'm not staying here all night."

Still the wolf would not come to her.

"What is it?" Mary stepped forward, but as she approached, he backed further away, with his head lowered to the ground. Her empathy with him allowed her to sense his thoughts, which were full of fast-moving images, whose edges blurred as one ran into the other.

"Slow down. Let me see what you see — please?"

An image of a swollen river surged through Mary's mind. Longshanks whimpered.

"Are you hurt?"

The whimper became a whine, and Mary tried again to catch her companion. But with each step she took, the wolf went a little further.

She took several deep breaths and forced her mental senses to plunge into Longshank's. His eyes seemed to pull her to him. Somewhere inside her, the strange compulsion to follow Kestral returned.

A voice rose and fell with the wind. "Help me!"

Someone was calling to Mary through Longshanks, whose mind flashed images of a figure trapped in the river's raging torrents, red hair tangled with weeds. It seemed like Kestral, the girl who had come to return the unicorn to its own world.

Mary stared into the wolf's moon-sparked eyes until it occurred to her what she must do. She shuddered. The thought of *that* place...it would be like throwing herself into a sea, not knowing where its deepest bed might lie. Yet, part of her yearned to explore the Otherworld.

Mary looked back at the wolf and again felt that strange pull from his eyes. "Trust me," they seemed to urge. "Let me guide you. Meld your soul with mine."

Still she hesitated.

In one leap, Longshanks crossed the short distance between them. His head was a hair's width from her own, his jaws parted just enough to bare the tips of his teeth. If he wanted to, he could tear her open before she so much as blinked. But in all the years he had been with her, he had never given her cause to fear him. She had always trusted him. Why should this be any different?

Her voice quivered as if all the air had been squeezed from her lungs. "All right. I'll go."

Mary slowly reached out a trembling hand and touched the wolf's moon-speckled fur. Her fingers reached deep into his coat until she felt the skin beneath. And the sinew. And the bone.

Mary gasped as Longshanks' body sucked her essence inside him.

• • •

Kestral had crossed over from Hrossheim. It was behind her now, and she was in the spiritual sphere of Llund, which is the kingdom of water ruled by the moon, one step up from Earth. She hoped it was her last visit. The place unnerved her and always had. She was eager to climb to the next realm up from here — the kingdom of air — from which she hoped to ascend to the realm of fire, her natural element. Kestral saw no good reason why she should include the moon in this ascension. Air was thought, fire was action. What other power did she need? The moon was weakness and passivity; she was not a daydreamer.

The unicorn rested easily beside her, quite unaffected by his surroundings. Or so it seemed. Kestral had no real way of telling. Of course, the wolf-girl would know, but she was on the other side of the gate.

A huge moon, the archetype of all moons, cast silvery radiance over the land. The lake at Kestral's feet glittered as if dusted with diamonds. A fine mist drifted across the water toward her, a gossamer veil itself caught in the strange luminescence. This realm was one of silver fire and shadows wreathed in violet.

She stepped out onto a wooden jetty, the unicorn close behind her. They waited. Presently, Kestral heard a rhythmic slop and swish from somewhere ahead. She had thought the ferry man might keep her waiting, but no, there was his wide-bottomed boat, gliding out of the mists toward her.

The vessel came to rest alongside the jetty, seemingly without any counterstrokes from the invisible crew. Its single occupant stood at the prow, swathed in a hooded cloak of thick gray wool which hid both head and hands. In fact, Kestral was not entirely sure there was anyone inside the cloak at all.

Once she and the unicorn were aboard, the boat moved swiftly across the lake, covering the distance far faster than Kestral would have thought possible. Patches of gray mist swirled and billowed around her, an ethereal watcher come

to greet her. It was not one entity, she realized, but several. Faceless silver wraiths oozed into the space beside her, sliding and coiling their damp limbs about her. Kestral stiffened and spent the rest of the journey with her fingers digging into the wooden seat.

Gradually the mists drew back to reveal a small island: Aewella, the source of the river and the heart of the Moon Realm. A tower stood at its center, a giant tooth of ice jutting up into a starlit sky.

At last they reached a rocky inlet, where steps hewn from solid rock led the way up to the base of the tower. Beyond its giant portals waited Dione, the queen of the water kingdom, and her court. The doors swung open.

Aewella rang with the sound of running water and the hypnotic drip of melting ice. The tower was melting, yet it constantly rebuilt itself. The icy path sucked the warmth from Kestral's feet, and for once she wished she had a pair of boots. The numbness crept up her legs and wrapped itself around her very core. She had always been able to rely on the fire in her soul to sustain her, to drive her onward, but if this place quenched it, she would be annihilated.

Dwell here much longer, Kestral thought, *and I'll dissolve into this realm*. How she hated water.

As Kestral worked her way through the keep's corridors, she saw air bubbles suspended in walls and hollows where the bubbles had become exposed. Her way was lit by miniature candles flickering from the natural alcoves. With so much moisture in the air, she was amazed the candles could burn at all. She found it hard to breathe, and tendrils of wet hair clung to her face.

She stepped over a puddle and into the Great Hall. Here spiral columns supported vaulted ceilings, but it was hard to tell where roof ended and pillars began. In this cavern was the pool into which the tower's meltwaters flowed before seeping into the Moon Realm.

The unicorn had already left Kestral's side and now approached pool, head bowed to drink from its cool waters. His horn glittered in the candlelight.

Beyond the pool stood the throne of Aewella, carved entirely from a single block of ice. A figure sat languidly on that throne, her dark tresses tumbling over bare shoulders to swirl at her feet. Around her neck hung a circlet of silver studded with amethysts and moonstones. The ice lady smoothed her diaphanous robes. The only welcome she gave was a nod and a knowing smile.

Kestral stiffened her spine and braced herself in readiness for the verbal battle she knew was to come. She wanted this to end — now. "Well," she gestured awkwardly toward the unicorn, "there he is."

"So I see," came Dione's soft, unhurried reply.

The queen spread her hands over the knuckles of ice that formed the armrests of her throne. She paused, black

eyes fixed in intense study. It was several moments before she spoke again. "Do you have the answer to my question, the one I asked you the first time you came here?"

Kestral nodded and squirmed under the icy gaze.

"Well then, tell me: why are you here?"

"You sent me on a quest to find your unicorn."

"Yes. And before that?"

Kestral wiped damp hair from her eyes and frowned. The answer was there, somewhere, but what if she got it wrong? Panic flared inside her. "As part of my magical training, I should experience all the spheres of the Tree of Life, but from Earth I went straight to Mughar, the kingdom of air. The lords of that realm sent me back here and then you sent me on a quest, which I have completed."

Still that knowing smile danced on the queen's lips. "And what has the company of the unicorn taught you about this realm? You have tried to use water in your magick and failed. Doesn't that tell you something? Why are you here?"

Kestral felt wrath crackle and spit within her. Yes, she had made a mistake. She did not need be reminded of that. If Dione had the power to see inside her, why couldn't she just tell Kestral the answer? Frustration lashed against the restraining bonds of fear and respect. The queen was like this tower, a tower of unresponsive ice. A mortal had no chance of moving her and would probably be crushed in the attempt, even if that mortal were a witch. To make matters worse, cold water dropped from the ceiling to slide down Kestral's neck. She was cold, she was wet, and the air clamped her head like a cider press. Was there anything else this world could spew at her? It seemed there was.

"Well, child," the ice lady said, "if you have no answer, perhaps you should stay here."

"But what else is there to learn? I know everything about this place."

The queen raised a finely arched eyebrow, her face suddenly somber. "You have learnt nothing at all, child."

Kestral's anger ignited. It raged through her like a blast of hot air from a chimney. Child indeed! She wanted to bring this whole castle down around that smug spirit's face. If only she had something to throw.

Before she realized what she had done, a bolt of fire shot from her hands. It hit the base of the throne, spluttered and died almost immediately. Kestral stared, open-mouthed.

Dione did not flinch. She merely looked at Kestral as if a slug had crawled into her court. "Your magick will not work in Aewella." She waved her hand over Kestral. "And now you cannot use it in Llun at all. Go. Do not return until you have the answer."

• • •

Mary's head was low in the grass as she ran toward Hrossheim. The scent of hares and deer stirred the juices in her mouth, and her stomach growled in anticipation. Her legs felt strong, powerful, and the land sped swiftly beneath them. Wind whipped the fur on her back, both cooling and sustaining her while she ran, ran, ran down the hill.

Longshanks' presence ran alongside her in the same body — his body — guiding and encouraging her. As the wolf's heart pounded and his tendons strained, Mary shared with him the sweet agony of being alive. This was what she wanted to be, had always wanted to be, but it was a dream she had never quite realized was there.

In her mind, Mary saw herself running toward the keep, then passing through the gate. She knew this was what Longshanks wanted her to do.

Is Kestral in trouble? she asked.

As a wolf, Longshanks could not communicate with words. Through the images he sent her, she realized that Longshanks was a denizen of the realm beyond the gate, receptive to its echoes. At that moment, she saw herself at the base of an old oak tree, looking up to the first branch where a glowing moon swung from it like a wish-token caught in a breeze. Other branches spun outward, each with its own adornment, the topmost level carrying a pulsating crown.

The Tree of Life, she thought, and Kestral has passed to the next level from Earth, the realm of the moon.

Her mind cleared, and before her she saw the keep. *This is where I must go.*

At the gate to the keep, Mary stopped, panting heavily. The doors swung open, spilling bright light into her sensitive eyes. Panic began to flood through her and she almost fled, but Longshanks urged her onward.

She took a hesitant step over the threshold and braced herself for the unknown.

What she found surprised her. It did not shock her; neither did it fill her with fear. Hills of white sand stretched before her while above them the moon shone brightly. It was much stronger than the one over her home realm. After all, as Longshanks told her, this was the kingdom of water. The moon ruled everything here.

Ahead of her, the dunes gave way to hunched willows and glittering pools. Beyond them, a lake stretched across the horizon. A gargantuan column of ice stood at the island's center.

Mary burst into a frantic run, twisting and turning and leaping. She was free. And the water! As she reached the willows, her eyes drank in the array of pools, streams, fine mist and pelting rain. She relished them all and rolled in a puddle, just for good measure. Here was a world in which she truly belonged.

At the edge of a small pool, she stopped to slake her thirst. As she bent her head, a white wolf, barely more than a cub, stared back at her from the water. It seemed that passing through the gate had changed her borrowed body.

Kestral's thoughts interrupted her, flashing impressions of driftwood tossed by churning currents.

Under Longshanks' guidance, Mary angled left around the base of a hill. He showed her an image of a girl with red hair on the opposite side of silver plains.

She saw white hares and silver fish as she ran, and she saw horses that flew in the boiling sky above, unicorns, crayfish — and were those wolves she heard? The ground sped beneath her feet.

They were indeed wolves — white wolves. She met them on the far side of a large lake, right at the brink of open plains. She slowed, lest her arrival be construed as a challenge. When she was still some distance away, Longshanks impelled her to stop.

The entire pack regarded her with curiosity. An old, gnarled male pushed his head forward as if to peer closer. Even at that distance, Mary could feel those intelligent eyes boring into hers. The old wolf raised his snout, tested the air. She wondered if he would set the pack on her. Could she outrun it?

The moments stretched, until finally the old wolf broke away.

Mary tensed as an inquisitive nose explored her lupine body. She hoped the scent of her fear was not too strong. If this creature chose to attack her, she had no doubt who would win. She only had to look at the size of his claws to see that. He was fearsome, despite his broken tooth.

Once the old wolf had completed his inspection, he circled her once more. Finally, Broken Tooth came to a stop, black eyes pinning her to the spot. Puzzlement rippled out from him. "Who are you?" his twitching nostrils seemed to inquire.

Mary froze. Then Longshanks created an image of a she-wolf whose silvery-bright tail swished above her newborn cubs, Mary in her borrowed body among them. She felt the image spin out to Broken Tooth.

The old wolf regarded her for a moment, then bowed his head, ears flattened. With that he made to rejoin the pack, leaving Mary to follow.

As she approached the moon wolves, Mary sensed she was among Longshanks' kin. He had come home at last. She realized that just as humans might seek to climb the Tree, so animals might seek human company on Earth.

• • •

Chill misery coiled about her bones.

As soon as Kestral had left Aewella, the chase had begun. No matter how hard she had tried to escape them, the wolves had pressed her on across the open plains, herding her away from the forest she sought. She had hoped

to locate a guide to help her solve the queen's ridiculous riddle, but the pack had steered her into the hills until she had found sanctuary in a hollow in the rocks. They had given her no chance at all. If it was not for her meager fire, they would have been upon her by now, she was sure.

Kestral hunched herself against the wind's serpentine touch and placed another branch on the fire. She was as far into the back of the hollow as she could comfortably get, but still the elements tormented her. Outside, the sky boiled with purple-edged clouds. It was raining again. A fine gray drizzle drifted on a pervasive winter wind, both whispering of more icy tendrils to come, perhaps even snow before long.

The fire crackled and spat.

My protector, she thought, and yet it gives birth to the darkness around me.

The queen had been true to her word. Kestral had no magick to protect her, not even enough to create a spark in the tinder she had hastily gathered. The piece of flint she had used instead had been a lucky find along the way. How she would have fared without *that* she dared not imagine.

For a moment she sat mesmerized as shadows and flames twisted in their incestuous embrace. She wished the fire would burn away the rain and stem the source of that steady drip-drip somewhere in the cave. How she hated the water of this place. It seeped through every fiber, every pore, until it seemed to permeate her very soul. She could hear a black pool swirling and swishing in her head, with those treacherous waters drawing her to their edge. She was like the bubbles of air in the ice lady's tower; trapped until the water saw fit to release her. She ached to be free, to fly, to soar through the air.

Her eyes snapped open. Her heart fluttered. All around her drifted the siren song of wind and rain. How seductive its magick — how corrupting. In an effort to ignore its call, she let her eyes begin to roam the cave once more, scrutinizing every crack and crevice.

Ignore the water, she thought, and find a way out of here.

But there were no holes to climb through, no loose rocks or stones to throw. She was burning the only weapons she had, yet she needed the fire to keep the pack at bay. If she listened quietly, perhaps she would hear claws scrabbling up the bank. At least she hoped she would, before the fight actually began.

Kestral stared at the flames, praying that their fragile light would not die, wondering what she would do once the fuel was exhausted. She spread her hands out above the fire, sinews taut. How small the human hand was, how feeble. What damage could it possibly inflict on forest-hardened tooth and claw?

Better to run and hide.

A hollow wail trailed a chill path across the plains, followed by another and another. In the distance, perhaps

from Aewella itself, came more answering cries. The moon wolves were coming, and Kestral had nowhere else to run.

• • •

Mary howled at the night sky.

Her brethren were all around her. They had escorted her to the foothills of Heahdun, where five more of their kindred waited. Higher up in the rocks, a fire burned brightly, invoking growls and snarls from the pack gathered below. Their frenzy spawned a torrent of excitement within her. There was another reason for her being there, but it eluded her, for her blood now raged with the thrill of the hunt.

When Broken Tooth encouraged them to howl again, she threw her head back and emptied her lungs. She could tell he was proud of Bright Tail's feisty cub.

Before long, the flames leapt higher and glowing cinders littered the sky like black snow. A wave of fear washed down the hillside, and the wolves drank it greedily.

Mary felt laughter flood each lupine heart. It amused her, too. How could anyone be frightened of these beautiful beasts? She cast her gaze up at the fragile light among the rocks. In her mind she saw a broken figure, fighting for air: it was Kestral, and she was drowning. Mary's joy suddenly turned to shame. This was not sport; this was cruel.

Broken Tooth stepped up onto a boulder as if addressing the wolves of the moon. Mary could sense his disdain of the red-haired woman in the image he projected. The Queen of Aewella might tolerate the interloper, but he did not intend to.

The pack became even more excited at this, and the howling began anew. They jostled round him with ears pricked and tails erect, eager to climb the hill. This time, however, Mary did not join in.

The old wolf waited for the uproar to die down. Despite his apparent puzzlement at Mary's reserve, sparks of amusement danced in his eyes.

She raised her head, *Enough*, she thought. It would take courage to teach the girl what she needed to know, for Mary sensed that she and her kin were the wolves of Red Hair's blackest feelings and darkest fears. Mary sent a final thought to the old wolf: *Step aside and let me show her.*

The pack fell silent.

Skin and fur wrinkled around Broken Tooth's snout as he bared his teeth. His response came as sharply as if he had clipped her ears. How dare she challenge him!

Mary tensed. Longshanks wanted her to fight this gnarled old wolf. Her legs quivered as she snarled. Her bond was with Red Hair, and she would not let the moon wolves hurt her.

For several moments, the air crackled with ice as instincts clashed. A deep growl rumbled in the old wolf's throat. Hackles raised, he sprang toward her.

• • •



Was that scrabbling? Kestral stiffened. This was no covert assault; something was charging up the hill and making a lot of noise about it, too.

The young witch grabbed a branch from the fire. The attack had come a lot sooner than she had expected. She had thought they might leave it until the fire had died down. Gripping the burning brand tightly, Kestral pushed herself into the back of the cave and made sure she still had room to move. With the fire between herself and the entrance, she might just fight them off — for a while.

If she had the use of her magick, of course, it would have been a different matter. A few bolts of flame directed at the pack would have dispersed it long ago. As it was, she could hardly think for the sound of water rushing through her head. Kestral swallowed hard. She wondered if the queen had known this would happen.

A scuffle near the entrance made her heart stutter. A white shape leapt out of the gloom and into her sanctuary. In the next bound it cleared the fire.

Too slow to evade it, Kestral threw her arms over her eyes just before the creature landed on her. Her head hit the ground with a sickening thud.

The weight of the beast pressed against her, on her chest now. Sharp claws dug through her clothes as it leaned closer. Kestral was acutely aware of its bloody breath on her face, of its long, red-stained teeth. A white wolf peered down at her, tongue lolling to one side as it panted heavily.

Images rushed through Kestral's mind, too fast for her to follow. Then the pictures slowed, and she saw a girl and a wolf melding into one. A rough tongue licked her face.

"Mary?" she whispered incredulously.

As her head cleared, she noticed a cut just above the animal's snout. Blood oozed from another wound and torn flesh hung loosely near her left eye. A trail of scratches and bite marks drew Kestral's eyes down the wolf-girl's body.

More flashes came: two wolves snarling, fangs bared, claws steeped in blood; one wolf standing, the blood of the other tainting her throat; the pack baying in exultation.

It was Mary, Kestral was sure of it. Frantically she grabbed the wolf's thick fur and hung on as if it were the only thing keeping her afloat. *Mary, help me!* her mind pleaded.

And another picture came: a fiery bird arcing toward the moon.

Yes! Yes, that's me!

In the next instant, the bird plunged from the skies. Its fragile body hit the surface of a pool, right through the center of the moon's reflection. Like the flames around the bird, the picture faded and died.

Kestral frowned. The wolf-girl was trying to tell her something, but what?

Mary stood up and went over to the mouth of the cave, picking her way around the fire. Kestral followed but stayed just inside.

Outside, the landscape was bathed in a silvery glow now that the clouds had cleared, as ephemeral as a picture painted with half-closed eyes. Shadows were softened, edges blurred; its beauty was strange, compelling.

Kestral followed the wolf-girl's gaze upward to where the Moon hung, pregnant with power. She was ensnared at once. Something foul stirred within her, an undercurrent that made her skin prickle. The moonlight increased in intensity until dark spots swam before her eyes. Then the spots began to merge, thickening and darkening until a black moon loomed over her.

As the moon swelled, so the nauseating tide rose inside her. She closed her eyes. Stagnant waters dragged her down, down, down, away from light, away from air; down until all she felt was water, crushing, twisting; down until her eyes strained in their sockets, her ears buzzed, her ribcage creaked; down until she thought there was no up.

You're nothing, the fetid water seemed to whisper. Why fight it? You belong in the sludge at the bottom.

Then, just as she thought she had expelled her last breath, she saw the silvery moon above her, glowing brightly once more. With a final, desperate effort, she kicked for the light — now she wanted to reach it, to grasp her salvation.

She opened her eyes and gasped for air. A river of feelings swept through her, clear water this time. She let it take her where it would, feeling it cleanse her of the dark waters and stream from her eyes. When it had finally ebbed away, she felt as if all the poison had been flushed out of her.

Kestral wiped her eyes. She hadn't cried since she was a child. When her sight returned to normal, she realized that she was not alone. Wolves watched her from just outside, with Mary close behind, herding them in.

Instinctively, Kestral ran to the back of the cave, but not from fear. All she could think of was water. There, in a deep recess she had somehow missed before, was the source of the dripping sound that had so tormented her. Meltwaters ran through a crack to land in a small pool in the rock. With cupped hands she drew from its depths. Again and again she tossed water at the fire until the branches hissed and sizzled. What flames she had not quenched she stamped out. Part of her felt strangely relieved at that — elevated, purged.

Without hesitation, the wolves entered the hollow. As she bent down to greet them, Kestral realized that she no longer feared them. Yes, she had threatened to dominate them with her fire, but she knew these creatures were no threat to her now that she had dampened the flames herself.

Old and young wolves alike whined, nuzzling each other out of the way to sniff and lick her face. *What*

wonderful creatures, she thought. She stroked them and hugged Mary close to her. Her tears mingled with the wolf-girl's blood as she felt the strength of the bond between them. An answering rumble vibrated in Mary's throat.

The truth had been inside Kestral all along: before reason came instinct. All she had to do was reach out with a compassionate heart. Only then came true knowledge and understanding.

The queen would let her go, she knew it. Freedom, however, did not seem that important anymore. Right then, she had something else she wanted to do.

The silver moon still hung overhead. Kestral lay down on the grass where its healing rays could reach her. Her heart was full, with pure waters this time.

The wolf-girl trotted over and curled up beside the witch, her fangs catching the light as she yawned. Kestral placed an arm over her, grateful for the warmth the wolf's body lent to hers. As sleep began to take her, she smiled. The next world could wait a while. Knowledge was a prize worth seeking, but to feel whole was glorious.





Chapter 1: Souls and Mortar

"All these things considered then, I shall praise him who builds fortresses as well as him who does not, and I shall blame whoever, trusting in them, cares little about being hated by the people."

— Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*



Without the folk who build it, garrison it, and conspire to batter down its walls, a castle is simply an artfully arranged pile of rocks. Without a treasurer to count its gold, and knowledge of routes and laws, a trading house is nothing but a family home. Likewise, a Covenant consists of people as well as buildings.

The magick-working inhabitants of a chantry or lodge constitute a Covenant. Before we describe specific places scattered across the magickal world, let's discuss a few elements that make a Covenant what it is. Covenants take many forms, and the ever-changing Renaissance is creating more. However, some broad rules of thumb apply.

Cabals

All Covenants are made up of cabals (also known as "covens" and "khanaqahs"), although the smallest may have just one cabal which is the Covenant. A cabal is a small group of mages with shared goals and concerns; one of less than three is rarely taken seriously, and one of more than seven or eight, ten at most, is usually too fractious and cumbersome not to subdivide. Effective cabals compensate for each other's weaknesses and know how to use each other's strengths.

Cabals come together by mutual agreement, through chance and friendship, although some more authoritarian

Traditions and Conventions assign members to work in groups. At this date, the majority of cabals are, in fact, made up of mages of a single Tradition or Convention, although some of the most successful and forward-looking groups cross such boundaries, merging varied talents.

Infernalists, too, have their cabals (and their Covenants, of a warped sort, the strongholds sometimes being called "labyrinths") — mostly violent and vicious cliques, forged by greed or hatred and held together by fear and brutal discipline. Marauds seem too mad to sustain any sort of organization, but some share a specific madness and may share a home. The Disparate are scattered and unorganized by definition, although some join together in small groups with common purposes.

Forms

A Covenant has a form and serves a function. Both may be flexible, but without some kind of organization and manner of goal, few Covenants last long. Mages are a strong-willed lot, else they would not be mages, and they rarely hold together without a good reason.

There are three models for the formation of self-contained communities come down from the European Middle Ages: the monastery, the castle household (or garrison), and the college. To these, the new era is adding a fourth — the trading house. These categories are far from exclusive; for example, most European and Islamic colleges



and universities are religious foundations that partake of the nature of the monastery. Similarly, some Gabrielites (especially the Knights Templar) are warrior-monks, whose castle garrisons are run as religious houses. Even trading houses have inherited forms and titles from the domestic life of the castle.

The monastery is a community built (supposedly) on faith and shared dedication. In times of darkness, such communities keep the fire of knowledge burning. In times of ease, they train servants of the Church. In theory, inhabitants have simple lives. If the monastery has substantial holdings (and many do), that ensures a full treasury to be used for the good of all. Bound by vows and rules, monasteries are overseen by abbots or priors. Beneath this leadership are simple and strict hierarchies. Monasteries tend to be restricted to a single sex; in Europe, the female versions are known as convents.

(Unfortunately, in this era, many monasteries are corrupt, exploiting their accumulated wealth for the pleasure of decadent monks. It is a major scandal that leads to the Reformation in a few decades.)

Castles are occupied by the household of a noble or military commander, along with military forces. They rule surrounding communities in times of peace and fight wars when necessary. At this time, even royal courts are especially strong and intricate castle-households (although there are already signs of the growing sophistication and centralization that lead through the Sun King courts of the Enlightenment to the governments of the 20th century). Such households are inevitably hierarchical, with absolute leaders, but the subdivision by function makes for some subtlety.

Colleges are communities of scholars, sharing resources and knowledge. As such, they tend to be gatherings of equals, and they seem almost democratic, with leaders being determined by voting or consensus. (Obviously, such democracy is limited to those for whom the college exists. Servants are there to serve, not to vote. Even students are assumed to have not yet proven their worthiness to speak in council.) However, there are always the strong and the weak, the manipulative and the disinterested. Collegiate politics are vicious, even deadly — especially among the Awakened.

The trading house is, like the noble's castle, a domestic household at heart. But it exists, not to rule and fight, but to buy and sell. Still, it resembles an extended family more closely than the great limited-liability corporations that are still four centuries in the future. The merchant family must acknowledge a patriarch (or matriarch — successful merchants may not let prejudice blind them to profitable talents) but they usually seek consensus over major decisions. And junior traders may be granted the chance to

prove their skills (or lack thereof) with their personal funds. Non-family members are in a more precarious position, but proven skill can earn an employee a safe place. Many families adopt such good servants, formally or informally, or bind them by marriage to a lesser family member.

In addition to these four, there are many less formal or more specific groupings, from outlaw bands to trade brotherhoods. In the world of magick, there are covens (especially among the Verbena), which are tight groups bound by shared skills, dreams and rituals. But for a Covenant to be accepted without too much comment from the common world, it should present the facade of something more familiar, which means following one of these patterns.

Functions

A Covenant may be defined by its goal (and hence, its function), rather than its form. Goals are more essential than patterns of organization, but they are also easier to change. Here are a few important categories.

War Covenants: Some Covenants exist for one purpose. This purpose is usually violent, and fighting a war is the most intense of all. Some are alliances of one or two cabals that are forged to destroy a specific foe and broken up within a few years, when they either achieve their goal or burn out with the intensity of their fury. Others, especially within the Daedaleans, are strong and enduring armies — outpost fortresses in the war for human souls. Their strongholds reflect their warrior nature, taking the form of castles — although some hide beneath less obvious shells (the better to surprise their opponents). War chantries possess excellent weaponry, but they may be more limited in other resources. Their forms tend to be that of a garrison castle, or a monastery.

College Covenants: Reflecting a more traditional and peaceable conception of magick, the College Covenant exists to study and to teach. All Covenants are capable of teaching the newly Awakened, of course, and most do — but only very few are organized as full-scale universities of magick. Smaller examples are hidden within the chaotic, mundane universities of the age. Disguised as “student houses,” they have the perennial problem of hiding their nature from towns full of curious Sleepers and formalistic university authorities. It is rumored that schools of magickal arts are more common in the East, where mysticks can found colleges in remote mountain areas without attracting so much attention. A handful of powerful scholastic mages have allegedly shifted their universities off to other Realms, such as the legendary School of Ghenrojok in the Kingdom of Styrkar.

College Covenants are run by scholastic, formalistic factions such as the Order of Hermes or the Celestial

Masters. They produce knowledgeable, doctrinaire graduates mainly through years of intense and formal teaching.

Exploration Covenants: With much of the focus of a War Covenant but less violent, the Exploration Covenant exists as a base from which metaphysical (or even mundane) explorers may set out to map the new worlds of the Renaissance. As physical journeys of exploration take months, even years, the Covenant serves as a home port and as a source of finance. Alternatively, mages who send their astral forms forth in search of arcane knowledge may just require somewhere safe in which to leave their fleshly forms for a few hours at a time.

The greatest Exploration Covenants tend to belong to the Order of Reason — especially to the Void Seekers (who often work out of trading houses in mercantile cities), and to the Celestial Masters (who favor secretive scholastic houses). Nonetheless, some members of the Traditions are unwilling to give their enemies complete dominance, leading to bizarre communities of exile Dreamspeakers, star-gazing Hermetics, and Chakravanti and Seers of Chronos, who even look beyond the barriers of time and death.

Ancient Covenants: In some Covenants, the dominant force is sheer habit or tradition. Such groups continue to exist because they have existed for a long time, and change seems pointless, which does not make them futile, for they provide shelter, training, companionship and ideas. Furthermore, they may acquire temporary or permanent objectives if sufficiently provoked (into warfare) or inspired (into research). Many Tradition chantries, especially among the Hermetics, Batini, and Akashics, fall into this category. Ancient chantries are invariably dominated by a single Tradition or Convention. They are often respected but tend to be inflexible.

A related category is that of the Hereditary Covenants, which are family groups. Some families raise their offspring in the ways of magick and remain together in the family home. Verbena are prone to do this act, and some strange families among the Chakravanti also exist.

Vagrant Covenants: A Covenant without a source of Quintessence or at least one Magister or Resplendent, and one without a fixed base, is dismissed by other mages as “Vagrant” and regarded with suspicion. In a society that still retains many of the attitudes of feudalism, the masterless wanderer, who is bound to no land is not a respected figure. Nor do some such Covenants do much to allay such fears, having the habit of raiding Crays for Quintessence, irrespective of the feelings of the mages (or shapeshifters, or whatever) who may be in residence. At best, Vagrant Covenants are regarded as useful pawns and mercenaries in the wizard wars. Their varied talents and enforced unity in the face of a hostile world make such Covenants dangerous

enemies, for they may transcend their lowly origins. Typically independent-minded characters may end up forming a Vagrant Covenant.

Crays

Mages have many important uses for Quintessence, and those who have settled down for research or warfare have a huge need for it. Thus, any Covenant worthy of the name spends considerable time and effort in pursuit of sources. Furthermore, scholarly mages have many other interests in Crays, which make research into the Umbra, Otherworlds and Paths of the Wyck so much easier.

The only problem — aside from the eternal struggle that ensues for control of every such site — is that Crays are so often associated with undesirable effects, such as Shallowings. (Crays are also known by many other names, including *Wells*, *Wellsprings*, *World-Hearths*, *Great Cauldrons*, *Sources*, *Caerns* (especially among the shapeshifters), and *Places of Power*. Being able to enter the Otherworlds at whim is very interesting, but it is a nuisance to have grog servants forever becoming lost in the Umbra. Some Crays are on haunted sites, which is especially unnerving. True mages are assumed to transcend the fear of mortality, but only Dreamspeakers and Chakravanti are comfortable when surrounded by manifestations of the unquiet dead.

Covenants may trade or share access to Crays, but the price demanded for use of such a resource is high and can lead to the sort of Faustian bargains that give mages a bad name among Sleepers. The politics that surround discoveries of new Quintessence sources are notoriously subtle and vicious, especially within the Order of Hermes, which assumes that it has sole rights to such power in Europe. The Order of Reason, while more orderly in its internal arrangements, is jealous of the Hermetics' many Places of Power, and Daedalean assaults on Tradition strongholds are inspired less by distaste for arrogant wizards than by a desire for Quintessence.

Still, it is possible for a Covenant to rise to reasonable power without its own Cray. It is only in future centuries, with magick becoming rarer and thinner in the world, and with the Order of Reason closing off more and more sources, that mages will begin to define their social groups by their access to Quintessence — and think of their conflicts purely in terms of fights for "Nodes."

Realms

The majority of Covenants exist purely in the Common World. It will take centuries of persecution by the Order of Reason and by the establishment of a materialist paradigm in the minds of Sleepers to drive Covenants that can set up headquarters in the Otherworlds.

Nonetheless, the process has started. Doissetep has fled its enemies. Horizon has been founded. Even the Daedaleans have their safe haven of Perseus Sanctum. There are others. A problem is that Realm creation is a hard task, and many of the Awakened consider it Promethean in its hubris. Some predict that whole Realms are to suffer the fate of Icarus.

An artificial Realm requires a continual supply of Quintessence, and so the Covenant must control one or more substantial Crays — with all that implies. And unless the Realm is somehow directly adjacent to the Cray, or the mages are prepared to make regular (and dangerous) "supply journeys," it must be linked so that the Quintessence flows smoothly to the Realm. Some otherworldly chantries and lodges draw on Crays, which they must guard more strenuously than their lives (because loss of one annihilates the Realm); others use smaller sources, forcing them to divide their defensive forces.

The actual creation of a Realm is a feat that taxes even an Oracle; Storytellers should restrict such achievements to Storyteller characters. It takes months or years of effort and at least one major ritual involving high levels of Matter, Forces, Prime, and Spirit Spheres. There may also be small diversions along the way, such as the founders of Horizon's battle with a demigod. (Different Traditions and Conventions take different approaches.) Then, when that is done, the cabals can set down to the *relatively* easy task of populating the Realm and defending it against the avaricious powers that swiftly become aware of this desirable new estate.

Even if they do not engage in such labors themselves, characters may visit Realm-based Covenants during the course of their travels. In that case, an important principle to understand is Resonance. The nature of the Realm and its creators and inhabitants tend to reflect each other, and to grow closer over time. The stronger the personality of the sorcerers or the atmosphere of the Realm, the stronger the influence. (And if both are similar already, each makes the other increasingly like a parody of itself.) Even Crays influence those nearby, although this whole business is not universal. Some mages seem immune to their surroundings and incapable of influencing it (a subject on which several theories are formulated). But the general power of resonance is impossible to deny. Short-tempered mages create stormy Realms where the sphere of Forces is strong. Lush green Realms render their inhabitants healthy, but incapable of cool-headed planning and disinterested in the arts of civilization. Verbena murmur that "all ye do returns threefold," but other mages prefer more analytical approaches. Neither system really explains resonance, however, beyond the level of generalities.

How Covenants Come to Be

Covenants may form, and found chantries or lodges for all manner of reasons: friendship, shared adversity, calculated profit, orders from above, and others. Although not all such groupings are strong enough to stand the test of time, a young Covenant is well-tested in the first days. Aside from the cynicism of superiors, the threat of enemies seeking to break a still-weak alliance, and the annoyance of personal mannerisms exposed by new proximity, there is the stress and labor of finding a suitable home.

A site with access to a powerful Cray is naturally preferred. Some Traditions and Conventions respond to the discovery of a previously unknown and remote Cray by forming a new Covenant to guard it (and exploit it). Other groups form of necessity when a new Realm is carved out of the Horizon, or they set out to test a fresh conception of a suitable site (such as the undersea experiment of Eska). However, with the laws of feudalism still being much to be reckoned with, and un-Awakened folk being suspicious of those who lack a place to stand, cabals and lodges are grateful to find any home they can, however inauspicious in location.

Some mages, or their allies or sponsors, are wealthy or aristocratic, which ensures that they possess a good patch of land — and few kings are powerful or meddlesome enough to pass laws governing what may be done with a lord's property. Thus, many Covenants meet in castles, manors, or palaces. Those of a more religious bent use abbeys or monasteries, although the Church asks what they are being used for.

Having found and laid claim to a location — or more than one, for the most powerful or ambitious — a Covenant must ensure that it has adequate resources to form a community. The management of mundane resources requires skills not necessarily taught to mages; a wise Covenant acquires competent seneschals and constables who can deal with day-to-day arrangements. The creation of a true community must be accomplished by the mages themselves, and is often the point at which a grouping of vain, hubristic and bizarre characters destroys itself.

Protocols

Organized and experienced fellowships have ways around this problem. The Order of Hermes has been forming durable Covenants for centuries, despite its members' commitment to personal power, while religious folk draw on the experience of the monastic orders. The solution is a

set of written regulations and agreements to govern every member, weak or strong. The Hermetics refer to such documents as "protocols," and other factions have borrowed the term, although Gabrielites and some prefer to refer to their rules in the monastic style.

The creation of protocols is a tempestuous process, despite all the precedents. Groups that work entirely on friendship or terror must forever be rearranging themselves — although Infernalist labyrinths are notoriously well-disciplined on the model of the wolf-pack (only bloodier than any wolves would tolerate). Protocols also incorporate large general sets of rules, such as the Code of Hermes or the Compact of Callias.

A workable set of protocols defines a system of resolving disputes between members. Usually, it comes down to the judgment of a leading figure or council, with Certamen duels as a last resort. Highly disciplined groups, such as the military arm of the Gabrielites, simply hold a commander's word as law. Magick offers alternatives; a group of Dreamspeakers may place major issues before the judgment of revered spirits, while a powerful alliance of Seers of Chronos is able to peer into the mists of time to determine the best resolution to an issue!

Of Buildings

Beauty will result from the form and correspondence of the whole, with respect to the several parts, of the parts with respect to each other, and of these again to the whole; that the structure may appear an entire and complete body, wherein each member agrees with the other, and all necessary to compose what you intended to form."

— Andrea Palladio, *Architecture*

A Covenant that purchases or inherits an existing building may have little direct influence over the shape of its home, but few mages can resist a little re-making. Most make a considerable effort to ensure that their house is as they wish it to be. Resonance ensures that a Covenant building suits the nature of its inhabitants — one way or another.

Architecture

In magick, both symbolism and the beliefs of people around the magick-worker are immensely important. Hence, the physical design of a chantry or lodge is more than matters of budget and convenience. This situation is especially true for High Artisans and Craftmasons, who draw on "Masonic" traditions and dream of building a Temple of Reason. Among the Nine, the Hermetics have similar respect for symbolic structure, the Choristers send their

Game Considerations

The straightforward way that characters become involved in a Covenant is that the group becomes one cabal within a chantry or lodge. Members are invited to join an existing Covenant that needs greater strength, or they build a new body from the ground up.

The latter approach is perhaps most satisfying, but it tends to make the creation and development of the Covenant into the dominant theme of the campaign. A storyteller who wants to involve the group in world-spanning quests might find the results frustrating. In the 15th century, long-distance travel takes *weeks*, even for most mages. Void Seeker traveling lodges aside, this method makes it largely incompatible with dedicated home-building. (Of course, it makes a Void Seeker chronicle interesting, as it combines community-building with travel.) Involving the characters with an existing group leaves them with more free time, but it puts them in danger of becoming the pawns of more powerful, older cabals. Players feel that their characters are unimportant in the stories unfolding around them.

On the other hand, any Covenant that acquires the respect of other mages needs more than the strength of a single cabal — and even if the Covenant is to be created from scratch, the Storyteller must create a large number of “ally” Storyteller characters, with their own personalities and motivations. Perhaps respect is not very important; the players may be content to be seen as a mere Vagrant Covenant, and to earn every ounce of respect by hard work, while enjoying the freedom of independence.

There is no right answer. The Storyteller must determine what players will be happiest with, by asking them or by offering them choices in play.

voices echoing up through the vast spaces of their beloved cathedrals, and the Ahl-i-Batin, masters of mathematics and space, number many talented architects among their shaykhs.

Paradoxically, Daedalean buildings hark to the past or foreshadow the future, while those built for members of the Traditions follow unremarkable styles of the present. The Craftsmasons are prone to ostentatious humbleness in what they build, while the Gabrielites are warriors (among other things) and often occupy stern and rugged castles. High Guildsmen and Celestial Masters, by contrast, prefer the airy, elegant “Classical” style, which is growing in importance in Italy, and which is to sweep Europe in a few years.

Some people believe that castles are no longer of any military value. Gunpowder is taking control of the battle-

field, and surely cannons can bring down any stone wall. And yet, Sleepers and Craftsmasons still build castles, although not quite as many as a few centuries ago.

The reason is that stone walls resist cannons pretty well, as Artificers have scrupulously tested. Some hold that castles can hold off months of siege for centuries. Fortifications are falling out of favor with Sleepers because armies are growing larger and more professional, while wars are becoming longer. Castles are less significant in the great scheme of things. Matters are decided on the open field of battle. Once one army controls the land, any fortress can be starved out at leisure, its garrison being too small to pose a threat by sallying forth.

To mages, however, these changes are less important. The Sorcerers’ Crusade is being fought by small forces (albeit powerful), and a castle can still hold a significant number of such combatants. Magick provides ways of defeating stone walls undreamed by mundane generals — but what magick can surpass, magick can reinforce. The wizard’s tower is a mighty keep indeed.

Then again, it need not *look* the part unless the wizard is a warrior through and through. Military buildings are so tiresomely *blatant*, which is an added advantage of avoiding excessive Sleeper attention. Many kingdoms have laws governing crenellation, which is the process of fortifying a building. A trusted lord might be permitted to crenellate his own fortress — although he may be charged a license fee, as royal treasurers are always looking for new sources of funds. But unknown or distrusted characters are treated with suspicion and told to take down the defenses (or have them tested by the royal army). Mages dislike arguments with Sleeper authorities as much as they like their comfort. Thus, the only mages inhabiting crenellated fortresses are the military, the paranoid, and those who have inherited old property.

On the other hand, the *look* of defensibility is common. Towers beside the main gate and a narrow moat are supposed to suggest that the occupant is a serious lord, even if they do not fool the eye of a professional warrior.

Styles

Castles are an extreme case of architecture being determined by function. They must be built of heavy stone blocks (because bricks and small stones are too easily shattered), and they cannot have too many windows or other weak points. Old-fashioned arrow-slits are being replaced or augmented by round gun-ports. They are built as a set of two or three linked or concentric courtyards. When an attacker destroys the first barrier, the defenders fall back to another. Towers represent strong points and artillery platforms. The final line of defense is the keep, a reinforced tower. Much ingenuity goes into ensuring that attackers can be subjected to missile fire, however they approach the place. Rocks and boiling water are poured



down on any who do reach the walls. Preferred sites include hilltops, adding to the effort required in an assault. A sheer cliff on one or more sides is better. Castles on lower ground have moats (or may be sighted on islands in lakes). Arch-mages find many ways of embellishing this feature, from flaming oil in place of water to obliging lake monsters.

Older nonmilitary buildings used by Covenants range from wattle-and-daub houses to soaring cathedrals. The former (wooden frameworks, with spaces filled with woven twigs and then sealed with “daubed” clay or mud) are falling out of favor with even semi-prosperous Sleepers, but some old farm-houses and large swathes of cities were built this way. Properly fired brick is popular, and wealthy house-owners can afford to have it laid in complex decorative patterns. Although blatant fortification may be unwise, large buildings and complexes are built around courtyards for reasons of defense. Windows and other openings can face inwards, and the outer wall can be left blank and robust — so revolting peasants or rioting townsfolk find only a strong gate to attack. Even a plain farmhouse may run to a moat, which can be created in a few days or weeks by a moderate-sized digging force, maintained by a smaller number of unskilled peasants and combined with a system of productive trout ponds by the thrifty.

In Europe, large buildings such as churches, town halls and palaces are built in the style that is known as “Gothic.” This style is the great accomplishment of the masons of the Middle Ages (both Sleeper and Awakened). It is based on soaring pointed arches and external flying buttresses, enabling the creation of vast spaces lit by huge windows (often filled with stained glass). This inspirational style represents one of the main meeting points between the philosophies of Masonic groups and the Church. Gothic buildings are generally created using traditional rules-of-thumb and consist of sets of spaces stacked on and around a central void. Externally, they tend to be heavily decorated with spires, carvings and gargoyles.

This style is being challenged, especially in Italy. The new “Classicism” is based on study of Greek and Roman remains and on rigorous mathematical formulations — a sign that the Order of Reason is involved. Artist and architect Filippo Brunelleschi was the father of the Classical revival and may well have been a secret Daedalean. Classical design uses round arches and long arcades of pillars often arranged in formalized “orders.” The subtlest use tricks of perspective to make the design look more elegant.

Different parts of the world have their own ideas about architecture. In the Muslim-dominated East, for example, the dome has been the central feature of great buildings for a thousand years. Builders in warmer climes are more fond of courtyards than Europeans, as they permit the occupants to go about their business in privacy without having to remain inside a stuffy house in the heat of the day. Flat roofs

are popular because sleeping outside on hot nights is more desirable than ensuring that rain can run off. Domes help with air circulation in hot climates, and they are still rare in Europe, although Classicism is bringing more of them to the continent. Brunelleschi placed a great dome over Florence Cathedral, after new inventions made the construction possible.

Elements

Another thing that marks the Renaissance from preceding eras is that its buildings are more internally complex than was previously typical. This factor is more important than it may sound.

The barbarian chief had a Great Hall, in which he, his family, and his retainers, feasted, talked and slept. Castles employed this idea for many centuries; at the heart of the complex defenses was a simple hall. Peasants and townsmen certainly ran to nothing more intricate.

In contrast, the Renaissance lord had withdrawn to a set of private quarters, where he enjoys a more cultured life and better food in some degree of peace. The complex castle designs reflect this aura, with the lord's rooms situated in the keep — the last line of military and social defense. However, the hall still exists as a place for formal feasts, the dispensation of justice, and councils of war; it is simply physically separate from the lord's quarters — perhaps across a courtyard.

The smallest serious fortress, the fortified tower, usually consists of a vaulted storage and kitchen-space at ground level (often not directly accessible from outside, but only by stairs from the floor above), a hall occupying the entirety of the next floor (entered by an external staircase — very dangerous for attackers), and the owner's quarters over that.

Houses in town display similar complexity and subdivision, albeit within less space. They usually have a moderate-sized hall, along with a multitude of smaller chambers. A sense of privacy is becoming a mark of sophistication.

Mages, of course, feel a special need for private quarters, as they invariably want somewhere to experiment with their arts, preferably without having to worry much about personal defense, and where they can store and manipulate exotic and dangerous materials, invoke spirits, and generally act in a manner that might be unwise in public. The Hermetic Code formalizes this in the concept of the Sanctum, for which members of that Order have a near-religious respect. Other mages understand the concept, at the very least. However, groups less obsessed with personal power and some religious mages hold places of magick-working in common, or they insist that superiors must have full access to them. Rules vary greatly. Still, Sleepers always enter a

magus' quarters uninvited at their own risk and often suffer for it.

The largest part of any building is generally dedicated to mundane, practical matters. The kitchens form a large part of the servants' area of a house. In a castle or palace, fireplaces are capable of roasting whole oxen. It is a self-sufficient community, which takes a lot of continual work to feed (and which has a taste for great feasts). Unfortunately, in addition to being hectic and noisy, such kitchens are a serious fire risk, so they are usually sighted in some remote area — so food is often cooling by the time it reaches the feasters.

Also, any castle will likely be surrounded by smaller, wooden buildings: stables, kennels, barns, dovecotes, quarters for lesser servants, and so on. These might regularly be swept away by fire or war, but they are part of the community.

Lastly, many buildings will have some cellar-space and often a number of large rooms below ground level. A cellar, being cool, serves as food storage. The archetypal dank castle dungeons are also real and even common, but not as large (or dreaded) as some may think. Prisoners are often other lords, after all, who are worth money for ransom and not to be maltreated; captive peasant criminals and bandits are not kept and fed at the lord's expense but are flogged and sent on their way — or, likely as not, hung forthwith. Mages are more likely to be interested in the cellars as a potential site for secret work, dark deeds, and other excitements.

Construction

Building a great house is always a major project; in an age before construction machinery, it requires a substantial work force. Castles especially are *big*; at one stage, work on one royal castle in Wales is said to have involved 2,000 unskilled laborers, 400 skilled masons, 200 quarrymen, 30 smiths, a number of carpenters, 100 carts, 60 wagons, and 30 boats — and there was a garrison already on site. Needless to say, skilled supervision is required. (The above-mentioned work force was prone to disappearing, as it was not being properly paid.) Nor is this quick work; a castle might require eight or ten years to build, and some cathedrals have been under construction, on and off, for centuries. (However, a large earthwork defense can easily be thrown up inside a year, and timber-framed, wattle-and-daub structures could be the work of weeks.) Great mages might use their powers to replace such armies of workers and to speed the building, but that in itself would make Sleepers in the vicinity highly suspicious. A sensible Covenant prefers a more modest structure, or it looks for an existing building, or both.

Finding a suitable site could be a great quest for a new Covenant, especially if it insists on access to Crays. However, most must make do with something given: a site it is

set to guard, an ancestral home, perhaps a minor Cray that it has stumbled across. If building work is required, mages must acquire the wherewithal, perhaps calling upon old favors from their seniors in a powerful Tradition or Convention — either in the form of money or of great building-magick when feasible. Professional design is not required for a common house or even a small keep; any half-skilled craftsman-builder knows what serves such purposes. However, if the Covenant desires a full-sized castle or palace or temple built according to mystical principles, expert advice and supervision will be necessary. (A fair few mages are trained in such arts, however.)

Decent mundane defenses add considerably to the cost and time of building; robust stone walls especially require much labor and expense. Banked earth ramparts are almost as useful, in rural areas at least, and may be thrown up by a moderate-sized gang of untrained peasants. However, they take up a lot of space and are rather too obvious to curious passers-by. A moat is probably the single most common defensive measure, being both affordable and easily explained as “decorative.”

Lastly, magick can enhance defenses in many ways, some of them subtle. Transmuting an entire keep to metal through Matter workings is extravagant and risks the Scourge, but it is certainly effective; the Artificers and Craftsmasons are fascinated by less Vain, more dependable ideas such as recreating ancient Roman formulations for cement, which creates a harder material than any known to this age. The fabled Daedalean “Ivory Towers” may be nothing stranger (to later ages’ eyes) than reinforced concrete....

Maintenance

Any building requires some restorative work from time to time; many require almost constant attention. Of course, more rugged components need less frequent repair. Stone castle walls can stand for centuries without any human attention, while the mud and timber of a peasant house are under near-constant assault by rain and beetles. On the other hand, even a castle has internal timbers, and thatched roofs on its interior quarters, which can decay swiftly. A proportion of any great household consists of carpenters and ditch-diggers, and masons and thatchers are called in regularly.

Of Covenant-Folk



nd the first opinion which one forms of a prince, and of his understanding, is by observing the men he has around him; and when they are capable and faithful he may always be considered wise, because he has known how to recognize the capable and to

keep them faithful. But when they are otherwise one cannot form a good opinion of him, for the prime error which he made was in choosing them.

— Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*

A Covenant exists for at least one purpose, even if it is simply its own perpetuation; individual mages are almost incapable of *not* having some objective to occupy their attention. Thus, a Covenant is typically a busy place. Most of the activity, however, is concerned with keeping the Covenant itself running.

The inhabitants of any large building in the Europe of this time can be called a household — or more likely, the Latin term “familia.” This concept is *not* the same as the modern family; a household is an organization, run something like a twentieth-century company or government department. On the other hand, the relationship between the lord of the house and his servants is a little closer than that between employer and hireling. For the nobles of the age, generosity is an important virtue, because it binds those who serve to those who rule. Not that every noble (or mage) possesses this virtue, of course, and not that every servant feels that unreliable payment in gifts, hand-me-downs, and the odd pat on the head compensates for an arrogant and selfish lordly attitude. The Order of Reason is exceptional in this time in that it recognizes rather more equality between leaders and led, which means that the *best* of its lodges are united very strongly indeed.

The Mages

A Covenant may come to depend on its surrounding communities for supplies, servants, and wealth, but in doing so, it becomes part of that society. Mages who claim this position gain duties as lords and a certain amount of work if they are not careful to delegate; for example, a decent nearby forest can provide enough hunting to provide much of the Covenant’s need for meat, but it is traditionally the lord who leads the hunt. Worse, mages may find themselves distracted by *farming* work. Town-based Covenants may engage in mundane craftsmanship or trade, which may be arranged as part of the mages’ work — or it may become a tiresome distraction.

Lordly duties may include the enforcement of laws and the exercise of legal authority — time-consuming business, and not always fit to be delegated. The common folk expect to *see* their rulers dispensing justice (and would consider the use of magick in such work deeply wrong). Worse, in time of war, a lord is expected to stand against the foe and to shelter the populace; given that many mages are sworn *not* to use their powers in battle against Sleepers, this situation is likely to lead to difficulties.

Most Covenants find it easier to stand well away from the mundane world. This way, mages can go about their business, often mysteriously so far as their underlings can



see. The nature of this work depends on the Covenant's role: research in Colleges, forming strategies and forging weapons in War Covenants, and so on. However, Covenants are also likely to engage in something of any sort of magickal activity; warriors teach other warriors, teachers send apt pupils forth to resolve scholarly questions, explorers defend themselves against assault, and so on.

Young mages are at least capable of explaining the general thrust of their activities to others, if they must. The true enigmas are the old mages, who have advanced far in their researches, become lost in their peculiar concerns, and quite likely slipped into Quiet for much of their time. In long-established Covenants, it can become hard to decide if the leading figures are engaged in work of unparalleled brilliance, or if they have simply gone mad.

The Order of Reason, with its emphasis on pragmatism, produces mages with a better grasp of Sleeper reality, by and large, than do the Traditions. Its lodges may seem hectic places, and full of plots and even obsessions, but they are generally more comfortable for ordinary Sleepers to visit; the leaders are folk the visitor can talk to, and receive fair answers. This goes a long way to explain the successes of the Order.

The Servants

The majority of the inhabitants of (almost) any Covenant are not mages, or even potential mages, but servants, from valued consors (librarians, craftsmen, account-keepers, lovers and so on) down to lowly "grog." The nature of Covenant serving-folk varies greatly, but in Europe, they tend to mirror the pattern of common world servants.

To begin with, there are plenty of them. In this age, even an English esquire — the lowliest class with any pretension to gentility — with an income of a bare fifty pounds per year would be expected to employ seven servants; a serious noble household should have at least forty residents, possibly well over a hundred. (A royal court, combining the roles of great household, national government, and trading house, gets *really* large.) Even Artificers have difficulties creating machines that can perform housework, and mages are generally too fearful of the Scourge or of witch-hunts to employ magic in such a role. In the twentieth century, even traditionalist mages will own washing machines and microwaves and drive cars; in this era, Covenants employ laundresses, cooks, and grooms. Of course, it is hard to hide the nature of the rulers of the place from such servants, so a Covenant must find a large number of Sleepers who will remain loyal to heretics, pagans, and crazed philosophers. Covenant servants can be a little *strange* themselves.

There is a strong hierarchy in almost any great house. Folk love their small marks of office, and social class is still pretty feudal everywhere. More to the point, any householder, Awakened or Caudex, expects the house to work

hard and well, without too many questions — and that requires discipline, which in turn demands hierarchy. The steward and the chamberlain see themselves as far above the stable-lad and the guard — and they can order their inferiors about as sternly as a military captain.

The highest level in a secular European household (or most religious houses, for that matter) consists of Gentry, the “Free Household”; educated Latin-speakers use the terms *Generosi* or *Libera Familia*. These people are not far below their lord in social class and speak to their employers as subordinates, but not gross inferiors. In a chantry or lodge, it is perfectly possible that mages will fill these roles. Important figures in this class will include the steward, or seneschal, responsible for food and drink supplies and perhaps the management of the entire estate; the chamberlain, in charge of managing the interior workings of the house (the chambers); and perhaps, in great houses, a chancellor, responsible for written records and the house’s chapel. In wilder or less comfortable times and places, the constable and the marshal might rank with these. The former is responsible for security and guards, the latter for the stables and hunting. These people, along with paid lawyers and the heads of major families from the estate, form a lord’s advisory council. In a Covenant, if they are not themselves mages, they may be considered consors, highly valued by wise mages for their skill in keeping tiresome practical matters under control.

Just below them in the hierarchy come individuals such as the butler, who oversees the controllers of the larder, pantry (where bread is made and stored), buttery (where drink is kept), and kitchen. The treasurer reports on matters of gold and silver to the chamberlain, and numerous ushers are in charge of doors and clothes. In quieter lands, the less busy constable and marshal might be considered to abide at the level of the yeomen or valletti — important servants, but not of the highest rank. Below them come the grooms (garciones), and then the youthful pages. Mages speak rather casually of these underlings as “grogs.”

The Covenants of the Awakened are exceptional in that they tend to have more womenfolk around at every level. A normal lord’s house — or even that of a great lady — usually has only a few washer-women and perhaps some companions for the lady of the house. As in many military organizations, mixing of the sexes is considered bad for discipline, and servants’ wives must “live out.” But mages have advanced beyond such concerns — sometimes.

Guards

Strange to say, not every household — not even every stronghold — clanks with armored guards. Some do, including those in contested borderlands or in the midst of wars. But in this age, kings pride themselves on keeping their lands peaceful. A great lord should surely be able to keep his property safe with a few stout grooms with cudgels;

to employ sword-wielding mercenaries is to insult — and threaten — the royal person. Many monarchs are introducing laws of “Livery and Maintenance,” limiting the right of subjects to maintain uniformed troops, or at least attaching expensive licenses to the right.

This situation creates a problem for mages; grogs or brethren able to form the first line of defense against assaults in the Sorcerers’ Crusade are likely to attract unwelcome attention and comment from Sleeper neighbors. Some deal with this by disguising their troops as peaceful servants; wealthy and powerful Covenants can even issue exotic weapons or train them in secret martial arts. (Artificer defenders especially tend to be armed with wheel-lock pistols and needle-pointed daggers.) Others become entangled in the snares of mundane politics, using bribes or influence to obtain permission to employ armed men — only to find themselves called to war when the monarch issuing the license becomes embroiled in conflict. Others regard this matter as yet another good reason to build their chantries and lodges in remote wildernesses or borderlands; the minor nuisance of occasionally having to drive off bandits, foreign raiders, or monsters is tolerable so long as one can at least maintain the forces to do such work unhindered and unquestioned.

Beasts and Vehicles

Households in the fifteenth century are perforce self-sufficient to a degree that the urban folk of an industrial age would find surprising. Even if a Covenant does not have a full-scale rural estate (and many do), it will probably have a few chickens for eggs and meat, a small vegetable garden, a patch of herbs — maybe even a pig-sty, whose inhabitant serves to convert household rubbish to good meat, or a dovecote (a low, round, tower-like building, providing meat for pigeon pies). A house of any substance will also, naturally, have stables, which will in turn have their own contingent of grooms and stable-boys.

A lord’s house also has a few vehicles for assorted uses. A cart can be used to move produce, equipment or people from place to place. A household with any pretensions to grandeur owns at least one “chariot” — a four-wheeled cart drawn by five or six horses and not too sordid to carry the ladies of the house as well as their luggage. When a lord shifts from one house to another, his charioteer may have a long haul before him. If the estate lies on a river or the sea, it probably owns a boat; water travel can be far easier than land.

Life in Realms

Those rare but important Covenants that have made places to stand beyond the normal world provide a rather different sort of life for their un-Awakened residents — although most still have many such folk about them. In such Realms, the wills of the builders are paramount, and

ages rule, not merely as lords, but as kings — and with powers that a mundane king would envy.

Thus, they may have large numbers of resident servants and other Sleepers; Horizon, for one, is developing entire Sleeper villages with their own governments and economy. On the other hand, mages can work magick in such places with fewer constraints and can therefore have their housework done by summoned spirits, wondrous artifacts, or simple spells — so they may employ rather fewer human servants. Much depends on the atmosphere of the Realm and the philosophy of its creators.

In game terms, a large Horizon Realm can be set up as a classic high fantasy world, with human, semi-human, and non-human inhabitants, vastly powerful rulers, strange conflicts, and grossly implausible architecture. Or, especially if it is the work of the Order of Reason, it may be arranged as a rather worrisome portent of a future society, regimented and austere. Most likely, in the latter case, it resembles a Renaissance philosopher's utopia, on a mathematical and symbolic pattern. Ruled by the wise and learned, each of the inhabitants assigned a place according to his capacities. If such an "ideal society" goes amiss, it should be a worry to the Daedaleans and an ominous foreboding to the Traditions.

That said, social ideals are complex on both sides of the great dispute. A Hermetic magus might be as happy as any Artificer to recreate Plato's Republic on the Horizon, while a Craftmason would prefer to create a primitive anarchy. As more Horizon Realms are founded, a great many failed experiments can be expected.

The Planting, Flowering, and Withering of Covenants



Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

— William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Despite the claims of some mages, no Covenant stands eternal, resplendent and unchanging. All evolve as ideals are propounded and forgotten, leaders rise and fall, enemies inflict harm or are finally destroyed and the world around persists in changing. As any master of Entropy will explain, stasis is worse than death, because at least decay fertilizes the soil for future growth — and the universe rarely permits stasis.

Mages, of course, are much taken with change. Some dream of perfecting themselves or the world; even the most modest Verbena and Dreamspeakers recognize cycles of growth and decay. Not that chantries necessarily change in ways that their rulers anticipate or wish, but recognition of

the fact of change is something that often differentiates the Awakened from the Sleepers.

The Seasons

One image that has remained popular since its conception in the Mythic Age is the idea that lodges and chantries pass through a cycle of conditions that can be described in terms of the seasons of the year. Some believe that this is simply a metaphor, that it is merely the nature of human life to experience good times and bad. Most mages, however, have a very high regard for the power of symbols. They hold that, with birth and death, the phases of the moon, and indeed the year all showing cyclical patterns, Covenants are bound to follow the same form, through the subtle power of Resonance.

Spring

*How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the Palm, the Oke, or Bayes...*

— Andrew Marvell, *The Garden*

A new Covenant begins its existence in Spring. Like new growth in the fields, it is vulnerable, and those who cultivate it must hope that it will grow rapidly (but not unnaturally swiftly) into Summer. If the Covenant fails to grow, it will be destroyed — burnt by harsh late frosts or trodden down by the uncaring.

A Spring Covenant makes many mistakes, but what it lacks in wisdom it may hope to offset with youthful vigor. If it is sensible, it avoids the attention of other Covenants, for those who share its ideals usually regard it as weak and irresponsible, while its natural enemies will see it as easy prey. Most Covenants that fail — especially War and Vagrant Covenants — do so before the end of their Spring.

Summer

*Tell me where I may pass the Fires
Of the hot day, or hot desires...*

— Andrew Marvell, *Damon the Mower*

A Summer Covenant is still growing, but more slowly. Some might compare it to a field ripe for harvest, although that is perhaps an unlucky metaphor. The Covenant reaches its peak of power during this season, although as it gains maturity, learning from its mistakes, its vigor and enthusiasm decline ever so slightly. The Covenant will most likely be very active but may not receive the full respect its power merits. It may be seen by others as too bold and dangerous, or it may be subjected to jealousy and malice.

Autumn

*Oh what unusual Heats are here,
Which thus our Sun-burn'd Meadows sear!*

— Andrew Marvell, *Damon the Mower*

Dealings with the World

In time, Summer turns to Autumn. The harvest is in, and the laborers grow weary — or lazy. The foolish become complacent while the wise are burdened by forebodings of Winter. An Autumn Covenant is still strong and confident, but ambition gives way to concerns for safety and status. Wisdom and stability grant political power, especially as past achievements are finally reorganized.

Autumn lasts for as long as the Covenant can husband its strength and resources — usually decades, even centuries. Elders foist more and more of the dangerous (or merely boring) work upon the younger members, while keeping power for themselves, and the Covenant as a whole becomes stagnant and set in its ways.

Winter

*Enough: and leave the rest to Fame.
'Tis to commend her but to name.*

— Andrew Marvell, *An Epitaph*

Autumn leads, inevitably, to Winter; a time of cold and death, which usually marks the Covenant's final days. This season may set in through a sudden disaster or simply through long, slow decline. Strength, confidence, and vigor are all too soon replaced by weakness, doddering indecision, and glorious memories. Those who remember the past still respect the Covenant, but many regard Winter Covenants as already dead, though not yet in the grave. Winter is often a terrible time, as too many of the best mages slip into Quiet, and their Hobgoblins become strong and potentially lethal to the Covenant itself.

But as the folk of this age perhaps understand better than their town-bred descendants, the hardship of Winter is to be endured with wise management and thought for what is to come; it is not a time of *inevitable* doom. Those Covenants blessed with vigorous younger mages may hope that Winter will eventually turn to Spring. In that case, older mages who can be encouraged to fight their Quiets rather than accept them may become involved in the effort to rebuild, which can in turn lead to a second, greater Summer: The vitality of youth combined with the wisdom of the ancients is a formidable marriage indeed.

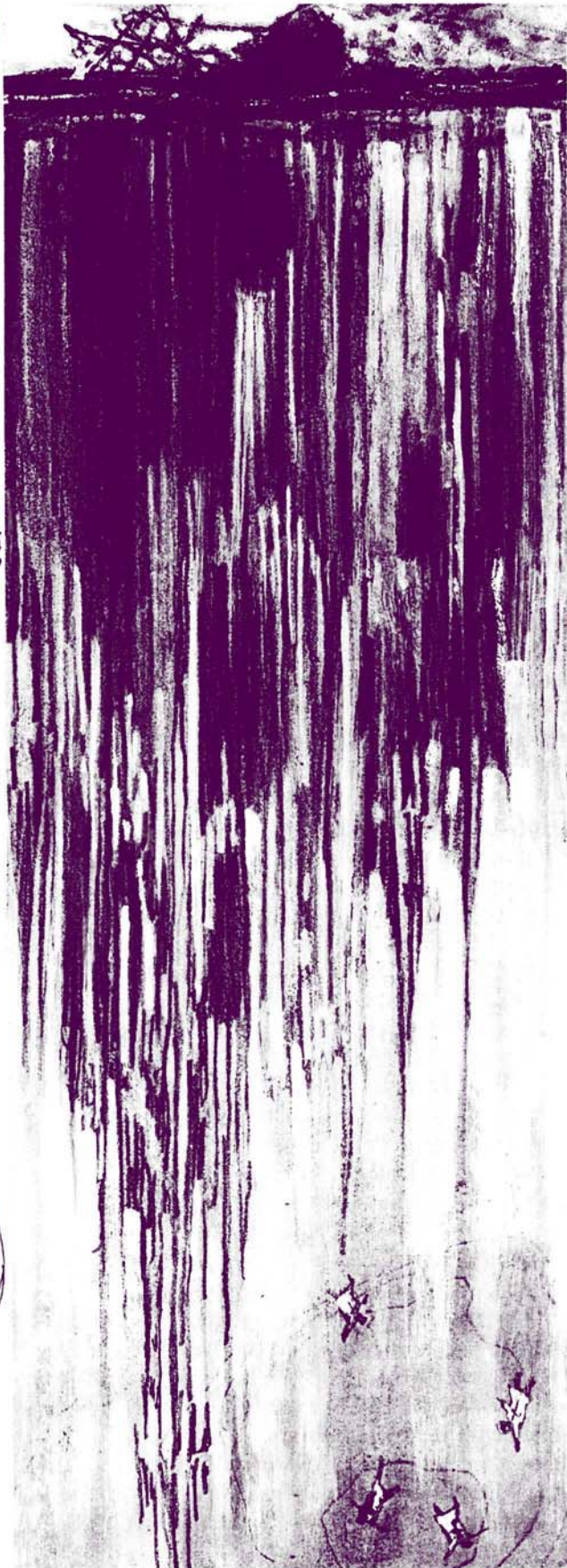
Characters may encounter Covenants in any season, although the turmoil of the age is throwing up more Spring chantries than ever; in Europe, those old enough to be in Autumn or Winter will mostly be long-established Ancestral or College Covenants of the Order of Hermes, Choëur Celeste, or Solificati. The Order of Reason is moving almost *en masse* from Spring to Summer, although it has plenty of young Spring lodges, and some Gabrielite garrisons are decaying through later seasons — because the Craftmasons have so many organized lodges, some are feeling the weight of age, too.

Magick counts for little if it does not influence the world, however subtly. Furthermore, with most Covenants firmly rooted this side of the Gauntlet, they must perforce deal with mundane folk and concerns from time to time. If they do *not* — if, say, a Covenant manages to feed its servants without cultivating fields or sending wagons to the nearest market — this is likely to attract attention in itself.

Of course, the majority of people do not travel much in this era. This is an advantage for a secretive Covenant in some ways; merely removing one's activities to a remote site can escape attention. However, it is a problem in many other ways. Unlike the urbanized folk of future industrial times, who do not concern themselves with their neighbors do not trouble them, a Renaissance peasant has little to talk about socially *except* the neighbors. People will be keenly aware if they are "different" in any way, given to receiving strange visitors or disinclined to trade for basic supplies. And while there are plenty of wilderness and near-wilderness regions, few of them are *completely* uninhabited — and anyway, most mages prefer to have the resources and workforce of a decent-sized community somewhere close at hand. To add to the problem, kings and their like are becoming stronger, asserting themselves over local lords; a castle is likely to be visited periodically by tax-collectors and other agents of mundane government.

Thus, Covenants are usually advised to interact with mundane society to some extent in the knowledge that it will surely come to them. These relationships tend to be cautious and to be kept at arm's length, but individual associations can become friendly. It is generally impossible to be friends with *everyone*, so wise Covenants seek to create webs of alliance, ensuring that in any difficulty, at least one other faction will side with it. See the notes on "Spheres of Influence" in Chapter V of *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade* for guidelines for normal alliances. Unfortunately, most mages are prohibited from using their powers to purchase Sleeper favor in obvious ways, for good long-term reasons. In any case, return favors asked of a known sorcerer almost always become more than she can handle. (Immortality, worldly power, a harem of the most beautiful women in history, *and* the favor of Heaven...) Thus, Covenants must become subtle and learn what individuals desire and stay within limitations of providing those desired.

A town-based Covenant *must* place itself on good terms with its immediate physical neighbors. The architecture of the age involves fitting as much as possible into the space available, and walls are often thin, so the people next door *will* become aware that something out of the ordinary takes place within the Covenant and *will* bring this to others' attention if not mollified. Admittedly, "town and



gown” rivalries — feuds between scholars and locals — are common in university cities (and can lead to lethal brawls), but a “mere” irate townsman may all too easily acquire formidable allies.

Rural Covenants mostly find themselves cultivating the friendship of one or two local villages, to which they may be bound by feudal ties; good relations with a neighboring aristocrat or two are appealing but harder to sustain. Mages have an advantage in that they may be able to ask low rents of tenants while helping with a very little discreet magickal aid to crops and such. Some, of course, especially Nephandi (and a few, though all too many, Hermetics) work from the idea that a good solid castle wall removes any need to keep the peasantry happy; this helps explain much of the success of the Craftmasons. (Storytellers with a soft spot for old-style Universal/Hammer horror movies should feel free to work the odd pitchfork-and-torch scene into their games. Vampires, and Sleeper lords of sufficient depravity, make equally good subjects for this sort of popular pressure. Cabals of members of the Verbena and Celestial Chorus have the advantage of religion to keep them on good terms with at least some of the peasantry.

Dangers and Destruction

Lastly, there are the forces that work to bring a Covenant down.

Cynics might say that the greatest of these is usually the Covenant’s own members, and it is true that internal bickering and divergent goals can be far deadlier than the odd siege. Some Covenants are forged without sufficient forethought and break up quickly in Spring, while the leaders of a Covenant that is slipping through Autumn to Winter tend to become cranky and egocentric, and may refuse to compromise. Character groups *usually* remain willing to work together, as they may well have been created to make an interesting, viable group game. They are generally young and idealistic mages rather than aging and Quiet-ridden eccentrics, and real-world social pressures not to damage the story leak through into the characters’ behavior. However, enthusiastic or bloody-minded players may have characters prepared to disrupt Covenant unity, and the Storyteller is certainly entitled to throw in Storyteller-controlled cabals with divergent aims.

Political Assault

Not that every scheming enemy is within one’s own walls, of course. Feuds and rivalries may involve opponents in other factions — and not just sworn enemies. Many mages are not only born manipulators but also utterly convinced of their own correctness, and they tend to regard a Covenant with other ideals as a nuisance or something that needs rectification. Sworn foes across the Tradition/Daedalean divide may not feel able to assail a Covenant

directly but may find other routes. Even mundane enemies may be dangerous in the field of politics.

A Covenant is usually responsible to the Council of Nine or the Order of Reason and must obey certain rules and protocols; this opens up one line of assault. The second is through the mundane world: threats to supplies, unwelcome attention from Sleeper rulers, the withdrawal of legal rights and privileges — all can diminish a Covenant's power. Therefore, it is usually wise to cultivate friends and contacts in as many places as possible so that the Covenant can at least hope for warning of attack. Merely remaining outside of political struggles that do not affect the Covenant directly is *not* an effective defense; by using its council votes and such wisely (which need not necessarily mean “irrespective of conscience”), a Covenant can make friends who will support it when it needs them later.

It is, incidentally, very easy for a Covenant to become embroiled in mundane politics as well as those of the Council or Order. A mage with noble status may be asked to take sides in dynastic conflicts; a wealthy High Guild merchant may be asked to lend funds to one side or another in the feuds of Italian city-states; an Artisan may have a place in her home city's guilds, which have their own struggles for position and power. Such conflicts are unlikely to represent an immediate danger to a sound chantry, but they *might* turn violent — and poor moves in these conflicts can provide more powerful foes with useful allies.

Siege

The Sorcerers Crusade is a real and violent conflict, however secretive and few in numbers its protagonists. Furthermore, having set themselves up in a (hopefully) defensible site, members of a chantry may find themselves embroiled in mundane wars. Only foolish chantries fall to internal feuding, and political enemies are more likely to wish a Covenant changed or weakened than annihilated, but violent assault can obliterate even the strong.

The threat is worst when the attackers include Awakened leaders or other supernatural powers (such as Umbrood or vampires). A moderate-sized group of competent mages behind well-made walls may feel able to see off any number of hostile Sleepers; however, such overconfidence is dangerous. Even a mob of irate peasants may include several with True Faith, and the presence of many Sleepers seems to make the descent of the Scourge more likely. In any case, enemy mages are usually quick to take advantage of mundane assaults on a Covenant (and Craftsmasons tend to join peasant mobs out of principle, while Artisans may lend some war machines simply to test them), so it is foolish to assume that an attacking force *cannot* include Awakened characters.

A direct assault by magickal enemies is a dramatic and terrible thing, and can be exciting to play through. Artillery and Forces effects batter at each other, while mortal minions and summoned spirits strike from all sides. Individual mages must stride into the midst of the fight to work their counter-magicks, while others must guard against indirect assault through the Umbra or Connection spells. It all leads to a lot of mess. And wars *always* have casualties. The Storyteller should not involve the characters' Covenant in a siege unless she is fully prepared to kill some of them.

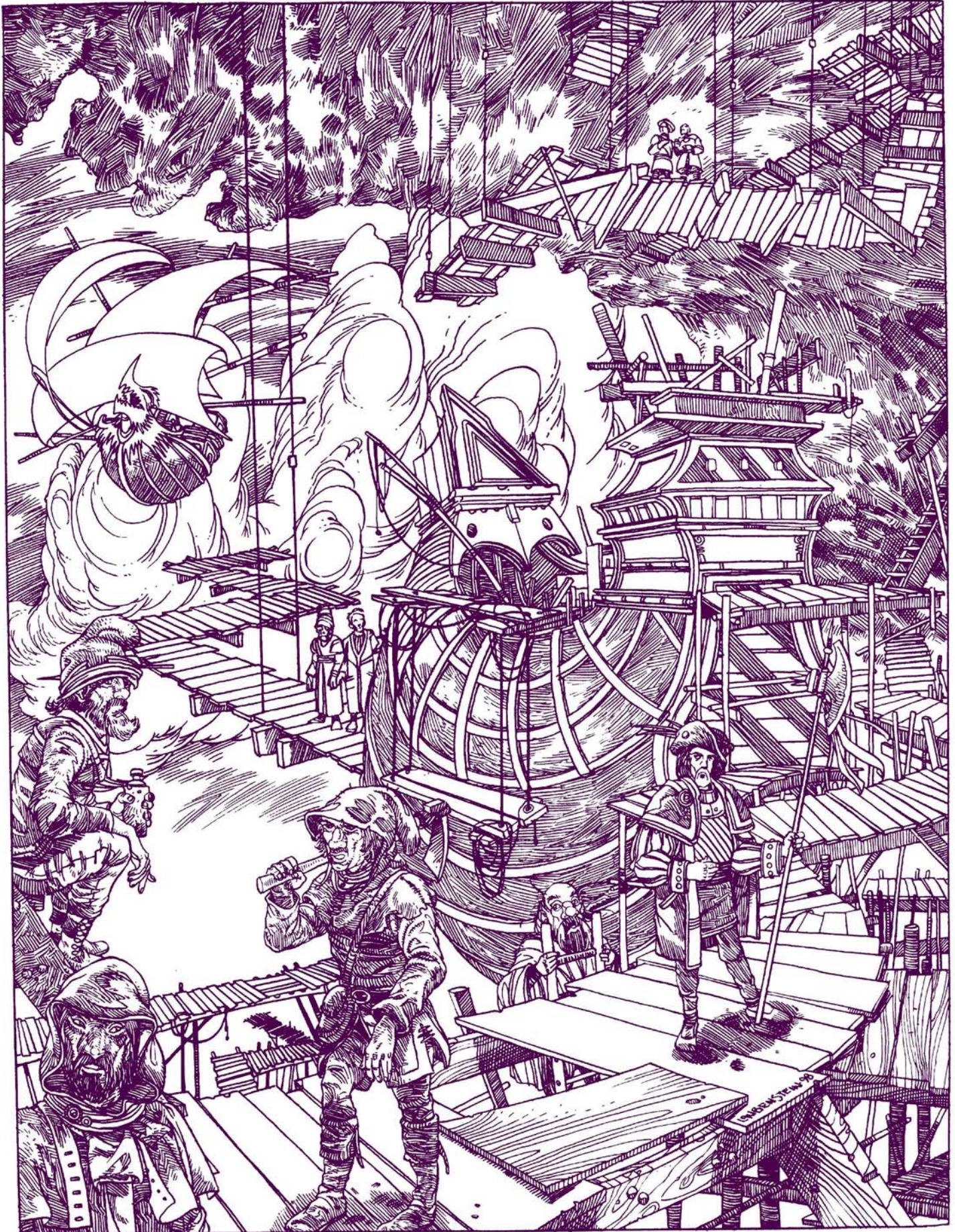
This assumes an out-of-the-way site, of course. A town-based Covenant may feel relatively safe, as violent opponents will place themselves at all manner of risk by an assault. This works well enough — until a dedicated foe manages to raise the entire town against the Covenant, or starts a great fire or street riot as cover. Wise urban mages pay close attention to the temper of their surroundings.

As for Covenants that occupy their own Realms, few have come under direct assault as yet. They are invariably powerful and hard to reach. Blows against such fortresses are likely to be subtle; they can certainly be indirect, as the deadliest way to bring one down would be to steal the wellsprings of Quintessence that feed it. The most likely strategy, given very strong attacking forces, would be a large diversionary force moving through the Umbra to distract the defenders and pin them at home while more mundane siege trains move against each Cray. However, that would mean extensive knowledge of the foe's resources. Horizon Realms remain the mightiest fortresses in this war. (When Horizon itself comes under direct assault in 1475, it is in a time of weakness — and the attackers' great error is neglecting to strike at its Crays as well as invade the Realm.)

The Aftermath

When a siege is done, whether or not the stronghold still stands, there will be much to repair. The whole reason for the attack may have been the wish to acquire access to a Cray, and the victors will need to consolidate their hold on that resource. Given the power of individual mages, the victors are also well advised to pursue surviving enemies with special vigor; the alternative is to have a bitter enemy sharpening a knife for the cabal members' throats.

Also, it is hard to keep such events from the attention of Sleepers, some of whom may feel obliged to investigate, to put down the “bandit uprising” or exorcise the “Demonic Sabbath” of which they have heard, which is one reason why open warfare between Traditions and Daedaleans is less frequent than it might be — and so why more Covenants survive than some would predict. But mages must not depend on this; too many ruins attest to the danger.





Chapter 11: The Order of Reason

The White Tower of Languedoc: Building Unto Heaven



And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad on the face of the whole earth...

— Genesis 11:4

To pass within the Seven Rings — the outer defenses of the great fortification, including the three inner fortress walls — was a privilege not granted to many. To stand, openly, before the doors of the White Tower itself implied both courage and the good opinions of one of the highest of Resplendent Ones.

To rap on that door with the hilt of a heavy dagger was, to say the least, unusual.

And yet the door opened promptly, and the visitor was greeted with grave courtesy. The Doorman — a Grand Artisan of the Pythagori — looked gravely on the visitor, and yet with keen interest. "You bring word, then?" he asked. "We may know how the stars favor Reason?"

"Better than that," the visitor replied, with what the Doorman suddenly realized was a mad kind of joy, "I bring word that the stars have nothing to say to us. Rejoice, my brother, for we are truly free..."

The Heart of the Dream

The White Tower of Languedoc, in southern France, is the present seat of the Inner Circle of the Order of Reason and a stronghold for education, Reason and Science. A formidable fortress, it plays host to Daedaleans of all kinds. Ready for battle, it also provides a sanctuary for scholars and merchants. After all, without the inspiration and progress the Order provides, warfare is ultimately meaningless.

The building and community are both the product of conscious design, and the design is formal and inhumanly precise. No one in the Order considers this factor worrisome, however, not even the most freedom-loving Void Seeker or humble Craftmason. The White Tower partakes of ritual. It is a symbol, transcending ordinary concerns. If the likes of the Council find it frightening to contemplate, it has achieved part of its goal.

Of course, no human creation can be entirely pure. The White Tower sees plotting and disagreement over means and ends. Daedaleans of a theoretical bent sometimes debate whether the Tower is still in a long and promising Spring, or whether it is now entered into the first days of a dazzling eternal Summer, but few can deny that Perfection is still being built.

History

The original White Tower was the private chantry of the Hermetic Yoassmy of Brittany, located in northern France. For all Yoassmy's vaunted power, the famous (or infamous) archmagus fell to a Craftmason blade in A.D. 1325. She was distracted by the threat of an open siege, and one legend is that the tower had been designed with the aid of a secret Craftmason, who had included a secret entrance route in the plan.

The victors considered the spoils of this battle to have interesting mystical properties as well as practical advantages, and they promptly adapted it to serve as the meeting place for the great convention that led to the formal establishment of the Order of Reason. The Brittany tower remained in use as their headquarters for some years (and is still a Daedalean stronghold), but mundane politics intervened. English and French forces rolled this region over several times in the course of the Hundred Years War and threatened to embroil the assumed feudal lord of the tower in their struggles. Thus, in 1429, the Order decided to create a new White Tower, "unsullied by Hermetic taint." After some debate, the Order decided to remain in France, but to shift to the less populous and currently less warfare-ridden south of the country. The south was also, conveniently, closer to the great cities of the Mediterranean world. German and British Resplendents were mollified by other concessions.

The chosen site was a hilltop that had been the site of an entire walled village centuries before. The community had suffered the misfortune of being identified as a site of Albigenian heresy and associated witchcraft, and it had been completely wiped out by crusaders in the 13th century. It was remote and wild enough that no substantial community had grown up on the site since. There was indeed a significant Cray, but careful examination — by devout Gabrielites and meticulous scholars — showed that it was completely untainted and effectively "neutral," and thus that it could be rendered fit for employment by the Order.

Authority to use the site, and to build a new "free village" nearby, was acquired by the exercise of influence at court; favors were called in by noble Daedaleans and their sympathizers. As far as the French Crown is concerned, this remote fief is the property of the Church, with special privileges relieving it of feudal duties and taxes. The Church, on the other hand, takes no interest in the place, thanks to Daedalean influence in the Vatican and the diocese of Toulouse.

The Tower was built with startling speed, thanks to Craftmason and Artificer machinae. The associated village of L'Espérance ("Hope") was almost as swiftly peopled with lesser Daedaleans and brethren. It was a self-sustaining community to maintain the place between council meet-

ings. Its history over the last two decades has been one of gradual development — a community deciding its nature.

The Setting

The White Tower is situated atop one of the hills of Languedoc — not among mountains (although the Pyrenees are not very far to the south), but on ground that is rocky, and rather stark, as well as high. This hill has enough of a flattened top to hold the tower and associated halls, and it is strikingly symmetrical. It commands a small plain, on which is sighted L'Espérance. A single unmade road leads up through the village to the main gate, which may seem rather unprepossessing a path to lead to the greatest lodge of the Order of Reason, but Daedaleans murmur that the road to the heights of glory is rarely easy. Loyal allies occupy churches or great houses in every village and hamlet, and the guardians of the tower are informed of anyone approaching the area, long before they arrive.

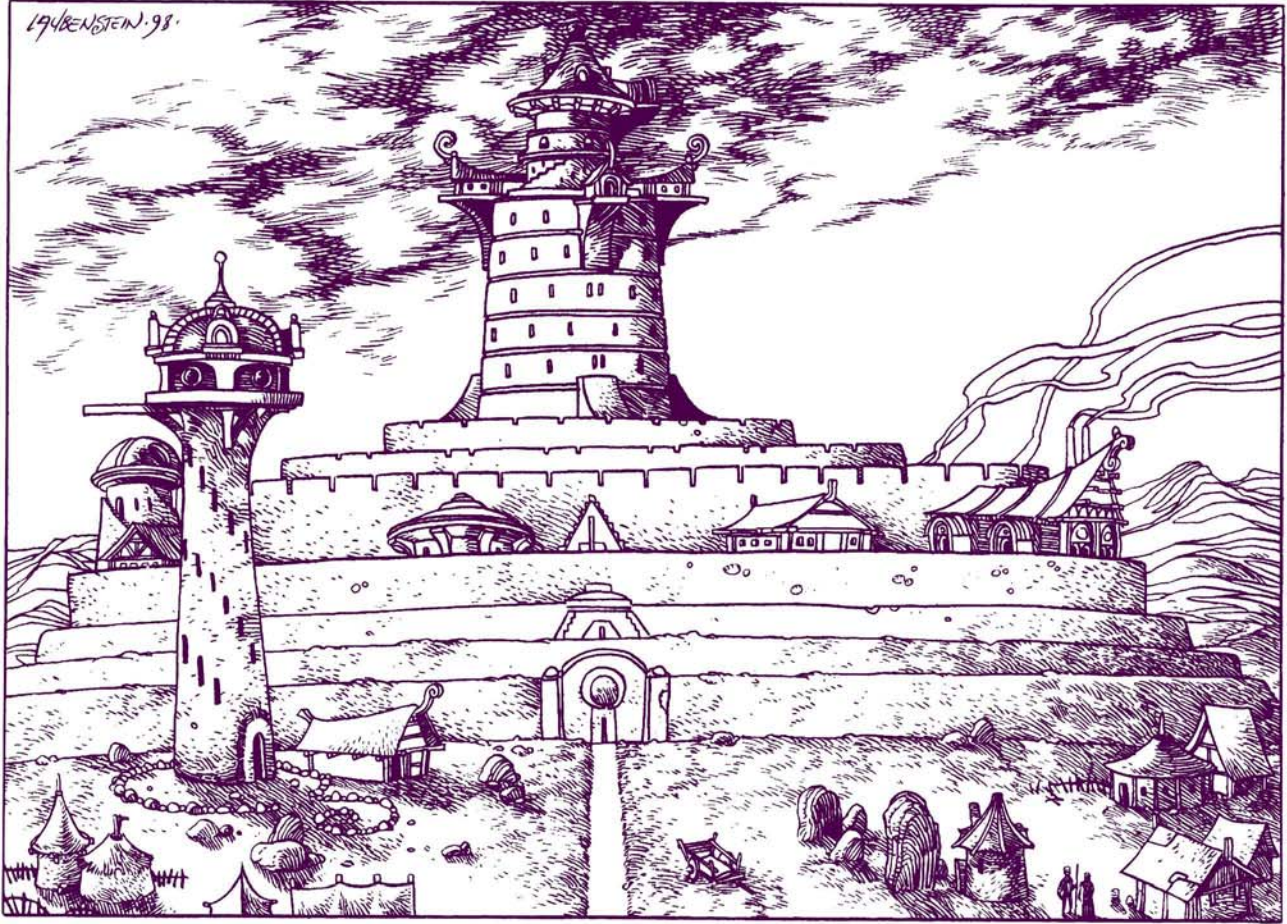
L'Espérance was planned as a complete community from the first, and hence, its layout is far more orderly than any normal European town or village. It is arranged around an open square, a site of weekly markets, which is dominated by a church, two inns, and a market hall. The latter is a brick structure, consisting of a single room (used by those who administer the market) raised on pillars over an open arcade (which provides shelter for some traders). The rest of the town is laid out on a grid, with major streets radiating out from the square. Neat and carefully maintained wells are placed at several points. Many houses in L'Espérance have workshops; the un-Awakened associates of the Order include many craftsmen, and the village produces metalwork and pottery that is sold in many adjacent towns, bringing the community a good income. An ox-powered mill on the edge of the village grinds its corn.

In short, the village has an air of prosperity that belies its size and the relatively unproductive nature of the local soils. (This region is thinly populated.) Daily administration is handled by a small council of un-Awakened citizens who elect a "reeve," or spokesman, from among their number. In the tradition of Craftmason lodges, the two inns double as meeting places for semi-formal craft associations, and increasingly, as schools.

The Fortress

The White Tower itself is a tall building with a perfectly circular plan, dazzling white in the southern French sun. Every stone was carved with intricate and powerful Craftmason symbols before being put in place, and the whole wall was then encased in a rock-hard sheath of some Artificer-formulated substance. It has seven floors and a pointed roof.

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Around it are multiple concentric circular defenses, the inner three being strong defensive walls — functional castles in their own right. (Kitchens, stables, and such are tucked within these three circles.) Just outside them, evenly spaced around the tower, are eight rectangular halls, one for each of the Conventions and one empty and (seemingly) unused. Each of these is strong enough to be defensible. Further down the hill, fully enclosing the place, is a palisade, a rampart of soil and loose stone, and a ditch — lesser defenses, but fully capable of at least delaying an attacking force.

Thus, the tower has no less than seven circles of mundane defense, which is said to symbolize the Order's being made up of seven Conventions. Knowledgeable Daedaleans appreciate that the walls of the tower itself are an eighth barrier, which like the “empty” Eighth Hall, hints at the secret of the Ksirafai. The tale told is that the Eighth Hall stands prepared for some future delegation — either a prophesied additional Convention, or perhaps the representatives of the Sleepers when some kind of great awakening is accomplished. In short, it is cultivated as a mystery that demonstrates to the lesser ranks that they cannot know everything — while in practice, high-ranking Ksirafai meet in the place at dead of certain moonless nights, protected by great spells of secrecy.

The Hill and the Halls

A few small buildings are scattered across the sides of the hill, serving various purposes. One of the most enigmatic, to uninformed eyes, is the dock for sky-ships. The dock is maintained by Celestial Masters and their acolytes, with a number of Void Seekers often in attendance and volunteering. Others seem more mundane, but they actually serve exotic purposes. For example, there is a dovecote and a small stable — both maintained by the Cosians, the creatures they hold being used for research as often as for food or transport. The dovecote is also home to a small flock of homing-pigeons, which serves as an efficient system of communication.

Each of the Conventions' halls is a rectangular building, large and grand enough to host a meeting of the highest officers of the faction. Internal arrangements are left to the occupants but always include fit accommodation for visiting Maximi. When the site was consecrated, one-eighth of the Tass generated by the Cray was directed to each hall, where it takes an appropriate form in each case.

Two-thirds of the Artificers' hall is a great workshop. Smithwork performed here incorporates a rote that imbues metals with Tass. The remainder of the building is divided up into meeting rooms, quarters for officers of the Convention and a library.

The Gabrielites have made half of their hall into a chapel, with a non-consecrated "chapter house" attached, where secular matters can be discussed, and monastic cells for sleeping. A special ceremony here can produce an oil that resembles what is used in holy ceremonies of anointment, but it is actually Tass.

The hall of the Celestial Masters is a jumble of libraries and private chambers, with a large observatory in the center. The roof over this section is domed and pierced for observation, and the rest of the building has a flat roof for star-gazers to stand on. Its Tass takes the form of a fine silver dust, which must be laboriously swept up from the roof after it apparently settles there from the sky on certain nights.

The Craftsmasons have kept their hall ostentatiously plain; it consists almost entirely of one large room, with a stage at one end for orators, and tables at the other where Convention members may sit and take bread and ale as they debate policy. Plain wood, burned in the hearth, may leave Tass in its ashes. There are a few plain rooms for sleeping.

Inevitably, the hall of the High Guild is richly decorated, showing the glory that wealth can bring. It is divided into two floors and several large chambers, where business may be transacted and small groups may negotiate policy. The private chambers for the Maximi are astoundingly rich. A great coffer held in a treble-locked treasury fills with what appear to be ordinary gold coins, but are Tass — provided that some true gold is kept permanently in the chest.

The Cosians have the hall most often visited, as part of it has become a house of healing. Small chambers serve as sleeping places, alchemical laboratories and library. One laboratory is used for a special procedure that produces Tass in the form of a liquid, dense as mercury and red as blood.

The Void Seekers, in contrast, make least use of their hall, which is divided into many rooms, some completely bare. By careful plotting of mystickal factors, occupants can know which room to leave a pitcher of plain spring water in on certain nights so that it becomes Tass by morning.

The "unused" eighth hall is painted black, inside and out. The Council of Fourteen claim that its Tass is diverted back to the tower itself and is used in its magickal defenses. In fact, it is gathered by the Ksirafai during their secret nighttime meetings, in the form of a small and poisonous fungus that grows on the interior walls.

The Approach to the Tower

Via a narrow causeway across the ditch, the road to the tower leads through a slight notch in the rampart and a well-made gate in the palisade, then up between the Halls of the Gabrielites and Artisans to the grand gate in the outermost of the three walls. The three gates in the walls are each 120 degrees around from the others, and the tower



door is likewise displaced from the third gate, forcing a visitor (or attacker) to traverse a full circle (clockwise) to reach the heart of the Order of Reason. On the way, a visitor notes the many barracks and storerooms built within the triple walls and the force of troops posted there.

The Lower Floors

On passing through the tower's one solid-iron door, a visitor finds herself in the Hall of Arrival, a windowless chamber that comprises the entire ground floor of the building. Its walls are ribbed with the elegantly curved arches that support the entire weight of the tower above, and they are embellished with rich paint and gilding. The floor is an intricate marble mosaic, depicting the symbols and important mathematical forms of Sacred Architecture. There is no obvious source of illumination, and yet the Hall is well-lit, almost as if the air itself glows.

Starting at a point opposite the door, a staircase runs up the wall and continues up the next three floors of the tower. The floor above the Hall is divided into chambers — simple storerooms, in fact, holding preserved foods and weapons to ensure that, even if all the seven outer defensive barriers fall, the tower could still be defended. At least one of these rooms is kept at the temperature of ice, winter or summer, by exotic machinae, and others are so reinforced so that even if all the gunpowder they held were to detonate, the tower would survive.

The two floors above that form a library and place of records, holding the Order of Reason's most precious and secret texts — grimoires of magicks too dangerous for widespread knowledge, plans for machinae that call down the Scourge if they are ever built, but that may become useful one day. There are lists of the names of Umbrood unknown to Hermetics or Dreamspeakers, books of advice to princes so cynical that every religion on Earth would demand that they be burned, philosophical treatises on the nature of Earth, Time, and Mankind of impossible complexity — and family secrets of great monarchs, copies of Medici account books, and important Hermetic, Akashic, and Batini references. The staircase up from the higher of the two library floors does not run against the outer wall, but spirals at the very center of the building.

The Upper Floors

The three topmost floors of the White Tower are the focus of awe for the entire Order of Reason. And yet, the lowest of the three seems to be nothing but a large chamber full of war engines — engines of rare and sometimes eccentric design, perhaps, but surely no more than might be seen on any battlefield of the day. (The wheeled carriages on which the guns are mounted are well-made, to be sure, but....)

These weapons are the closest to perfection that the art of weaponry has ever seen. Most are Artificer masterpieces,

although several Celestial Masters contributed to the design of their aiming mechanisms, but some think that the mightiest weapons of all sit in a plain chest between two of the gun ports. These are Gabrielite contributions to the tower's ultimate defensive might, and even the other Conventions are uncertain of what they include. But it is known that there are swords and spears here with names and histories.

Above this floor is one that has several small chambers, all illuminated by windows only. If the Order of Reason has a beating heart, it is here. It is *Viasilicos Primus*, the central node in the Order's magickal communications system. The crystals are tended day and night by Daedaleans; they bear the important news of the Order's doings and encounters to the rest of White Tower inhabitants. As well as experts involved in the magicks, there are "scribes" who not only organize and record what they hear, but who also work to understand it and to relate diverse messages that may have important hidden associations.

(Incidentally, the *Viasilicos* system would not disintegrate if the White Tower fell. It is the most important station in the web, but it is not all operated or empowered from here.)

At this level, the last stairs up are once again set against the walls of the tower; there are four such stairways, to reduce sticky questions of precedence between those permitted to make this last ascent. Because, of course, at the top of the tower is the Council Chamber. No resident servant of the White Tower talks about any other such meeting-place without qualifying the name, for this is the purpose of their lives, the place where the Inner Circle meet around a round table. The only decorations are the seven crests of the Conventions on the walls; light comes from seven evenly spaced windows, the panes being exceptionally large and perfectly flat. (There is no eighth hidden window. The *Ksirafai* do not work in light.) The floor is smooth, polished wood. The walls are white as the exterior of the tower.

And finally, a hatch in the ceiling of the Council Chamber leads up to a narrow walkway that runs around the pitched roof and behind a solid parapet, which is useful should the tower ever be besieged. It is, of course, a symbolic eighth floor.

Cabals

"...Men, walking almost always in paths beaten by others, and following by imitation their deeds, are yet unable to keep entirely to the ways of others or attain to the power of those they imitate. A wise man ought always to follow the paths beaten by great men, and to imitate those who have been supreme, so that if his ability does not equal theirs, at least it will savour of it."

— Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*

The organization of the White Tower may be confusing because the supposed arrangement bears little relation to the day-to-day ordering of the place. This situation

irritates some Resplendents, but there seems to be no way of improving matters.

In theory, the halls of each of the seven overt Conventions are run by a formal hierarchy, with the Resplendent Maximi at their heads. These leaders then form the highest council of the Order of Reason, which rules the tower with wisdom and insight. A few groups of lesser individuals deal with specific functions, such as housekeeping and defense, all in an orderly fashion.

In practice, the running of the place takes precedence over formal hierarchy. The substantive cabals tend to be concerned with the day-to-day running of the tower, and to consist of members of several Conventions. Furthermore, most of the Resplendent Maximi only occasionally come to this place, when great meetings are due. Some Conventions also change their leadership regularly, even yearly, adding to the potential confusion. The cabals described here are those permanently in place. The population of the tower increases substantially when the Council of Fourteen are in full formal session.

Les Ouvriers

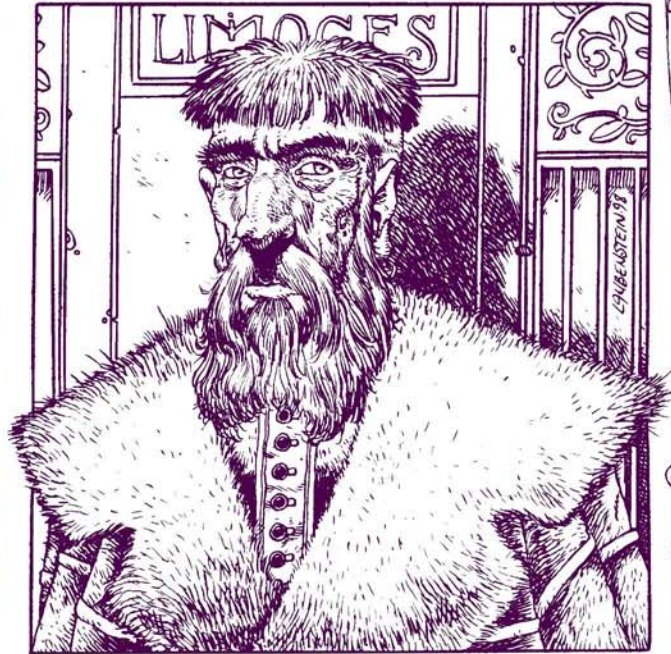
This faction started out consisting of workers responsible for the creation of the tower and its defenses, and it endured because several members remained about the place, maintaining and extending the structure. It is dominated by Artificers and Craftsmasons (the latter gave it its unpretentious name in ordinary French — “the Laborers”). The former faction’s ideals are very similar to the Craftsmasons’. Antoine Couvreur and Miguel Destro, respectively involved in arranging the tower’s defenses and the Order’s dealings with local traders have gravitated to this group.

Inevitably, les Ouvriers are very concerned with ensuring the continual security and solidity of the White Tower, both as a building and as a community. While some Craftsmasons may mutter that the necessary rebuilding of the Order of Reason no doubt involves the reshaping of this over-proud fortress, those in this cabal are frankly too sentimentally attached to the place to agree. However, they do often fall out with other Daedaleans over policies that disdain the interests of the mass of humanity in pursuit of lofty ideals or personal greed.

Gerard de Limoges

Background: Although Les Ouvriers lack strong leadership (one of the cabal’s weaknesses), they do include Gerard, a former Craftmason Maximus. Whatever their political views, other leading Daedaleans instinctively respect one who has held such an office, and Gerard therefore makes a useful spokesman.

As his name says, he was born in the city of Limoges in the heart of France, where he became a mundane mason,



working on churches and great houses. He awoke and entered the Craftsmasons in the usual way, but he soon moved within the Convention to the Guild of the Sword — the warriors. Courage and skilled leadership in a series of assaults on Hermetic strongholds earned him respect, and he rose, eventually being elected to spend his year on the Council of Fourteen. Thus, Limoges came to the White Tower around 20 years ago and found it still growing and developing — not always in directions that he approved of. When his time on the Council was done, he remained on the site to help organize building work.

Although service to his Convention has taken Limoges away from the tower on occasion, some of Les Ouvriers have come to value him, and they have sufficient influence to bring him back. He is more often found in L’Espérance than up at the tower itself, for he is popular among the citizens for his unflinching dedication to many of their causes.

Image: As he becomes more grizzled and weathered, Gerard is not losing any of his toughness. None who meet him doubt that he has worked heavy stone or fought battles. (He shaves, when he remembers.) He dresses plainly and carries a hammer in his belt — a weapon and a tool. He is not especially eloquent, believing that what he says should count for more than how he says it, but he is bold in speech.

Roleplaying Hints: You are dedicated to the ideals of the Craftsmasons, especially to the defense of honest working folk. You would lay down your life for the cause. However, a lifetime of experience has taught you a little about politics, and you hide your annoyance with other Daedaleans who lack a proper sense of what is right. Perhaps, as some of your Convention say, the Order of Reason is corrupt and must be demolished and rebuilt in better form, but such a great change must be undertaken

with care and judgment. For now, you work with the materials you have at hand.

Quote: "This town was built to help the Council meet. But we must not forget why the Council was built."

The Villici

The White Tower is a working structure, and a small group of adept and trusted individuals are responsible for its continued function. Living in close proximity, sharing practical concerns, these people have grouped together as a cabal. Given the wealth of the tower, their occasional disputes over precedence and priorities are not enough to divide them. They call themselves the "Villici," which means stewards of an estate.

The leader of the group is Padraig O'Mara, the tower's Doorman. This title may sound trivial, but its importance is symbolic, and O'Mara bears considerable responsibility for some of the tower's wards and warnings, as well as for the ritualistic aspect of much of the place's life. Even Judith Miller, Proavia of the Hippocratic Circle, defers to him on matters of cabal policy. She is a member because she dwells around the tower, organizing its medical activities and studying reports of plague and pestilence that come through the Viasilicos crystals. (However, as a member of the Council of Fourteen, Miller has far greater potential political influence.) Of the others of the cabal, Rugero Atharios has the title of Treasurer, taking care of the tower's accounts and responsibility for its provisioning, while Elena des Tomasi is in charge of the library.

Elena's assistant, Rutger van Bergen, is supposed to be an Artificer, but he is a Ksirafai (as the Circle of Fourteen know) and was placed here in an innocuous post near the top of the White Tower to observe the other high servants and to bear urgent messages. He wears the façade of a quiet, diligent fellow and is a skilled librarian. After all, the Ksirafai deal in knowledge above all else.

The Villici are jokingly nicknamed the "New Pierres" around the White Tower. "Pierre" is the French version of "Peter," and Saint Peter, of course, bears the keys of Heaven and stands at its gates; but "Pierre" also means "stone" in French, and there is some sense that this group is the foundation stone of the tower's operations. Les Ouvriers are thus referred to as the Old Pierres because they were responsible for the stone work of its building.

Padraig O'Mara

Background: Born in a remote corner of Ireland to a family with the barest claim to gentility, Padraig O'Mara was inspired by an old and forgotten tradition of his homeland: high scholarship. He succeeded in gaining entry to a monastery and was eventually given work in the library, but he seemed too restless for it. The quiet rural house found him weary and sent him on to study in more sophisticated establishments.



Shuttling from university to abbey, the young scholar-monk ventured down strange paths of scholarship, esoteric numerology and pagan philosophy. O'Mara might have found himself in trouble had he not come to meet with a band of Awakened thinkers. Their gentle encouragement assisted his own Awakening, at which time, he recognized that his interests were far too *worldly* for the Church to hold him.

Fortunately, he was able to gain release from his vows with the aid of a noble sponsor, and O'Mara went on to study with a master Artificer. He entered that Convention and the Pythagori. His mathematical, theoretical interests were a little extreme for the mage-mechanicians, but acceptable. In time, O'Mara came to the new White Tower with a band of others, and showed a swift and intuitive grasp of the near-ritualistic nature of its building.

Image: Padraig is a dignified figure in middle age. He dresses plainly, but his clothes are of fine fabric, and he wears a badge of office on his shoulder. He also bears a staff of silver metal, which is a magickal artifact. It strikes with the force of a heavy mace and serves as his tool for most of his workings.

Padraig speaks several languages. He has a calm manner that enables him to deal with king or peasant equally well, without recourse to formal etiquette.

Roleplaying Hints: Others see you as a mystick and a theoretician, but you know how truly practical your work is. You may thus be a practical man and driven by your duty to the Order of Reason, but you are also a magus and a scholar. Years of study and conversation with colleagues from across the world have made you into a cultivated, thoughtful individual, with your Irish accent wiped away (except to the ears of the most perceptive student of speech). You desire

what is best for humanity, intellect and Reason, and you see that the security and smooth function of the White Tower serves that goal. Your anger is rare and quiet, but powerful. Your friendship and pleasure is dignified, but sincere.

Quote: "I've placed bars of iron and fire on those portals, and shields of storm and howling about this chamber. We may speak freely. State your business."

The Followers of Heraclius

As the leaders of the White Tower's defensive forces (and of the occasional armed bands that it must send about its business), this cabal has named itself in honor of a Byzantine emperor who recaptured the True Cross from the Persians and earned the last old-style Roman triumph — a significant blend of old and new, faith and glory.

The Followers of Heraclius are a military cabal, liable to support direct and uncomplicated solutions to problems, but they are not wild or uncontrolled. They are loath to expend the tower's finite defensive forces on uncertain ventures, and most of them are Gabrielites who see themselves, in due humility, as secondary to the "Doves of Christ."

In truth, most of the cabal spends their time dealing with rather dull practical concerns. However, when the swords of the White Tower must be drawn, these leaders exhibit formidable knowledge of battle magick, tactics and weapon use.

Those Who Venture

Background: There are relatively few Void Seekers and Celestial Masters permanently in residence at the White Tower, so those who are present here naturally tend to band together. The instinctive policy of a settled community is to demand stability and caution. Those Who Venture understand this policy, but argue otherwise.

But this cabal is more than simply an argumentative faction with a love of travel. Journeys beyond the limits of the known often turn up opportunities for profit, pagans to convert, monsters to fight and new medicines. Those Who Venture are a distinctly militant and aggressive group, with many allies beyond the two dominant Conventions. Indeed, they nominally count one of the highest of the High Guild among their number. They are also very political, making up for in energy what they may lack in eloquence or subtlety. Their duties around the tower are mostly concerned with pressing their case rather than ordinary work. Furthermore, they include no less than two Maximi. Their influence on policy is immense.

Their acknowledged leader is Sabina Valmarana, Maxima of the Celestial Masters. Wolfgang von Reismann, the secretive and ancient Maximus of the High Guild, lends his influence to this cabal on occasion but stands aside from

the tiresome policy-making. While he adopts a pose of quiet dignity, wise observers realize that he spends most of his time studying the traffic of the Viasilicos system and exploiting it to the profit of his Guild, house and self.

Maxima Sabina Valmarana

Background: Born in a palatial villa in the hills of Tuscany, the great-granddaughter of the co-founder of the Celestial Masters inherited much from her ancestor: magickal aptitude, wealth, position and a bold disdain for the conventions of religion and propriety. The Convention would welcome her into its ranks for her birth, but it is unlikely that she would ascend to its highest position on that recommendation alone. The Celestial Masters prize determination and innovation over an old name, but Sabina has all three.

That said, it may be that, had Sabina been a nobody with the same talents, she would have entered another school of magecraft. Her greatest skills lie in the subtle arts of Mind and Life more than in the crafting or use of machines or astronomical charts. Still, she gained an honorary place in the House of Selene and made herself (and her resources) useful. She now spends her time at the White Tower, deploying her reasonable political skills and near-limitless wealth and social connections to promote the Celestial Masters' ends.

Image: Although Sabina has spent much time earning her rank, and her face and manner do not deny her years, Sabina uses both Life magick and mundane tricks of etiquette and dress to preserve her attractiveness. Her gowns are of rich silk, subtly embellished with the symbols of her fellowship. Her hair is dark and lush. She speaks with a pleasant, deep voice and has a strong Italian accent when conversing in other tongues. She is fluent in French,



Spanish and Latin, among other tongues — but if it causes some listeners to underestimate her intellect, and if some men find it charming, Sabina does not object.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a consummate politician and genuinely dedicated to the interests of the Celestial Masters. After all, the name of your family is bound up with the success of the Convention. You enjoy these games of politics — and games is how you view them. You bear no great malice toward your rivals. However, you do have a streak of vanity. Offenses *personally* against you, or your ancestry, merit proportionate revenge.

Quote: “Oh really — we of the Celestial Masters do not consider this matter worthy of great concern. However, if you find it worrisome, we might agree with you in council — if you will agree to support us in certain other matters...”

The Marshals of the Light

This small cabal is sponsored by Bonifacio Valle, war leader of the Cabal of Pure Thought. Its concern is with the promotion of the Order of Reason’s militant policies. Unlike the Followers of Heraclius, who must concern themselves with the practical workings of the tower’s defenses, these firebrands press for strategies that take every war to the enemy. However, being relatively low-ranking in the Order, members cannot make much difference in the day-to-day politics of the Order in their sponsor’s absence; therefore, they mostly restrict themselves to preaching in L’Espérance, training their skills and recruiting new Daedaleans for bold ventures.

Of course, not all such war-makers are Gabrielites. Indeed, the cabal has recruited one equally aggressive Craftmason to its cause. They are swift to sound out any visitors to the tower who seem venturesome enough to work for their aims.

The Delegation of the Four Corners

Members of the Order of Reason come to the White Tower from across the world with special concerns of their own. Most such visitors remain only for as long as it takes to present their case and then depart, heartened or otherwise. However, a number have dwelt in L’Espérance for months or even years, either because they refuse to accept an answer they have been given or because their mission demands a perpetual representative at the heart of the Order. Nor are they generally unwelcome. Their strange talents are of interest to scholars, while their tales of exotic lands appeal to Void Seekers and Financiers.

Members’ shared condition naturally tends to draw these folk together, and despite some contradictory aims, they form a clear faction in the debates of the White Tower. They all wish to remind their hosts that there is more to the

world than the “Frankish” lands, and members share practical concerns with the expansion of the Viasilicos and with the improvement and protection of travel.

This cabal wields a variety of outré magicks, some at the limits of what the Order considers right or godly, but effective. Its political power is limited by its members’ diverse aims and shortage of close allies about the tower, but wiser Maximi always listen to what its members say. The reactions of distant lands to new policies can be hard to predict.

The Delegation always includes a secret Ksirafai agent, currently Eleanora Parvellides, although the occupant of this post changes periodically. The supreme spies of the Order of Reason like to learn as much as possible about those nations that cannot be watched closely. They also study foreign manners in order to assist in the preparation of disguises, and they want to be sure that these odd visitors are not collaborating on dangerous plots. Fortunately, the strange and subtle magick of the Ksirafai is not much noticed in a group of known “strange foreigners.” Eleanora claims she is of Byzantine descent. She passes herself off as a wandering exile and as a member of the High Guild, seeking to ensure that the Order concerns itself with the practical consequences of the fall of her home city to the Turks.

Other current members:

Sundiata Rashi is a master salt-trader from the expanding Songhai Empire of Africa. His trade-brotherhood, the Dyula, has integrated with the High Guild, but its leaders hold that they should observe their new allies from close quarters — so Sundiata has been sent to the tower, where his extraordinary negotiating skills have made him the *de facto* leader of the Delegation of the Four Corners.

Hsuan Hsi is an emissary of the Wu Lung (see *The Book of Crafts*), sent west by a faction of the independent Chinese legalist-mages who are sympathetic to the idea of cooperation with the Order of Reason, to observe and negotiate at length. Hsi is unhappy and uncomfortable in this disorderly barbarian land, but far too controlled to display these feelings. He has decided that this cabal of barbarians might at least jolt the Europeans out of their silly arrogance.

Hajji Abd-Allah ibn Sali’a and Shakla bint-Attar al-Rikab are travelers from the Sultanate of Delhi — a footloose wanderer who has been inducted into the Void Seekers and a healer who is seeking wisdom from the Cosians to merge with her independent Arab and Indian training. Having joined together for safety on the road, they came to the White Tower out of curiosity, but they find themselves as the only current representatives of the Islamic faith here (besides Sundiata, who is a charming fellow, but rather heterodox). They are shrewd enough to find this situation worrisome and feel obliged to stay and struggle against the prejudices of the Order. (Shakla disguised herself as a young man when traveling and has become very practiced at this charade. Abd-Allah was taken in for weeks; during that time, he came to treat Shakla as a brother.)

Father Yakov Andronovich is a Russian priest who has converted to fanatical Roman Catholicism, and who holds that the greatest threat to the Gabrielite dream of "One World, One God, One Church" is his own nation's stubborn perpetuation of independence for its national Church. Yakov, nicknamed the "Bloodthirsty Dove" around the tower, preaches extraordinarily lurid sermons in broken Latin. He doesn't fit in this cabal, but he remains a member while he presses for ties with the Marshals of the Light, who include his former escort from the journey west.

Brethren, Consors, Servants

In addition to meeting the usual need of any fortress for servants and porters, the White Tower commands a complete army of un-Awakened brethren. After all, it is the heart of the Order and must be properly warded. Furthermore, some high-ranking Resplendents have determined to make this community into an example of their ideal for the future of humanity. Although it still resembles an ordinary sort of village or town in many ways, the tower is part of the function assigned to L'Espérance.

The non-combatant citizens are organized as small, informal guilds. The stonemasons and smiths (who include silver-workers) are the most powerful through their close links to the Awakened and private wealth. But the village's butchers, bakers, and vintners have gathered together into one substantial and increasingly respected body.

Somewhere in the village dwell two innocuous folk who are thought to be traveling merchants, which explains their irregular absences. They are in fact Fulmen and Suavium of the Ksirafai, who thus place themselves close to the meeting place of the Inner Circle, in case they are needed.

The Armed Force

The troops who defend the White Tower are a strange mixture of the archaic and the experimental, but all are recruited with careful attention to their dedication (first) and skill (a close second).

They are divided into six companies (smaller than the bodies that usually bear this name, but so formidably armed as to represent a serious strategic force). The first consists of around 30 to 35 "men-at-arms," who are mostly Gabrielites and their brethren, trained as heavy cavalry, armored from head to toe, riding horses, and willing and able to charge on any foe. Some of these troops may also carry hand-held guns. As these "knightly" cavalry are too slow and cumbersome for scouting or skirmishing, there is also a company of 40 light cavalry (sometimes termed "Turcoples"), who are armed with crossbows, Artificer-made guns, and light lances. This force often has many duties at once, and its members are trained to operate alone and in small groups.

Cavalry need infantry to support them and finish the work their charges begin. The White Tower has two companies of 60 foot-soldiers each. Half of each are equipped with crossbows or firearms (the latter being examples of Artificer ingenuity). In one company, the second half wield halberds, while the other includes pikemen, trained to use the long-shafted weapons that the Order soon encourages in Sleeper armies when they wish to break the power of the aristocratic knight for good.

The last two companies are the strangest, with a large number of Artificers and their brethren — 10 to 20 troops in each. One tends the tower's artillery — sophisticated cannon that defends the ramparts and castle walls and could be taken to battlefields if necessary. The other company combines the war skills of the German Hussite Protestant armies and strange machinae appropriated from Adolphus Gent of Bavaria. They mount guns and other missile weapons on enclosed wagons, and in some cases, mechanically-powered vehicles (which can be driven to the battlefield to form closed circles bristling with firepower).

Some of the Artificers and Celestial Masters associated with the tower may also call on their Conventions for use of various balloons and sky-ships, which are not a regular part of the defenses; they have proved too likely to call down the Scourge, and they attract too much attention if Sleepers see them. But they would arrive and fight soon enough if they were needed.

Lastly, in the event of a truly dangerous assault on the White Tower, all the able-bodied men of L'Espérance are expected to take up arms. The Order does not anticipate that it will ever be necessary, but the existence of a thriving community of loyal brethren is reassuring.

Politics

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-masters and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed stood in constant opposition to one another, carrying on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes."

— Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

The White Tower is a hotbed of policy debate that remains at the level of fairly polite verbal dispute, although some individuals might not be above the idea of extreme tactics. While the garrison of the tower does not much act directly in the world at large, and the Circle of Fourteen may or may not choose to pay attention to the opinions of their supporters, there are powerful and influential Convention members around the place, who advise and have power over what the Maximi hear and see.

The main disagreement is among Les Ouvriers (who propound the Craftmason creed of aid to the common

man), and Those Who Venture (who are more concerned with expansion and exploration), and the Marshals of the Light (who say that the first concern is to strike down all that is monstrous and ungodly). The latter two agree as often as they disagree but see each other as impious "Prometheans" and stiff-necked pious brawlers, and thus they do not mix well. The Villici are a moderating influence, reminding everyone of the high ideals of the Order. The Followers of Heraclius agree with the Marshals of the Light on principle, but they try to restrain them in private. And while the Delegation of the Four Corners are an unpredictable factor, albeit with friends among Those Who Venture and a degree of friction against the Villici, who all too often seem impelled to invoke proper protocol to obstruct the needs of these "outlanders."

A secondary running dispute concerns the proper arrangement and goals for the community, and especially the governance of L'Espérance. To Les Ouvriers, it should be ordered as an ideal community for the working folk who live within: There should be little law, what there is should be fair, and there should be no distinctions between "gentlefolk" and "commoners." This matter does not accord with the practical concerns of the Followers of Heraclius, who would prefer it become a garrison-town, serving the needs of the soldiers and respecting necessary military gradations. The other cabals either remain neutral or tend to the Heraclians' side, but the Craftsmasons have their support, not least in the village. Those Who Venture do concur with Les Ouvriers that the village should have more dealings with the outside world, although their reasons differ. The Craftsmasons and Artificers want to set an open example to others, whereas the "adventurer" Conventions admire travel for its own sake, and their friends among the High Guild see virtue in trade. The other cabals prefer less danger of "caudex interference," although the Delegation of the Four Corners agrees that the community is too isolated.

Future Fates

From *Six Months in Languedoc*, published in London, 1987:

"The next day, we took the car further inland, to a hamlet called, according to the map, *Lesprance*. We had to go by the map on this because the grand total of three cottages seemed to be completely deserted. We parked the car a little further up the track and hiked to the top of the nearby hill.

"I was interested in this area because, according to a history of the Albigensian Crusade that I'd been reading, there had once been a sizable walled village here, which had been burned to the ground by the crusaders. At first, I thought that every last trace of it had been wiped out by the passage of time, but then my wife called out that she'd found something. However, the rectangular building foundations poking up through the scrub, some way down the hill, didn't

look old enough to me; I guessed that they could have been those of a barn, built and then abandoned some time in the last couple of centuries.

"Just as I was saying as much, we found that we had company; a gnarled old local, accompanied by a shabby dog, was eyeing us with suspicion. We greeted him, and started to tell him what we were doing there, but he just shrugged, and then told us that his grandfather had told him that there had once been a castle on the hill, but it had been stolen away by the devil one dark night for its wickedness. Presumably, this story is either a remarkable case of folk-memory over seven centuries, or a complete coincidence..."

Rowan Castle: A Rock, A Storm

And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new."

— Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

It was perfectly reasonable for the chamberlain's secretary to have cause to visit the castle pantry, but it was unusual. Father Paul looked about himself with care as he approached Gwen.

"Don't fret, singer," the serving woman murmured with a cold smile, "there are no others around here at this moment."

"And don't you be so foolish," Paul snapped back. "Using your witch-magic to tell yourself that could bring danger in itself. We are in the heart of their place of power, with an army of burning swords about us. If they take us for what we are, then we will likely die within the hour."

The woman scowled. "I thought that you had their trust," she snapped.

"They do not trust. They know me for a true Christian," the secretary answered, "and as one awakened to the glory of God. Thus do I pass among those who, in their hubris, claim to have been embraced by angels, when they are barely worthy to sing His praises. But they have power, for all their folly, witch-woman — and should they know us for their enemies, neither your witchcraft nor my faith would suffice to bring us from this high place alive..."

A Stalwart Fortress

Overlooking a verdant valley in the west of England, Rowan Castle was granted by the Crown to the Church, and through them to General Christopher Wyndgarde.

The castle provided the headquarters for Wyndgarde's crusade across the isles. Even after its lord's death, the castle endured, withstanding every attempt by its enemies to dislodge its dedicated garrison. Rowan's able force of Gabrielites and Artificers still stands firm against the hordes of faerie and the blood-worshipping Verbena.

But what use is valor when England suffers civil war? Are there, perhaps, greater enemies than the pagans and fae? The Daedaleans within debate the question and pray that their answers should be correct. Rowan Castle is a chantry that is enduring the storms of a swift-come Summer that seems to be dying prematurely, and yet it refuses by pure effort of collective will to sink into Autumn.

History

"When the Templars were called to arms they did not ask how many the enemy were, only where they were."

— Jacques de Vitry

The Order of Reason has many alliances — and can call on many favors — among the un-Awakened. The Gabrielites have friends in the Church, and certain artisans and healers are owed many debts for discreet favors done for the nobility, which is always useful when a new stronghold is desired. Rowan Castle is an example.

The site was once that of an old, unremarkable tower, the holding of a knightly family. However, the last member of that family died some decades ago; control of their lands reverted to the Crown by default, and the tower fell into decay. Then, in the year 1422, certain churchmen petitioned the new, youthful king, declaring that they had need for a holding from which to administer Church holdings west of England. They also were undertaking that any estate granted them for this purpose continued to fulfill its feudal duties. Churchmen claimed a further need for men-at-arms to protect traveling bishops, clerics investigating allegations of witchcraft, and so on. Given the lawlessness of the time, with lords' private armies roaming the land, this seemed plausible, and the petition implied that the Crown would be able to call on the castle for support. Favors were traded, proper documents were drawn up, and the old site was assigned to an obscure monastic order.

Amongst the Daedaleans who rode the overgrown path up the hill one spring morning was a young, dedicated warrior named Christopher Wyndgarde — one of the *Venatores Maleficorum*. Although, throughout the rest of his life, he spent more time riding the land than here, and he came to regard Rowan Castle as the home of his mission. He took part in the great ceremony that transformed the site into a functioning Cray. And when he became Inquisitor-General in the great effort to cleanse the islands of Britain of pagan magick, he was granted the rooms at the top of the keep as his own. To this day, many within the Order of Reason regard the castle as Wyndgarde's memorial.

However, before he could declare his secret war, there was much building to be done. Craftsmasons and Artificers took the lead in this project, of course, but the influence of the pragmatic Gabrielite soldiers led to something more like an ordinary castle of the day than, say, the symbol-laden White Tower.

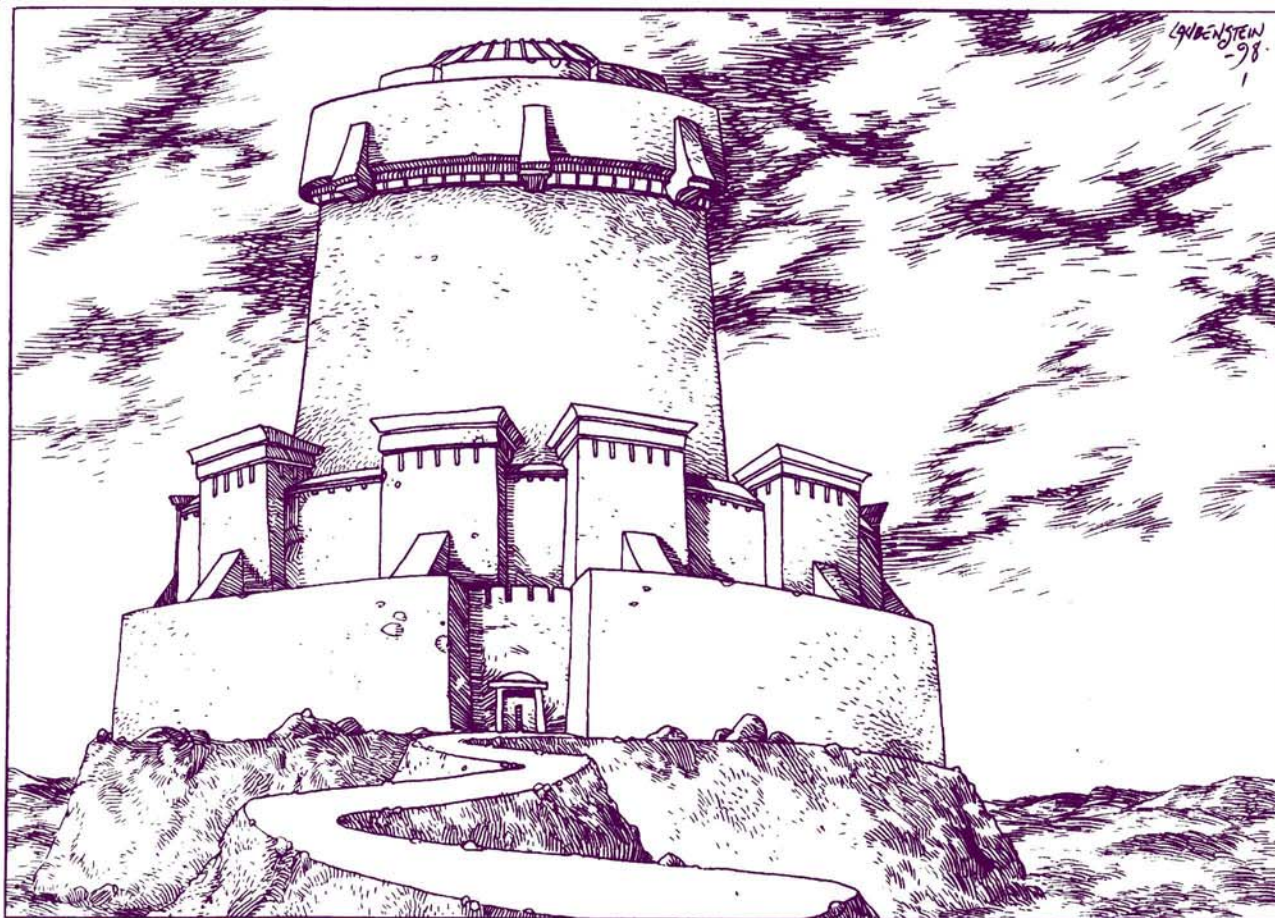
Almost all castles serve more as centers of power and homes for the mighty than as defense works, but since Wyndgarde's death, the place has been tested in that function, too. The pagans and fae have never been strong (or foolish) enough to try a full-scale assault, but they have tried several sneak attacks and insidious magickal castings against it. All have failed. The walls are strong and carved with Craftmason symbols that repel magick as well as damage. The Gauntlet in this region, too, is warded and watched. And the castle's foundations are firmly affixed to bedrock. With Commander Northbridge, perhaps the most capable planner of defenses in all Britain, with authority over it, it won't fall to main force. But then, far more castles fall to treason or confusion among their defenders than ever fall to storm.

The Setting: Upon a Green Hill

Rowan Castle stands at the head of a valley carved by a small river which, not far away, flows into the lower reaches of the great River Severn. In other words, it is in the southwest Midlands of England — at the heart of the country, some might say. It is placed to control more than one road through this productive agricultural region, but it is far enough from any major town or city to avoid distracting entanglements. From here, war parties ride forth westward into the unruly mountains of Wales; or south, down the Severn to the port of Bristol and to the southwestern peninsula, where too many mysteries remain on the moors and the craggy coasts (and where the Verbena stronghold of Glastonbury stands like a carbuncle on the face of England); or north, into the cold dales; or east, either to the dubious but important scholar-town of Oxford and to London, or to the secret, ancient, enemy temple of Stonehenge.

This land is hill country. There are sheep farms and villages visible from the castle battlements. Magic aside, the lord of the castle can pay for a tolerable lordly life from the proceeds of fair rents on the lands roundabout and reasonable tolls on those adjacent roads. A shrewd but uninformed visitor might wonder how such a remote region can support such a strong garrison, but few would guess at anything supernatural.

The castle is actually some way from the nearest real village, but there is a thin sprawl of cottages and huts beside the path that leads up to the main gate. The residences provide accommodations for servants, including some of the castle's un-Awakened troops. Careful management of



the stores enables the castle to feed itself by sending a large cart to the nearest villages once a week or so.

The Fortress

*But all things are composed here
Like Nature, orderly and near:
In which we the Dimensions find
Of that more sober Age and Mind,
When larger-sized Men did stoop
To enter at a narrow loop;
As practising, in doors so strait,
To strain themselves through Heavens Gate.*

— Andrew Marvell, *Upon Appleton House*

Rowan castle is likely to impress that hypothetical visitor, as was its builders' intent. Its hilltop position precludes the creation of a moat, as is normal for a fortress in a plains area, but high ground is always the best defense. Sheer walls of golden stone rise from the green hill, lacking even the notches in the stone that support scaffolding on a structure built by entirely ordinary means. (The Craftsmasons have better construction methods than any Sleeper.) The road twists around and back on itself as it approaches the main gate, so any attacker seeking to batter at that weak point is likely to come under fire from the adjacent towers.

Its plan is divided into three closely linked parts: inner and outer courtyards, a great round tower, and the keep. With steep slopes on three sides, a conventional assault of any strength has to come from the fourth — which means that the attackers have to take each of the three parts in turn, while the defenders are able to draw back in good order from each court. Furthermore, the tall keep is positioned to command the entire castle.

The Outer Court

The outermost section is entered through a strong main gate, flanked by small towers. It includes kitchens, stables, and larger workshops. It has a bustling, businesslike air and minimal decoration. Rowan Castle's main kitchens and food storage reflect a Spartan Gabrielite approach, although it is always well-provisioned.

In one corner, a narrow stairway leads down to a cellar that is equipped as a jail. The powers that hold Rowan Castle do not tend to hold prisoners long and do not engage in pointless torture — but they keep what tools they may need to do what duty demands. The cells have a number of subtle features and devices that serve to make magical escape or rescue difficult.

The outer court is separated from the next by a block made up of very important parts: the places where the garrison pray, meet and eat.

The Hall and Chapel

The great hall is not as richly decorated as those of many lords, but there are a few hangings on the walls, although some have designs showing secular scenes of particular significance to the Order of Reason (such as the Fall of Mistridge). The great oak dining tables are well-made, and the high table is raised a few inches above the rest of the room on a wooden platform. One floor up, a gallery around the walls provides more standing space when mass meetings take place here.

The castle's chapel is similarly austere, although predictably substantial. The walls are painted a plain white. The altar furniture is rich, with much gold.

The Inner Court

The courtyard that comprises Rowan Castle's second line of defense is mostly given over to accommodation for the garrison. A large number of cell-like chambers line the inside of the wall. These are mostly grouped round narrow staircases and occupy two or three levels. Members of the garrison live in close proximity, but are permitted privacy for meditation, prayer or study. There are also a number of small Artificer workshops, where special weapons and magickal machinae can be constructed or maintained, along with some food storage and kitchens (so that the castle could hold out for an extended period even after the outer court had fallen). There is also a small library, holding holy books, ill-organized notes on types of enemy, and some Artificer texts. (Each Artificer in the castle also has her own personal notes.)

A short walkway leads from an upper gallery in the hall, along the top of the inner court wall, to the keep. There is no entrance into the keep at ground level, and the doorways leading to the inner court battlements can be subject to fire from multiple arrow slits and gun ports in the tower's higher levels.

The Keep

Visitors are rarely admitted to the keep, and only if they are known and trusted. Meetings take place in the hall or in a smaller presence chamber in the inner court. In fact, this tower is mostly set up as personal chambers for higher officers.

Commander Northbridge has plain rooms at its top, including a small, windowed chamber in the roof space that holds at least two Viasilicos (which only Northbridge and a select few may use). The next floor down is occupied by the Artificer Peter Jaspers. The magickal defenses of Rowan Castle are ordered from here. Three more floors are a mixture of smaller private quarters, along with a small kitchen and food storage.

The lowermost floor of the keep has its floor a foot or so below the level of the ground outside and consists of a single chamber with white walls embellished with a large crucifix. This heart of the Cray empowers Rowan Castle. A stone block at the very center of the room often has a fire burning on it, but the room never becomes smoky or stuffy, and whatever is used as fuel, the fire leaves only fine white ash — Tass.

Cabals

Occupants of the castle are divided in the household, termed the *Libera Familia*, and the warrior garrison, who follows old Templar Conventions and call themselves the *Commandery*. Predictably, the latter are mostly Gabrielites, while the *Libera Familia* is mostly Artisans — but members of both Conventions are found in both categories.

The cabals of the Commandery are known as *Lances*. Each has a specific role, usually military. The *Libera Familia* is grouped into chambers, which are named for the part of the castle where they perform their primary duties.

The Magistrate's Gonfalon

This Lance — named for the banner that would be borne at the head of an army — is the personal council and guard of the commander of the fortress. As such, it is the most powerful cabal in the place, although its members are not as dedicated to combat as some.

Father Roderick is a tall, austere priest and member of the *Illustroferatores* — and exorcist. He is an expert in the spheres of Spirit and Prime, has been in residence at Rowan Castle since the site was consecrated, and takes responsibility for the defense of its Gauntlet and the repulsion of assaults from the worlds of spirits and demons. He has free access to the castle's Cray. Although he has passed sufficient knowledge onto others that the defenses would survive his death, he can claim much credit for its survival of the Decade of the Hunt.

Cuthbert Shand was appointed to the castle by Northbridge's superiors — implying that the Order must have come down from the White Tower itself. Northbridge is too good of a soldier to do anything but spread the story that he has been told to give out — that Shand is a scholar-soldier who has come here to advise on the plans of the Order of Reason and to serve as Northbridge's lieutenant when necessary. Still, Northbridge must wonder and he has heard whispers of a secret group within the Order. Shand rarely uses magick, lest his idiosyncratic style draw attention. He is actually reasonably impressed with the castle's condition, although he remains cautious.

Commander Northbridge

Background: Born the youngest son of a family of minor gentry and warriors in the Scots Border region (on

CHAPTER II: THE ORDER OF REASON

the Scottish side of the border, but no one in that land pays much attention to that), Robert Northbridge saw mercenary service as the obvious way to make an honest enough life. He was devout and honorable (and maybe naive) enough to think that certain types of service might bear more honor than others, and thus he eventually entered the household of the Bishop of Durham as a guard. He saw enough service guarding the bishop's lands against cross-border raiders to polish his war skills.

It was while Northbridge was standing guard at the bishop's house that he caught the eye of a strange, stern visitor, who was suggesting to the bishop that recent bloody troubles in the area suggest something weirder than bandits. Unlike most of the household, Northbridge did not laugh, even nervously, at the visitor's hints — and the visitor requested that Northbridge be sent with him when he rode forth into a certain area of blasted moorland with a dark reputation.

That day saw a swift and desperate battle between the visiting Gabrielites and the Unseelie fae who had been rejoicing in its slaughter of innocent humans — a true redcap, as folk of that area use the word. Northbridge paled at the sight but stood his ground — and after the battle, the visitor offered the young soldier a new and high duty.

In the years that followed, Northbridge earned the Kiss of Gabriel and rose through the ranks of the Cabal of Pure

Thought, becoming the trusted lieutenant of General Wyndgarde himself, who needed an aide with a cool head and a tidy mind to organize. Wyndgarde inspired the warriors, while Northbridge saw to their well-being.

Not that Northbridge's advice was enough to save Wyndgarde one dark day outside Newry. Suddenly, the survivors of the army found themselves hunted and on the defensive, and Wyndgarde's lieutenants were forced to become leaders. His particular talents came into their own. Drawing his forces back into secure castles, calming the fearful with a simple word, plotting strategies on the eternal principle that "This, too, shall pass," Northbridge held the Gabrielites together for 10 dark years. He then led them for 15 more as the Hunt ebbed and his battle-hardened troops allied with new forces from across the world to drive down the forces of chaos once again. In all this time, he refused the title of General (which is not a military rank at this time) preferring the old Templar title of Commander. There could only ever be one general in Rowan Castle.

Image: Northbridge is a sturdy, healthy man, still dark-haired despite the years that are just beginning to wear him down. He is clean-shaven and usually clad in soldier's garb. He speaks briskly, having largely lost his Borders accent.





Roleplaying Hints: Most of your brothers-in-arms experienced a holy vision before entering the cabal; yours was a slow-growing awareness, culminating in a confrontation with bloody horror. Sometimes, in moments of vanity, you think that slow and careful forging has made a strong blade. It has made you determined that everything you see as fair, true and worthy shall not fall to chaos and insanity.

You are a soldier to the core, but most of all, you are a defender. You take no pleasure in bloodshed, but if there must be death, you see to it that it is the death of enemies, not soldiers. You are not frightened of decisions that could send Gabrielites out to die, but their deaths should never be in vain. Nor do you like torture; even monsters should be given a clean death.

You deal briskly and politely with others, and you do not concern yourself with abstractions. Theology is for priests, and philosophy is for schoolmen. In combat, you prefer to rely on sensible plans, augmented by quiet use of "casual" effects (usually involving the spheres of Mind or Life), which you think are no more than Heaven giving the righteous their due. All else aside, you find that this way is the best way to avoid the Scourge.

Quote: "So that is their idea — to fall on us by surprise. Well, we are not surprised..."

The Shield-Hand Lance

When all is said and done, Rowan Castle is a house of soldiers — ones who prefer open battle to subtle war. The Shield-Hand Lance represents this aspect of the chantry. Its members are formally required and entitled to ride on the left flank of the Commandery in any battle, and the symbolism of their name has led quickly to the tradition

that they are among the sturdiest and most resolute of the castle's garrison. They include two survivors of the Decade of the Hunt — dour, grim men who fought when most they knew were dead. One is William Harkness, of the Artificers known as *Mauls* — a rugged veteran warrior who uses hammers and maces of dark, massive metal as a focus for calculated battle magick. As with all of this Lance, battle is Harkness' lifework.

The Sword-Hand Lance

Granted the privilege of riding on the right flank of the Commandery in battle, and thought of as the swiftest and most fearsome of its warriors, the Sword-Hand Lance bears a proud name. However, even the proud suffer misfortune.

In this case, it was the dark experience of losing a comrade in battle. During a recent venture — what should have been a simple scattering of a heathenish coven meeting on the Yorkshire moors — a war party from Rowan Castle was assailed by fae monsters and driven back. Three brethren and one Sword-Hand Lance fell that night. Seeing their fellow's throat torn out by a hellhound that materialized from the very darkness of the night has left Perkin Thorne and Edgar Earham chastened and pensive, and Commander Northbridge is wise enough not to give them especially heavy duties for a while, perhaps until a new Mediator can be found to round out the group.

The Turcoples

Turcoples were the light cavalry arm of Crusader forces such as the Templars; the Gabrielites apply the name to all manner of warriors whose first duty is not necessarily to stand in the line of battle. However, this lance has the task of determining what can be known of Rowan Castle's enemies. It deals with both scouting and spying.

Thus, members tend to be chosen for sharp wits and expertise in the sphere of Connection. Leader Martin Young is one of nature's cavalrymen, and he concerns himself with scouting most; he usually uses a small force of picked riders from among the castle's un-Awakened brethren. Rowan Castle makes few efforts toward spying out its enemies (if actually possible), and it depends on the aid of subtler Daedalean lodges for intelligence. However, the Lance's Artificer, Maria van Ruyter, provides some exotic magickal capabilities, if only through her interest in telescopes and other optical devices.

Martin Young

Background: Born into an old Bedfordshire family of the knightly class, Martin Young was drawn to the Gabrielites as much through ideals of honor and knighthood as through religion. His faith — and his holy vocation — are genuine, but some suspect that he is a knight first and a servant of God second.



Young is a dashing, swift-footed fellow, and a fine horseman with a sharp eye, as well as an inspiring leader of men. These attributes have led him to command a lance at an early age. The cabal sees this result as a fair test of his talents. As the youngest of the garrison regularly sit in council, he argues for action over caution, although he is not foolish. One of Young's great concerns lies in the realm of Sleeper politics. His family is a longtime supporter of the Lancastrian cause in England's civil wars, and Martin declares that the Cabal of Pure Thought should not stand by while a "usurper" holds the throne of the land.

Image: Slim, graceful and fair-skinned, Martin tries to bear himself as a knight out of the old tales. For this reason, he is usually found in a brigantine jacket and practical clothes, whatever the situation.

Roleplaying Hints: Your sword is ever by your side, and your sense of honor is ever sharp — that is all that the world needs to know. As you are on the side of the angels, you need not worry yourself about theology when you need to make decisions. You are polite, especially to your social equals, for courtesy is a knightly virtue — but you do not believe in standing on ceremony. You speak your mind when the issue is important.

Quote: "Our duty is clear, my friends. For truth, God, and honor!"

The Esquire's Lance

Charged with command of un-Awakened troops and with standing in reserve in battle, the Esquire's Lance is numerous, adaptable and cautious, although not very powerful. Most members of the group are little more than Apprentices, and it is significant that they are of low social

origins. Many are from the Celtic lands or the far southwest. The Lance's duties naturally extend to manning the castle's defensive cannon, and for this reason and others it has acquired Artificer members.

Zebedee Welsh is the leader of the Lance. Florence of Worcester, of the Illustroferatores, is a capable healer who deals with the castle's medical requirements. Although Florence represents the Gabrielites in their merciful aspect, she is not soft or sentimental. She has no time for malingerers, and she could preach a fiery sermon on the holy mission of the warrior arm were this permitted. The frivolous of the garrison secretly comment that Florence's rank as a Knight of God is more than a formality.

The Chancellery

The Chancellery deals with the running of Rowan Castle — and also with peaceable dealings with the world, both mundane and Awakened. Therefore, this "chamber" commands considerable power and more influence, although its leader, Chamberlain Andre of Sark, is always scrupulous about acknowledging the high position of the Lances. Andre is an Artificer of the Pythagori guild, whose skill lies more in guiding the hands of others than in invention. If he realized what his secretary, Father Paul, was truly about, Andre would know true humility. The third member, Brother Luke, is an aging, not very powerful Illustroferato. He spends his time buried in books and records, although his organized mind is of true service.

Father Paul

Background: Faced with the half-secret struggle between the Gabrielites and the pagans and fae of Britain, the Traditions have been obliged to take sides. Even the devout Christians of the Celestial Chorus fear what the Order of Reason might do if they triumph here, which does not make the actions forced on them any easier.

Paul of Falmouth was born into a knight's household, and he had little difficulty in entering the church when he showed an overwhelming dedication to God. However, that dedication took the form of a miraculous song in his soul, and he soon fell in with his natural friends in the Chorus. His time on this path was spent quietly, so it was safe to assume that he was not known to others as a member of the Traditions.

Thus, Paul came to be asked to perform a dangerous and essential task: to enter into the house of the proud foe and to report what he found. In due humility, he agreed.

To the Gabrielites, this new brother was clearly possessed of great faith and prior enlightenment. If he seemed almost uncertain of the knights' holy mission of warfare, well, the Order can respect Christian gentleness, and it has its place for healers and scholars. Paul's power was too useful. He was soon given a task in the fortress-garrison.



Image: Paul is of medium height, fleshy and careful in his movements. He rarely smiles, or even speaks. He dresses in the simple garb of a priest.

Roleplaying Hints: You have accepted all that has been assigned to you, but the weight of your double burden is great. You must stand aside when proud killers commit violence in the name of his gentle God. Then, you must betray faithful Christians into the jaws of unholy hounds. You cannot warn the Traditions of every threat, for you are not privy to every plan, you cannot endanger your own secrecy too often, and messengers are all too slow. But nor can you judge for yourself which enemies of the castle are truly wrong. Even having adopted a “heretic” faith that denies the significance of confession, you wonder what dispensation can shield you from the punishment due your lies and deceit.

Thus, you seem quiet to those about you; it is the safest way. It, too, is deception. On the rare occasions when you can safely speak freely, you are quite eloquent.

Quote: “This is a sad time, and we must learn from it. Perhaps caution is the lesson?”

The Armory

In the war for men’s souls, good blades are a necessity. From the day when Wyndgarde’s March was proclaimed, Artificers stepped forward to lend the crusaders aid. Their reasons for doing so are rarely questioned. It is not courteous to challenge the faith of others. In Rowan Castle, these Artificers form the chamber known as the Armory. They are led by Peter Jaspers, a Grand Artisan who is considered to be the leader of his Convention in the castle.

By courtesy, this group is considered to include one member of another Convention — Charles of Westmorland, a Craftmason whose daily task for many years has been to oversee the maintenance and improvement of the castle walls. In truth, he is respected almost as much for his inspirational proclamation of the justice of the Order of Reason’s crusade against the uncanny.

Peter Jaspers

Background: Born to a family of mundane craftsman-armorers in the great city of London, young Peter Jaspers was *intrigued* by the family trade. His father feared that he was a little too much of a dreamer, albeit good with his hands. However, Peter soon realized that one of the high-ranking guild-masters who sometimes visited the workshop seemed interested in some of the same sorts of things as himself. Peter pestered the man for instruction.

Thus began Jasper’s steady advance through the ranks of the High Artisans, specifically the Forgers. Although he showed the full range of talents that the Convention demands, Peter always returned to his first love: the creation of arms and armor. He offered his services to Rowan Castle and rose to high rank there. His creations are much appreciated by those about him.

Image: Sandy-haired, slender by the general standards of the hard-hammering Forgers, and with a growing squint (caused by perpetual close inspection of his creations), Jaspers is nonetheless typical of his kind. He wears guild regalia when he must, but he is mostly found in a rough tunic and heavy apron, slender hammer in hand.

Roleplaying Hints: You are dedicated to the ideals of the High Artisans, in a very personal way. You love invention and despise those who hinder it. Your personal interest



is in weapons — not that you much enjoy causing harm to others, but there is something dramatic and satisfying about the firing of a well-made cannon. The solidity and smooth perfection of such devices please you, and with all the dangers and lunatics in the world, they can definitely be used for good. You take every opportunity to show how your handiwork can help defend this castle and its people.

You get on best with other Artificers. You suspect that Gabrielites trust too much to faith, and you do not understand how the Lord best aids those who take the trouble to prepare themselves and their tools. However, you can work with them on your shared aims. You simply shrug off challenges to your beliefs. You are a maker, not a talker, which means that you get things done while those who disagree with you argue.

Quote: “My suggestion is that we mount light cannon over the gate. I have drawings prepared of the type of piece best suited.”

Charles of Westmorland

Background: Power can be gained through loss; is the gain is worth the price?

Charles the Tiler was an honest, hardworking, and reasonably content countryman dwelling in the north of England. He had a fair wife, pretty twins — a son and daughter — and some small pleasure in his work. When he put a roof on a new building or repaired an old structure, he felt a sense of calm.

Then came the confused night when a band of fae swept down on Charles' home village. When the chaos passed, the tiler's beloved children were gone — stolen away by the “fair folk.” Their mother took the loss badly; within six months, she was dead and Charles could see that she died of a broken heart.

Somewhere in those months of grief, something awoke in Charles. It might have withered or twisted, save that a party of visitors came walking out of the mists, and he looked at them and knew them as brothers. When he learned what he could do with them, it was sufficient to make him cast aside his paralysis, pass their tests with furious dedication and join their ranks.

Charles was a builder, born and bred. He could not make himself into a warrior. In any case, he can build something that achieves more of his hopes than any sword stroke. He does not call it revenge. He does not bother speaking of justice, which he leaves to lawyers and nobles. Charles of Westmorland is helping build *rightness*.

Image: An aging, weathered man who lacks the magick to hold off advancing years, Charles has the build of a laborer, and his strength remains formidable. He is never clad in anything but plain builder's garb, and he is usually preoccupied with some important practical matter.



Roleplaying Hints: You are a straightforward man who actually prefers action over talk — but you talk when you must and with passion. You do not speak overmuch of your personal tragedy, but you explain your reasons if anyone asks. You respect most of the people in the castle. If some of them treat you as socially beneath them — that's only to be expected of knights. At least these knights put their swords to good use.

Quote: “We do not fight for glory, or for the favor of Heaven, or for the love of fighting. Our battle is with those who tear children from the breasts of their mothers and souls from the love of God. We fight because if we do not, everything we value will die. Everything!”

Consors and Servants

Gabrielite warriors see themselves as knights — and anyone who knows the first thing about war, knows that knights need foot-soldiers for support. On the other hand, these Knights of God are not so proud as to refuse to man the walls of a castle, or to hold a line on foot, spear in hand. And multitudes of armed men do attract unwelcome attention. The castle's Artificers, meanwhile, need a few skilled assistants.

Thus, Rowan Castle has only a moderate number of “groggs,” along with necessary non-combatant servants. That said, many of them are full brethren of the Cabal of Pure Thought, with some Gabrielites and a few Craftsmasons. They are capable folk, and the 30 battle-ready soldiers have all been trained in weapon skills and are tested in battle. Like the Awakened garrison, they include some veterans of Wyndgarde's March and the Decade of the Hunt.



Gwen the Serving Woman

Background: Seemingly a local farm girl who has found employment in the castle kitchens, Gwen is truly Gwendolyn of the Third Moon, a Verbena witch who has been placed here by the Traditions to spy and to bear messages from Father Paul. Paul's place in the castle does not permit him much freedom of movement. Gwen was born in this part of the country and careful applications of Mind-magick by other Verbena ensure that her story stands up to inspection. Devout and courageous in her work, Gwen is not dangerously careless.

Gwen's spying consists of quiet observation and message-bearing; anything else involves too much risk. She deliberately keeps her Pattern purged of detectable Quintessence and actually uses a small spell to prevent her Daemon from drawing such stuff to itself.

Image: Gwen dresses in the tattered, plain style that her subterfuge demands, as she was largely chosen for her unremarkable appearance (and Arcane innocuousness). She lacks any great skill in acting, but she can keep her mouth closed and her eyes averted as well as any. If Gwen was exposed, or if she returned to the company of other Verbena, her manner would become much more brash and forceful. That is her true nature. It was probably as well for her that she has magickal talent, as she would have made a poor downtrodden peasant.

Roleplaying Hints: You have a task to perform here, and you are going to see it through — but oh, there is no joy to be found amongst these sanctimonious killers! Father Paul is only tolerable for what he *does*, not for what he is. You are absolutely certain that these people live only to murder what is beautiful. What annoys you most is to hear

them attempting to justify themselves. Why do they bother? It's clearly all lies.

Quote: "Forgive me, milord. I'll be going now."

Politics

*I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.*

— William Blake, Milton

Gabrielites have their troubles, but they rarely include a lack of determination or a failure to decide on goals. And it is the Gabrielites who set the tone of Rowan Castle. Differences here revolve around the question of whether to face the foe from behind strong walls while mustering more strength, or whether the time is now for a counter-stroke. Older members, who have personal and terrible recollections of the Decade of the Hunt, tend to be either more cautious or more vengeful than their younger comrades — sometimes both.

A secondary question is gaining importance: how far the castle should become involved in the concerns of the mundane world. England is presently divided between the supporters of the houses of York and Lancaster, and while York seems to be very much in the ascendant since their great victory at Towton, there is still considerable friction in the land and at court. Young King Edward is making enemies of his recent allies and of his own brother, and the deposed King Henry still has supporters. Rowan Castle, its creation rationalized by the troubles of Henry's youth, may find it difficult to avoid involvement — and the garrison includes supporters of every faction. Northbridge reminds his men that their mission transcends such concerns, but in council, Martin Young persists in pressing the argument that "when the land is led by a usurper, the godly cannot stand by." This stipulation raises a sticky question: the castle was founded by Henry's permission, with an implicit declaration of personal loyalty to him — although it is just as arguable that the oath was given to the Crown, and that it should thus now have been transferred to Edward.

The presence of no less than two enemy spies in the castle is a deadly, unknown threat, of course. But the spies perhaps have more differences than their foes. At least the resident Ksirafai is no problem to anyone — for now.

Future Fates

From *The Tourist Guide to Ruins: The Welsh Borders*, published 1996:

"...A little further up the valley, but well worth the journey for anyone staying around Stroud or even Evesham, are the ruins of the fifteenth-century Rowan Castle. Admittedly, there's barely one stone standing on another on this

hilltop site, but archaeological work in the '60s cleared enough of the foundations to reveal the true scale of this relatively short-lived fortress. Oddly enough, Rowan doesn't appear much in records of the time, and its military importance must have been limited — in fact, it seems to have been an exercise in conspicuous consumption on the part of an obscure noble who was probably building beyond his means — but if the reconstruction by the team from Coventry University is correct, this castle was on a par with its contemporary at Raglan, in Wales. On the other hand, the walls may never have been entirely completed, or it's possible that the large round tower, whose foundations are unmistakable, was a later replacement for an earlier double-courtyard structure, perhaps an attempt to create a more modest but still impressive tower-house keep during a temporary resurgence of family fortunes late in the century..."

The Palazzo Thearini: What Gold Affords



ople of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices."

— Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*

The little hire-boat — the gondola — slipped easily through the bustling canal waters, and Diego found himself gawking at everything about him — especially the great gilded palaces, whose walls plunged vertically into the water... With an effort of will, he forced his mouth closed. He was coming to comprehend how much he had to learn, but one thing that the captain had already taught him was that it was most unwise to let others see that they had impressed you.

Not that the captain was watching Diego just then — or at least, not much. Rather, he was in the prow of the boat, looking forward. But not standing upright for a best view. No, Captain Diatelli was hunched, tense, like a cat waiting beside a mousehole. Diego had certainly learned better than to try to guess the captain's thoughts, but at that moment, the captain knew what was ahead of them and was preparing for conflict.

The boat turned left to a small jetty, and a servant whose shirt bore some kind of insignia helped the gondolier tie up, and then he turned to offer the captain assistance. But the captain was already on the jetty, and Diego followed him. Again, Diego forced himself not to show too much of his feelings, despite that this place was one of the grandest, and one of the strangest. Then came a solid oak door and a broad flight of marble steps — at the head of which stood a woman clad in silks that would surely pay for a voyage the length of the Mediterranean.

"Diatelli!" the woman said delightedly, "How went your voyage? I see that you have returned with at least one prize." Her eyes barely skimmed over Diego, and yet he sensed that he was noted. "Talent is always a valuable investment..."

A Summary of Accounts

Venice!

While archaic wizards huddle in out-of-the-way hiding holes, or they place themselves high above the "common herd" in antiquated castles, members of the High Guild prefer more practical locations — in, say, the heart of the greatest merchant city on Earth. There, they can give shelter to restless, questing Void Seekers, who serve them by finding new markets and better routes to known lands. The High Guild pays the Seekers with justifications for their travels, to place before suspicious potentates along the way, as well as a roof beneath which to rest between journeys. And both appreciate Venice, the city of Marco Polo and the capital of the greatest mercantile power in the world.

Venice holds many Covenants. A city of this size and power cannot help but become a magnet for mages. The Order of Reason has a clear edge in the city, with their great headquarters of *Locus Praesidii* exerting influence all across the Adriatic, but some members of the Order keep more private houses here, where they can go about their particular business. Among these, the Thearini, a trading and banking family, stand proudly in their silks and furs, and their Palazzo reflects their power.

Compared to the mighty fortresses presented elsewhere in this book, this lodge might seem small and sedate. "Small" is a relative matter. "Sedate," on the other hand, is a long way from the truth. Money and trade breed conflicts of all kinds. The wily Guildsmen run a tight house, but even the best of friends could stab you in the back if the price is right.

History

The Thearini are among the least of the great in Venice. They are an established patrician family, one of the *Case Grandi* (Great Houses), their names long established in the city's "Book of Gold." They have never played a leading part in city politics or provided a serious candidate for the office of Doge (head of the city), or even many members to the powerful Council of Ten (let alone the sinister inner Council of Three). Most other *Case Grandi* discount them or consider them useful minor allies when a vote must be made certain.

This is an error, largely inspired by Thearini manipulation. From early times, the family cultivated connections with the builders and craftsmen of the city and became aware of the plans that were being worked into its architecture. They may have been patricians, but they helped Craftmason plans with money, favors, and patronage, and

in return, the most promising children of the family were granted levels of initiation.

But they remained traders, pointing out to their allies that this brought in the funds that paid for the sacred building work. One Giovanni Thearini was among the Venetian delegates at the White Tower in 1325, and hence became one of the founders of the High Guild. The combination of this new alliance with established Venetian trading-power was highly lucrative, and the Thearini were soon able to order the construction of a new, grander palace in the heart of the city — built according to precise Craftmason and Artificer calculations.

However, since then, the Thearini have moved away from that old alliance; they find the Craftmasons too crass, and too slow. The future, they believe, lies in the expansion of the web of trade and finance that the High Guild is casting across the world. A building is a starting point and a comfort, not an end in itself! They would rather deal with the Void Seekers — who may be dreamers, but who at least look *outward*. Thus, there is a permanent Void Seeker presence in the Palazzo Thearini today, whereas the Craftmasons only come here as visitors.

Mariana Thearini, present matriarch of the house, is becoming worried about its past. The Craftmasons are very clever, in their way, but she does wonder if they were completely open about the significance of the geometry they worked into the Palazzo's plan a hundred years ago. It is not pleasant, when one lives in a house built on water, to think that another may have power over its foundations. Thus, Mariana has commissioned the clever Gabriel Lanier (a Celestial Master, but wise enough to be trustworthy) to investigate the matter — carefully. In the meantime, she is also commissioning countless small embellishments and changes, all from Sleeper craftsmen, in the hope that the cumulative effect is to diminish the power of any "sacred geometry" worked into the original plan.

The Thearini are skilled traders who rarely pass up an opportunity for profit. However, they also understand that a good reputation leads to greater profits in the long run. They are respected by the other merchant houses of the city as fair dealers. One great quirk is that they are also occasional vampire hunters.

They have encountered bloodsuckers from time to time in the past, and there are hints of a bitter ancient grudge, but today, vampire-slaying has simply become a venerable tradition for the house — and a fine (if dangerous) sport for the youngsters. If asked, they say that "vampires accumulate greater debts than they are ever willing to pay." The subtle traders disdain the Kindred as tyrannical killers. In the Thearini view, most foes should be left to live once one has overpowered them. True victory is a foe who must live with defeat and inferiority (and perhaps poverty). Vampires, however, are destroyers, who should themselves be destroyed.

The house does not only fight such enemies themselves, it also aids anyone who is fighting vampiric opposition.

Surroundings

*I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
A palace and a prison on each hand:
I saw from out the wave her structures rise
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand...*

— Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

The drawback with Venice is, of course, that it's built on water — more precisely, on islands in a lagoon. As a result, every square inch of solid land is valuable, and even the masters of secret arts must cram their palaces hard against those of mortal neighbors. But although the Palazzo is sighted in the midst of a 100,000 Sleepers and was built by mortal toil, its setting is as ornate and fantastical as most mages could desire.

The building itself is impressive by Venetian standards. Craftmason builders had little love for the ornate "Venetian Gothic" style of most of its neighbors, preferring plain, semicircular arches (and proportions based on secret mathematical rules). Mariana's obsessive refurbishments have included additions to the external decorations, however. Like the adjacent buildings, it is now embellished with relief panels and marble insets. Because it is a reasonably prosperous neighborhood, albeit tucked away down a lesser canal, every building along that canal — palazzos, churches, lesser houses — has at least some marble pillars and decoration. Many, including this Palazzo, have a little gold leaf where it looks best. One of Mariana's additions is a row of four classical-style statues in niches along the upper front, which only the initiated are likely to recognize as Daedalean heroes.

The Palazzo can only generally be approached by way of the canal at its front — either by boat, or along a narrow walkway. There are a whole row of landing stages, watched by efficient servants. Although most of the house's trade passes through warehouses nearer to the open sea, a few small cargoes of exceptional value are brought to the Palazzo by small craft. Some younger members of the household enjoy using alternative approaches, mostly across neighboring rooftops. Older members know most of these tricks, and an attacker has to be very clever to find an unguarded approach route. Each adjacent building is also secretly owned by the Thearini, or belongs to a Thearini client, or (in the case of a church) owes much to Thearini patronage. The house is far better shielded here than it might appear at first.

The Palazzo Building

Because of the high value of land in the city, Venetian palazzos do not usually include the courtyards popular everywhere else in Italy. In the simplest view, the Palazzo

Thearini is a plain rectangular box, with a shallow-pitched roof, and a frontage embellished with pillars topped with semicircular arches. Low towers — little more than reinforced pairs of pillars — mark the front corners. It has an impressive number of windows. Venice is not much troubled with stone-throwing street riots, while light is at a premium in these cramped quarters, and houses must take what illumination they can get.

Note that the Palazzo has no direct access to Crays or other places of power; the whole neighborhood is completely lacking in mystickal significance. The High Guild prefers small and subtle magicks that do not need much enhancement. If members want Quintessence, they can always trade for it.

Entrance and Work

The ground floor of the Palazzo is fronted with an arcade and consists of open storage space for both those small, valuable cargoes and for the house's day-to-day supplies. Kitchens are also tucked away here. A large doorway at the front center leads straight onto a marble staircase up to the main living and working quarters. These are a mixture of dining and sitting rooms and offices. The Thearini do not distinguish between "work" and "life." The ceilings are high and the fittings sumptuous. Visitors are received here, and the Thearini wish to ensure that they are impressed.

The two largest rooms are the "counting chamber" and the dining hall. The former is lined with desks, at which a number of clerks work and calculate likely profits and amounts due and owed. These are un-Awakened servants, although Carlo Thearini keeps a close eye on their efforts. Mundane prospective business partners are brought here to impress on them the diligence and substance of the house's dealings. The Thearini may also ensure that visiting mages of other houses are treated similarly to remind them of the hard work that underlies the Palazzo's splendor. The dining hall is far more ornate, its walls being hung with tapestries, its floor covered with Eastern rugs. The Thearini are not gluttons, but they enjoy the intricacies of conversation over food and drink — and they have never forgotten the mundane Mind-magick that can be achieved by overwhelming a visitor's senses, giving him or her a little more wine...

Sleeping, Relaxation and Secrets

The floor above holds the family and guest sleeping quarters and some private offices. This floor is cozy, with low ceilings, but luxurious nonetheless. It is also the location of several secret panels and doors. The Thearini are not obsessive about such tricks, but this floor is something of a maze, and the additional features have many uses. Needless to say, all guest bedrooms can be spied on.

The space above is servant quarters and is plainly appointed, although pleasant by the common standards of

the age. To serve the Thearini well is to be treated well. Also on this level, but with a separate access, sits a small astronomical observatory (for Lanier's use), and a small armory. A secret panel in the wall, known to family members and a few trusted servants, leads into a *second* armory, filled with slender blades and Artificer creations.

Cabals

This lodge is divided into three loose factions, each of which acts as a cabal. In addition, it has alliances with other High Guild Chancies and friendly contact with Void Seeker mobile lodges.

An impressive number of Thearini Awaken these days, and the Palazzo is run by family members. Of course, not all of the family passes the tricky High Guild admission tests. However, most of them are sooner or later assigned to routine trading vessels or to running houses in outlying cities or towns, if only to save them from becoming cannon-fodder or hostages in the struggles of the Awakened.

Similarly, any member of the family with an un-Awakened spouse and children usually keeps them safe in an obscure house away from the Palazzo. Other Thearini tend to consider the exploitation of a cousin's loved ones in a family feud crass, excessive and likely to provoke dangerous revenge, but it is considered wise to leave the defenseless away from the battlefield. Offspring are introduced only to the family business when they are old enough to help (and to know when to seek cover), and generally have the secret mysteries of the house's higher activities revealed to them by slow stages over many years.

Conversely, the chantry is not averse to recruiting new talent from without the family. Despite a growing clannishness that may become dangerous in a few generations, it still recognizes that power and cleverness are the keys to success.

The Keepers of the Palazzo

This cabal represents the personal faction of the heads of the house. Its power is greater than its numbers might imply because it commands most of the house's funds, good name, and servants' loyalty. Roberto Thearini, the current patriarch and Magistrate, is still a formidable figure despite his gray hair and growing paunch, but he has come to delegate much of the day-to-day exercise of power to his third wife, Mariana. Having been a respected figure in the Sun Guild for most of his life, he now seems to be negotiating a place within the Patrons' Guild. Some of Roberto's family believe that he may be seeking to employ alchemists to extend his life, and they may be correct, or he may feel that since accumulated substantial wealth, he feels duty-bound to find uses for it. He does become forceful, however, if the house ethics of fair dealing and vampire-slaying are ever questioned.

At his right hand sits Gabriel Lanier, a French-born astronomer (and astromancer of the House of Prometheus), who the Thearini employ to plot better maps of trade routes (based on observations of the sky) and to improve navigational arts. Gabriel provides an invaluable alternative conception of the *Ars Praeclarus*. Carlo Thearini, a junior cousin, is also considered to be of this faction, despite his youth. A pale, plump, unprepossessing fellow, Carlo seems obsessed with numbers and accounts and lacks the spark of revolt that drives others to challenge the status quo. He entered the High Guild more on intellectual talent than flair, and what to others is a financial risk is a plain calculation to him. (He is a member of the Royal Griffin Guild by default.)

Mariana Thearini

Background: Born a peasant-girl in a dull village northwest of Venice, young Mariana seemed doomed to an unremarkable life, despite the depth that struck most of those who met her surliness. All changed, however, the day that a fine merchant-lord rode through her village and stopped to water his horse. He glanced at the girl, then looked again and made her look into his eyes. When he rode out, she rode a spare horse, and her parents stared in befuddled confusion at a purse of silver coins, while their neighbors gossiped in jealous fury.

In fact, Roberto Thearini never took Mariana to his bed for several years, until his second wife was dead (and she died of honest natural causes) and until a decent period of mourning past. He married Mariana soon after. Not that the marriage was hard to justify by then, for she had decent amounts of money on her own account (somewhat to the confusion of much of Venice, but, well, the Thearini are a strange family). She had been put to work advising traders in silks and spices

what the mid-ranking women of Venice would pay most for, and when she was not moving through that level of society with her ears open, she was studying the *Ars Cupiditae*.

Image: Despite the best dresses and cosmetics that her fortune can afford, Mariana has never been accounted more than tolerably handsome — she can never keep a look of cool calculation out of her eyes for long — but she *impresses* everyone she meets. She dresses well, of course, and her hair remains dark.

Roleplaying Hints: You of all people should know that the path to power involves determination, forethought, and sometimes ruthlessness. But you also understand some truths that too many others forget — that your success depends on allies, that debts should be honored, and that loyalty is key to success. Deal politely with strangers, respectfully with the powerful, and briskly with fools, and make sure that you have the best advice when a possible danger lies outside your field of expertise. And never forget that others may have plans as long in the shaping as your own.

Quote: *You may wish to reconsider what you have just said. It is far more profitable to deal fairly with us than it is to threaten...*

The Blades of Thearini

The Blades of Thearini are younger and less closely related members of the house and are joined in a loose alliance to press their impatient claims against their staid elders. Although, these rebellious youths being Awakened, their activities take a subtle and rarefied form, when they venture out to playhouse or carnival in their silken finery, they could be mistaken for an upper-class gang. Ah, youth...

The cabal is dominated by Carlotta Thearini, Roberto's daughter by his first wife. Carlotta has evidently inherited all of the family talent and ambition and an additional measure of ruthlessness. The rest of the Blades hold her in awe; being intelligent for the most part, they combine this awe with a healthy nervousness. Roberto and Mariana spend entire evenings pondering how to render Carlotta's energy into a form that is more safe to have around the Palazzo, without destroying her potential usefulness.

The oldest and apparently most staid of the Blades is Abraham Orafo, known within the house as "Abraham de L'Oro." As his name implies, his family has long been established in the gold-working and jewelry trades, but in recent years, they have started to use their good name, considerable wealth, and well-built strong-rooms to facilitate their entry into the trade of money-lending — the new field of *banking*. Abraham was identified and recruited by the High Guild to reinforce its connections; having been well-read and educated by his people well before that, Abraham's use of the *Ars Cupiditae* has a strange, cabalistic tone. The rest of the Blades made a point of befriending him as an alternate source of funds to their family elders. It is not entirely clear why he associates with them, but he no doubt



has his reasons. Although he is less brash and genuinely less violent than they are, he has depths.

The rest of the Blades are cousins and outside recruits. Cousin Antonio Thearini displayed unusual, interesting talents and was sponsored to study at the great university in Florence, where he worked his way into the Hippocratic Circle. Now home, Antonio mixes interest in family affairs with private study of the healing arts. He is to be summonsed if the family ever needs medical aid, especially if the circumstances are peculiar.

Carlotta Thearini

Background: It is untrue that the children of the rich are invariably spoiled and incompetent. Certainly, Roberto Thearini made sure that his own offspring were taught to make themselves useful from the first. And when his daughter Carlotta showed exceptional potential, he ensured that she was given every opportunity to develop it, but with no special favors.

It is unclear whether she is at all embittered that she received less help than she might have hoped, or whether she simply learned the lesson that her father wished to teach. Carlotta is *almost* as subtle as Roberto would wish, but she is perhaps a little too fond of her Awakened powers and may use them at times when it is not entirely wise. She has accumulated substantial wealth on her own account, which she uses from behind the scenes in trade ventures. Each is potentially profitable, but no one deal is large enough to break her if it should somehow go wrong.

Image: Carlotta is still a young woman. Dressmakers and cosmetics-vendors are paid generously to ensure that she makes the most of her appearance. She cultivates an exceptionally courteous and generally outgoing manner, but it is no more than an act.



Roleplaying Hints: You are good at what you do and enjoy it. However, you do not gloat — cool politeness reduces the complaints that can be made against you, and demonstrates to others that you are not even exerting yourself as you defeat them. You are on watch for opportunities more often than not, but you are not an entirely soulless person; you do enjoy music and wit.

Quote: *Shall we dance? So much more pleasant than discussing business just here, I think...*

The Knights of the Wave

The Void Seeker presence within the Palazzo Thearini consists of a loose clique of trader-seamen, ambassadors and map-makers who accept the shelter of the house in exchange for a conditional sort of loyalty. Their acknowledged leader, when he is in residence, is Captain Ludovico Diatelli, a respected navigator. They also include Jessemini Talos, a highly capable weather-witch who enjoys keeping her birth and background enigmatic, Alexander Ekotherios, a Greek map-maker, and Martin Thearini, who was inducted into his family's usual guild, but whose restlessness led him not only into the Albatross Guild, but into showing more sympathy with the Seekers than with profitable trade.

Captain Diatelli

Background: Many people, even within his Convention, are uncertain whether Ludovico Diatelli is one of the cleverest and subtlest of the Void Seekers, or something of a fraud. In his youth, a couple of decades ago, he took part in some great expeditions. Rumor has it that he helped prepare maps that are to be released, in partial form, to Sleepers before the end of the century, when the Daedaleans are ready to bring two worlds together. However, as Diatelli grew older, he grew more fond of the comforts of home. Today, he rarely leaves the Mediterranean — the sea that the Seekers know better than any other.

He says that he has made it his work to know this sea perfectly: to plot every detail of its islands, the precise position of its shoals and reefs, the dangers and safe havens of its coasts. Some believe Diatelli, while others mutter that he has lost that which makes a true Seeker. However, he remains a dashing, flamboyant captain and has established himself as a near-permanent resident in the Palazzo, enabling him to arrange finance for numerous expeditions and schemes. Thus, his exact motivations matter little.

Diatelli has recently taken an apprentice, Diego of Valencia. The boy, formerly a dockside street urchin, shows substantial mystickal potential and worships the captain.

Image: Diatelli works to ensure that his increasing years give him an additional air of wisdom and mature charm, without slowing him down. Athletic and alert, he has just a touch of gray at the temples. (*So distinguished!*)



He is also polite when he needs to be, although he may exhibit a sea-captain's belief that his commands will be obeyed immediately. He dresses well, although his clothes usually show a few signs of wear — perhaps because he wishes to be thought still active.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a bold and sophisticated Void Seeker; naturally, you feel that you merit a little respect, and you know how to get it. Should anyone seem to impugn your adventurousness, you explain that your current aim in life is to deepen and extend knowledge of the great Mediterranean, and to arrange and support more venturesome expeditions by other Seekers.

Quote: *There's trade aplenty along the Moorish coasts, of course. Enough to pay for an expedition against any nest of corsairs!*

Consors and Servants

The Palazzo requires deft and discreet service and obtains it by paying well. It also reckons to know as least as much about spies and intrigue as any of its enemies, and the Arts of the High Guild are very useful in determining loyalties. Any prospective hireling is subjected to subtle but intense examination, and even the most trusted longtime servant is periodically reexamined.

Prospective spies from mundane trade rivals are turned away, as the Thearini believe that a reputation for subtlety, luck and judgment is worth at least as much as a brute threat. On the other hand, some would-be intruders are judged dangerous enough to need special attention — which *may* consist of seeing that they turn up in a distant canal with a dagger in the back. Awakened spies might well fall into this category, although an attempt at spying by the Traditions or other Daedaleans is always considered impor-

tant enough to merit careful thought as to the appropriate response. (Note, incidentally, that while it may be easy enough to protect against mind-magic, it is hard to conceal the protection, let alone the fact of an Awakened Daemon.) That said, some such “visitors” have been slain.

No traitor has ever found a way into the service of the Palazzo — or at least, not for long. Spies sent by vampires *always* die.

The house's loyal servants number some 20 or more cooks, porters, maids, clerks and doormen. Most reside in the Palazzo, and countless others work in ships and warehouses. Because the *Ars Cupiditae* is a subtle business, only the most trusted know that their employers have some kind of supernatural interests, although most think of the Thearini as spending a lot of time discussing philosophy like schoolmen. The astronomer-scholar Lanier is naturally regarded with some superstitious awe by the ignorant, but the Thearini make a point not to hire dolts who scream “Witchcraft!” at the first sight of an astronomical instrument. Many of the porters are former fighting sailors or mercenaries, hired for their experience, and the Palazzo could defend itself with respectable mundane force if necessary.

One of the most impressive of the consors is Ibn Tarlo, a North African mercenary who leads the house's mercenary guards, planning the Palazzo's mundane defenses when in the city and occasionally leading hand-picked groups of fighters on ships that are traveling in pirate-ridden territory. Ibn Tarlo is an imposing, charismatic captain, and several of the Thearini agree that he may be on the verge of Awakening — in which case, he will surely make a fine addition to the Resplendent Axe Guild.

Because the Thearini are judged to be loyal and capable, while remaining only a minor element in most greater Daedalean plans, the Ksirafai have not gone to the trouble of placing spies within the house. (It would be interesting to know how effectively their skills could defeat the Thearini's protections...) On the other hand, they take their work of supervising *all* of the Order of Reason's work very seriously. Thus, several mundane tradesmen who sell food and fuel to the Palazzo, and a number of pleasant individuals with whom Thearini mages and their servants enjoy carousing, are in fact informers.

Politics

The Palazzo Thearini is a lodge that still enjoys a prolonged and profitable Spring. When Summer comes, it is to be a scalding, tropical season of high-stakes power-games, and Autumn will be marked by intricate and deadly intrigues. But for now, the political maneuverings of the Palazzo are kept in check by shrewd elders and are restrained by the fat profits available to everyone.

Intrigues within this lodge naturally have two possible objectives: ascendancy within the house and power in the world at large. Both are pursued with ingenuity and wit. Senior house members tolerate only a certain amount of challenge from their younger associates. They do not deign to define those limits precisely. In fact, according to an elder's whim, an unsuccessful challenger might be applauded and offered a compensatory goblet of wine — or slain out of hand. The latter instance is unlikely, but it *could* happen. The chance that a proffered goblet could hold poison is all part of the amusement. The elder Thearini never set *rules* for intrigue. Part of what makes a successful merchant is judging how much one can get away with today, and the wise apprentice must learn that judgment.

That said, the Palazzo sees a great deal more barbed conversation than bloodshed. Its political games are mostly played in the long term. Or, to look at it another way — these Daedaleans turn their political energy and deviousness outward, against rival traders (Sleeper and High Guild both) and Tradition opponents.

The major issues are funding for new trade ventures — with the Knights of the Wave continually seeking money, the Blades looking for interesting opportunities, and the Keepers acting as a restraining force. And similar debates about the priorities are given to existing business (which consists of a broad mixture; spices and silk from the East, English wool, silver and gold from mines everywhere, corn and olives in season, and a sound traditional line in building stone from inland quarries). Other small dramas revolve around the idea of lending money or other support to rising mundane factions in Venice or elsewhere in Italy, while the politics of the Order of Reason may also be reflected within the Palazzo. Some of the house (especially Gabriel Lanier and Jessemini Talos) have special interests in sending expeditions beyond Christendom, to acquire strange knowledge. The risks and costs involved make such projects debatable. Incidentally, it is possible that outside agents could be hired for many of these purposes.

Future Fates

From *The Approximate Guide to Venice*, 1998 edition:

...Further down this narrow side-canal is one of Venice's lesser-known palazzos. The early fifteenth century Palazzo Thearini is still in private hands, and so is not regularly open to the public. To be honest, it's not a very impressive from the outside, by Venetian standards, being rather understated and under-decorated, although some scholars apparently think that its proportions anticipate the rules of formal classicism — a style that Venice never took to its heart, even when it came into its full glory, a century after this building went up.

Still, some people evidently love it. This whole area of the city was up for major rebuilding in the early part of this

century; the neighborhood legend is that the Palazzo Thearini was saved by the influence of a local crime boss, who had a soft spot for the place, having been brought up in its shadow, or something.

Proving, perhaps, that in Venice, even the gangsters are art lovers.

Brandenberg Krakenhouse: The Reason of the Order



night Commander Hoffbraun, Captain of the Palatine Guard, pressed the edge of his riding cloak closer to his nose and mouth. He cast a handful of coins, dispersing the flock of lepers who crowded around him, their tattered black rags flapping.

It had taken him most of the morning to pick his way through the rambling tent city that stretched unbroken across the miles between the Roman road and the Old Forest. Still he could not pick out the shape of the Krakenhouse amidst the swirling mass of the walking dead — the crippled, the mad, the plague-stricken.

Hoffbraun closed his eyes and let himself imagine that he rode through the midst of some vast military encampment. But he could not maintain the comforting illusion. Even during the Crusades, when the armies of all of Christendom came together under one banner, never had there been such a multitude assembled all in one place.

If only the good Lord would see fit to suddenly and miraculously transform the expectant throng — to grant them their fondest hope, to render them whole of mind and body — surely all the armies of the world would tremble before them.

But Hoffbraun had come to beg a more modest miracle — should the good Lord and the master of this house prove willing — to bring Herr Doktor to the court with all due haste. For the yellow death was loosed in the Elector's own house and its visit boded ill for the future of the empire itself.

Short Summation

The Brandenberg Krakenhouse is the Order of Reason at its finest. One would be hard-pressed to find a more noble undertaking in all of Europe. It is a hospital, a sanctuary, a university, a refugee camp and a pilgrimage site. The Krakenhouse is a bastion of reason and humanity, balanced delicately between the twin ravages of the warring states of the Holy Roman Empire and the superstitious darkness of Germany's deepest primeval woodlands.

This age is turbulent, a time when well-loved truths are overturned daily. The light of learning rises each morning, not in the east, but in the south, from the waters of the Mediterranean. Each evening, the heavenly beacon is ex-

tinguished, plunging into the northern wilds. The Krakenhouse is the last outpost of the dying light.

Although a young covenant, the Krakenhouse has already tested its mettle against the encroachments of war, pestilence, famine and inquisition — the four apocalyptic horsemen who threaten to usher in the chantry's final end.

History

The Krakenhouse was founded in the year of Our Lord, 1376. The building itself, a motte and bailey keep, is older still, dating back to the 12th century. In the minds of the locals, the Aeld Baele had always enjoyed a somewhat sinister reputation. The villagers take great pride in the indiscretions, real or supposed, of their forebears.

It was whispered that the Baele was a stronghold of the Knights Templar in the days before the order was condemned to the pyre. The unnatural rites and unholy experimentation attributed to that foul cabal have wormed their way into the legends surrounding the Aeld Baele.

It is not known how long the Templars may have held this distant outpost against the righteous persecutions of the Pope and King of France. County records indicate that the adjacent village was burned to the ground no less than three times during this turbulent period, a strong sign that the struggle may have been a protracted one.

In the wake of this conflict, the manor and lands lay untended for a generation before they passed into the hands of the family Vanderneufen. The archives of the Count Palatine do not record the nature of the service Vanderneufen rendered the Elector to prompt the latter to grant this (somewhat dubious) honor.

The family Vanderneufen, however, apparently failed to live up to even this ambiguous trust. It was not long before the name of Vanderneufen was infamous throughout the northern reaches of the empire. For three generations, travelers spoke in hushed tones about the *Rottebriiter* — the Robberbaron of Vanderneufen. In all that time, it is said that no man ever plumbed the depths of either the *Rottebriiter's* avarice or his dungeons.

Vanderneufen's infamy came to an abrupt end one day in 1375 when his men intercepted a lone doktor on the road to the Elector's court. When dragged before the *Rottebriiter*, the stranger did not humble himself before his captor. In a rage, the *Rottebriiter* struck him a furious blow, laying the man out on the cobblestones.

A priest was hurriedly called for, as it was apparent to more than a few onlookers that the man's neck was broken. Before the runner had left the hall, however, the fallen man lurched to his feet and, with a sharp twist, set his head back on straight.

The force of the blow, denied the natural outlet of its fury, raced back across the space separating the two men. It

could be seen to course up the length of the arm that had laid the doktor low. The Robberbaron convulsed once and pitched forward to the floor, dead as a stone.

It is a common topic of debate among the newer students at the Krakenhouse as to the ultimate destination of this blow, which has come to be known as "the Recoup." One camp holds firmly that the Recoup struck the *Rottebriiter* squarely on the heart — the seat of a man's pride and thus, the origin of the stroke. Another party maintains, just as staunchly, that the force of the blow was reflected on the Baron's gall, which aroused in his anger, caused a lethal imbalance of the humors. There is a third, and more disturbing, contention.

Perhaps the Recoup did not find peace in the taking of the Robberbaron's life. Maybe, unsated, the blow continued its quest for final justice, for its own beginnings. It is so unreasonable to think that the Recoup might have found its way back to the hands of the *Rottebriiter's* father — now folded in repose, but so oft raised against the boy in anger? Is it impossible that the blow may have struck truer still, passing into shade of his father, the first Lord Vanderneufen, who introduced the boy to certain dark unsettling habits in the catacombs beneath the old manse? Perhaps the stroke was even more far-reaching and fell on the Old Elector who had both slighted and destroyed his good servant by the unorthodox means of an ambiguous gift.

Many pilgrims to the Krakenhouse find this tale to be a great comfort. Undoubtedly, the dark hours pass more quickly when one can believe that either vengeance or justice is at large in the world.

With the death of the *Rottebriiter*, his following of brutes, rogues and highwaymen scattered to the surrounding wilds. Three gentlemen alone remained. It is said that even in the heart of the most unrepentant villain there is something that sings in the presence of the just. These three men begged the good doktor of his blessing and for permission to travel with him to the court of the Elector to stand witness to all that had transpired. He consented and the three became not only his boon companions, but also his disciples.

At the court of the Elector, the four received a most anxious welcome as there was a virulent pox on that noble house. Although the Elector of Brandenburg was one of the five most powerful men in the Holy Roman Empire — vested even with the power to elect and depose emperors — he found himself totally at the mercy of this adversary.

Neither lancements, nor fire, nor purgatives, nor charms, nor fevered prayer availed against the ravages of the pox. It was whispered at court that the Elector had incurred the displeasure of the gypsies who had retaliated against his harsh edicts with a potent curse. Few physicians of the Realm dared to even answer the Elector's urgent summons for fear of running afoul of the curse themselves.

CHAPTER II: THE ORDER OF REASON



Undeterred by these obstacles, Herr Doktor set to work and had affected a cure within a fortnight. Despite the nearly unbearable foulness of the concoction, the Elector was so pleased at its results that he lavished the good doktor with silver and precious gifts. He would have immediately made the wandering medico the official physician to the court were it not for the doktor's firm protestations of unworthiness.

The Elector, however, was not a man to be easily put off. He kept the good doktor at court a full year and summoned him every day to demand if he were yet ready to assume his duties. Each day the doktor replied the same: He was flattered by this generous offer, but unworthy of such an honor. The Elector dismissed him each time, saying that the doktor was to be granted another day of the court's hospitality in which to better himself. In this way, Herr Doktor became something of a prisoner within the Elector's house.

It was whispered among the courtiers that the good doktor, in daring to thwart the doom leveled by the gypsies, had taken some measure of the terrible curse on himself. He and the gypsies now shared a common predicament — unable to depart the Realm as they were unable to enter it.

After a time, the Elector began to press the doktor to report what progress he had made toward his goal. Although this challenge was initially a mocking one, the Elector was soon drawn into the eclectic recounting of the studies, rituals, experimentation, disciplines and conjectures that made up the daily routine of the doktor and his three apprentices. A great admiration and friendship eventually grew between the two men.

One year to the day after Herr Doktor's first audience, he was summoned as usual before the Elector. The lord posed his ritual question, inquiring whether the doktor was ready to assume his duties. On this occasion, however, the good doktor did not give his traditional reply. Instead, he leaned in close and whispered something into the Elector's ear.

The Elector was so startled that he hardly heard the doktor's words. At the sound of that voice, however, an awareness crashed over the Elector. A terrible door within him burst open. The court, the seat of his power, the very center of his world, fell suddenly silent and seemed to recede.

With great deliberation, he raised the proud doktor from where he had fallen to one knee. The doktor, who did not give knee to the Robberbarron, here saw and acknowledged a greater force at work.

The Elector embraced his friend and told him that he was free to go. To everyone's great astonishment, however, the doktor replied that although the court certainly no longer had any need for his services, he was unworthy to accept the generous offer of his liberty.

Whether out of affection for his friend or some lingering effects of the gypsy curse, the doktor found himself unable to ever bring himself to leave Brandenburg. Herr Doktor stayed on at court for another fortnight, during which time, the two



men settled on an ambitious project. With the Elector's aid and sponsorship, they would found a house of healing and learning, where students, pilgrims and refugees could come from across the empire to find wisdom and solace.

To house this far-reaching project, the Elector granted his friend the manor of Aeld Baele, which might be said to have fallen to the good doktor by right of conquest. The Elector made the grant doubly binding by bestowing papers of nobility on the new Count Hans von Rottenfeld and entrusting the lands to him under oath of fealty. No one thought to challenge the propriety of this ambiguous gift.

In the years since the founding of the Krakenhouse in 1376, the Elector has oft had opportunity to be thankful for Herr Doktor's devotion. Although the Count von Rottenfeld himself perished under mysterious circumstances four years later — amidst rumors of the lingering gypsy curse claiming him — the Krakenhouse, his crowning achievement, continues to thrive.

Surroundings

The Krakenhouse is situated a two day's ride from the court of the Elector of Brandenburg. The landscape itself is wild and overgrown, carved at some point in the not-too-distant past from the looming canopy of the Old Forest. The

stalwart farmers of the region fight a constant battle to keep their lands from being reconquered by the encroaching wilds.

The most direct route from the Elector's court to the Krakenhouse is the old Roman road that remains miraculously serviceable after several hundred years of disuse. The road continues south, running straight as a pike stave, and alternately vanishing and reemerging from the forest canopy. Travelers should heed the warnings of the locals and consider it time well spent to ride the two days back to the Elector's court and then take the reliable Brandenburg Road south into the heart of the empire.

A capricious whim of geography excludes the Aeld Baele from the river trade that makes up the bulk of the traffic between the cities and townships of the region. While in ages past, the motte was fed by a sizable stream, this waterway has long since dried up. The nearby market town of Wyrmouth is the nearest river port. A journey of no more than eight miles, the entire trip to and from the market can be accomplished — even at the leisurely pace of an ox-drawn cart — in a single day.

Approaching the Krakenhouse along the Roman road, the first impression that greets visitors is the sprawling tent city that fills her entire field of vision. Canvas completely covers the open ground between the razor-straight roadway and the Old Forest. If the walls of the proud city of Salzburg

were miraculously transported across the leagues, they would fail to encompass the vast encampment.

The tent city is a refuge for all those who are sick in body, mind or spirit. Within the maze of tent flaps, the visitor finds the crippled, the mad, the blind, the plague-stricken, the poor and the dispossessed.

Residents of the Krakenhouse and the surrounding villages refer to the tent city as “le Jardin” — the Garden. Such French names are common at the Krakenhouse, since the French language has established itself as the international language of the medical and apothecary arts. This honor is due in no small part to the reputation enjoyed by the University of Paris of being Europe’s premiere school of medicine.

The students of the Krakenhouse do not openly contest this honor. Humility is, in fact, regarded as a chief virtue at the Krakenhouse. It is held in the same esteem that the gentlemen of Paris accord to Honor, or that the paladins of an earlier age rendered to Chivalry. Thus, when a student at the Krakenhouse is on some urgent errand of mercy, he might dismissively state that he thought he might take a stroll in the Garden.

The care and management of le Jardin is the solemn duty of a brotherhood of monks known as the Order of Ravens. The Order derives its name from a famous exploit of their patron, St. Francis. Despairing of his prosperous and genteel congregation, Francis went to the outskirts of town and preached to the crows and ravens. His mission remains an example for his followers who are ever found tending to the outcasts of society — the dying, the lepers, the pariahs.

Despite their serious and often morbid preoccupation, brothers of the Order tend to be outgoing, good-natured and high-spirited. The locals often jokingly refer to the Order as the “Murder of Crows,” which is a mocking sobriquet thought to be instigated by a member of the Order itself.

The Grounds

From the center of le Jardin rises the mound of the Aeld Baele. The hill is ringed by a wide dry moat that must have posed a formidable obstacle in its prime. Now, however, the moat presents a very different face. Even at a distance, visitors do not fail to notice the many brightly painted rooftops jutting from the vast trench.

Upon closer inspection, the newcomer discovers that the moat is almost entirely roofed over. A thriving marketplace has sprung up to cater to the throngs of pilgrims and penitents seeking entrance to the Krakenhouse.

In the early morning hours, crowds stretch all the way around the walls of the Aeld Baele. The line winds down and through the Market before emerging again on the inner bank in the shadow of the walls.

On a fair day, the hidden Market is an enchanted place of colorful banners, wondrous aromas and musical voices that entreat and entice. On a hot day, the unrelenting sun

works a far different magic on the close confines and the crowds, rendering the marketplace nearly unbearable. On a foul day, the entire bizarre runs ankle deep in rain and mud.

At the far side of the moat, the path ascends again to a narrow shelf of earth, pressed against the Aeld Baele’s 20-foot walls. Here the line encircles the fort again before culminating at the main gate. The once-daunting fortifications are badly in need of repair. Walls are nearly breached and a determined man might pick his way over the rubble to get into the courtyard.

In the shadow of the main gate, the rusting drawbridge mechanism is still visible. The Baele’s primary means of egress and ingress is the winding Pilgrim’s Path. This route can be safely navigated only on foot. The way is too steep, too narrow and too crumbling to risk a good mount. A staunch mule, however, might undertake the journey.

When there is a need for hasty arrivals or departures, the only recourse is to enlist the aid of the Coachmen. This self-styled “Ancient and Fraternal Order of Coachmen, Teamsters, Wainwrights, Footmen, Grooms and Porters” prides itself on the daring and ingenuity of its members. They maintain the Krakenhouse stables and carriageyard, and neither mount nor beast of burden may enter or depart the keep without their leave.

Coachmen maintain makeshift “fords” across the moat. Navigating one of these fords is accomplished by racing a carriage at breakneck speed up and down a labyrinthine path of rooftops, strut bridges and exposed planking. As some of the roofs are quite steep and some of the planks spanning the chasm are quite frail, it is widely held that speed is the essence of the undertaking.

Drivers maintain that the ride is particularly picturesque by moonlight. It is difficult to dispute their claim. Most passengers find that the best way to brave the ordeal is with eyes firmly closed. It is unquestionable, however, that a carriage and its four mad chargers careening over the rooftops in the dead of night provides a unique spectacle for any late-night revelers that might still be abroad.

At times, students of the Krakenhouse, in a display of bravery or desperation, attempt to duplicate the Harrowing Ride alone and on horseback, with limited success.

The Moot Court

Those who manage to endure the Pilgrim’s Path or the Harrowing Ride find themselves passing through the main gate of the Baele. The gate itself, like the drawbridge before it, is no longer there, having been appropriated for new uses. A low dark tunnel leads through the walls and opens onto the courtyard beyond.

During the day, the Court swarms with pilgrims and penitents seeking relief from their afflictions. The Moot Court is so named because, in the Germanic tongues, a “moot” is a gathering to decide the fates of those called

CASTLES AND COVENANTS

before the assembly. Visitors to the Krakenhouse travel long miles through uncertain territory to place their lives in the hands of this community of physicians.

With the overwhelming number of guests seeking miracles, it is not surprising that the courtyard is also the stalking ground for an alarming number of quacks, leeches, apothecaries, astrologers, chiurgeons, hedgewitches, relic peddlers, occultists, magnetists, diviners, mesmerists, exorcists, phrenologists, mediums, midwives and miracle workers.

New students are often alarmed that these individuals are suffered to ply their trades within the walls of the Krakenhouse — a bastion of learned medicine. They soon realize that there are very compelling pragmatic reasons behind this decision.

On any given day, the masses of those seeking relief easily exceed the number of masters and students at the Krakenhouse by a factor of 100 to 1. After long debate it was decided that these even these questionable treatments were marginally better than certain death for the patients and significantly better than the riots that might ensue from turning away so many.

In these debates, the Paracelsians (see listing) were vocal advocates for allowing the “amateurs” to remain. For their devotion, the Paracelsians were entrusted with all matters pertaining to the lodging, safety, concerns and

complaints of the Krakenhouse’s guests — a duty they consider a distraction at best, when they consider it at all.

Students and masters of the Krakenhouse can also be found circulating through the crowds, offering relief where they can, ushering others within for examination or treatment. There is no particular device that differentiates the authorized representatives of the Krakenhouse from the self-styled healers of the Court. The Galenist (see listing) lecturers at the University are easily distinguished by their black academic robes, but their peers scorn such pretensions.

Unsuspecting visitors fall prey to mountebanks, hucksters and cutpurses. Others are whisked away to participate in shadowy experiments in the secluded dungeons beneath the keep. The majority, however, go away disappointed, having failed to attract the interest of even the amateurs.

Not a single day passes, however, without at least one miraculous cure being reported, and it is this hope that keeps the Krakenhouse one of the most popular pilgrimage site.

When night falls and the visitors have retired, the Moot Court becomes a meeting place of a different kind. Masters and students gather to engage in animated oratory and debate — an activity considered the lifeblood of universities throughout Europe. It is a time of dramatic and sweeping change — not only in medicine, but also in all areas of science, religion, art and exploration (in almost



every major field of human endeavor). All of these subjects are fair game for the heated discussions that follow.

Each of the rival factions, of course, has its own distinct agenda and is not above using these gatherings as a means of increasing its own power, prestige and following. Often discussion turns to very practical matters in which the groups have a vested interest — choices, threats, possible futures that face the community as a whole.

It is not unknown for the rhetoric to occasionally devolve into fisticuffs or subtler and long-lasting feuds.

The Operating Theatre

Modeled on Vesalius' famed classroom at the University of Padua, the Operating Theatre is one of the most jealously guarded secrets of the Krakenhouse. The hall itself is goblet-shaped. The base of the goblet contains a plain rectangular table (about six feet by three feet) and just enough room for the instructor to walk around it.

Steep tiers crammed with students, encircle the base — each tier barely wide enough for a student to stand. Each observer leans against a wooden railing and peers down over the heads of those on the tiers before and below him.

The object of this curious design is that each student in the vast hall might have a clear view of the simultaneously fascinating and repelling spectacle unfolding itself on that table.

The topic of this class is anatomy — the method of instruction, the dissection of human cadavers.

The very idea of human dissection is commonly regarded as blasphemous. The Church takes an understandably stern view of the defiling of the dead. The proper study of anatomy involves consulting the masterworks of antiquity. Galen, in particular, is considered the very wellspring of anatomical knowledge. In the Operating Theatre, the student has arrayed before him secrets that have lain undisturbed for thousands of years.

Interiora Terra

Deep below the keep, an extensive system of cellars, dungeons and catacombs conceals even darker secrets. Since the days when the Templars first occupied the fortress, these sulfurous depths have witnessed profane initiations, rites and experiments.

The residents of the Krakenhouse collectively refer to these halls and galleries of nefarious repute as the Interiora Terra. The name is taken from famous advice, *Visita Interiora Terra Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem*. Visit the center of the world and by purifying, you find the secret stone.

The Interiora Terra is the haunt of a splinter group of the Vesalians who refer to themselves as the Animists. While the Vesalians are content to lay bare the secrets of the human body with their scalpels, the Animators push the operation one step further.

On the surface, their goal seems unobjectionable enough — the uncovering of the innate perfection in the human form. Their methods, however, have been described as everything from “morally questionable” to “an abomination against God and all his creatures.”

Each animator has his own driving quest. Some are grandiose: the animation of living tissue, the resurrection of the dead, the evolution beyond physical form. Others are much more modest and exacting: the increase in the capacity of the human brain, the sustaining of life in a severed limb, the development of a third eye.

To fuel these experiments, the Animators routinely cull test subjects (or raw materials) from the visitors to Moot Court. These unfortunates, existing on the far fringe of hope, are seldom missed or mourned.

The Cabals

Galenists: The Elementalists

“The truth was long since found, and has united noble spirits, do but grasp the ancient truth.”

An enduring quest of this age of discovery is the *rediscovery* of the truths of antiquity. This pursuit holds so great a fascination that scholars abandon the comforts of home to scour the world in search of isolated monasteries and forgotten manuscripts. They study Greek so that they might translate these treasures of the ancient world, and this language becomes what Latin had been in the previous age — the language of mystery, initiation and magic.

In their tireless search, these scholars unearth pivotal masterworks of literature, rhetoric and history that have been lost to mankind for centuries. Among the crumbling tomes, however, an even more startling revelation begins to take form. From the ruined volumes of Galen, Hippocrates, Dioscorides and Celsus scholars begin to piece together a very practical magic: a magic of reknitting flesh, bone, muscle and sinew; a magic of restoring and perfecting the human form.

Many find this new art a rather dangerous discovery. The Church is rightly suspicious of physicians' attempts to meddle in things divine; the reigns of life and death are for God's hands alone. Furthermore, the very thought of “perfecting” the human form is blasphemous, for are not all men created in the image of God?

The new generation of physicians walks a very dangerous line. Their sole defense is the shield of established belief. They rely heavily on incontestable truths of antiquity. It is not surprising that Galen, the ancient “Prince of Physicians,” has become their patron and rallying point.

Galen's medicine revolves around the four-fold theory of Elements (air, earth, fire and water). From these four

elements, the four bodily humors are derived (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile).

For the Galenists, good health results from the proper balance of these humors while disease results from an imbalance. The physician might observe an excess of blood from a ruddy complexion. Jaundiced skin tone indicates a dangerous level of yellow bile. Diarrhea is symptomatic of an imbalance of black bile, and a runny nose is a sure sign of excess phlegm. The examination of urine is also be used to diagnose illness — even in the patient's absence — as the humoral excesses are evident in the sample.

The pivotal work for the Galenists is their patron's *De usu partium*. This work, first published in the second century AD, is the cornerstone for all studies of physiology and anatomy since that time.

The Galenists are certainly the largest and best established faction at the Krakenhouse. The quest of these scholar-physicians is one of rediscovery rather than one of invention. The great Truths are out there, waiting to be brought into light. The most obvious sources of revelation are the lost works of antiquity.

Once this knowledge is unearthed, the Galenists feel very strongly that their solemn responsibility is to reveal it to the world. They are tireless teachers and they are entrusted with the care and running of the University. They possess an almost missionary zeal. From time to time, when one of the masters from the Krakenhouse departs to found a new center of learning, healing or refuge, it is a good bet that she is a Galenist.

The Galenists are painfully aware of the dangers posed to the Krakenhouse by the experimental methods of their associates — the Paracelsians and Vesalians. They must act quickly to shield their colleagues from the forces of orthodoxy.

Thomas Erastus

Erastus is one of the luminaries of the Galenist tradition. Educated at the University of Paris, Erastus discovered and soon became obsessed with the rich works of Aristotle and Galen.

In his studies, he found himself mocked by references to other works of these great thinkers that had been lost in the intervening centuries. These missing pieces gnawed at Thomas like a hunger.

Upon completion of his studies, he wasted no time in embarking for the Holy Land where it was said many of the great works might be found, having fallen into the hands of the infidels. Many revelations in the volumes of Averros and Avicenna hinted at the lost traditions of Greece and Rome.

Eight years later, Erastus returned. He did not, as he had so often imagined his homecoming, carry some forgotten tome that he had liberated from the unbelievers. What he did bring with him was the mastery of medical tradition whose equal had not been seen in Europe since the Crusades



— which was, not coincidentally, the last time that Europe had made contact with that same tradition and carried some knowledge of it home with them.

Armed with two arsenals of medical knowledge, Erastus returned to the University of Paris as a lecturer. Shortly thereafter, he published his famous *Disputationes de Medicina Nova Paracelsi*, in which he upheld the authority of the classical masters and damned the innovations of Paracelsus. This work is considered the opening salvo of the debates and confrontational literature that have swept the universities of Europe.

Erastus was also a leading figure in the attack by the conservative medical faculty on the use of the “alchemical” antimony cure. In a series of decrees and court cases, this powerful body nearly succeeded in forbidding the use of chemical cures in medicine.

Erastus is dignified and almost stately in his grace and aloofness. His is certainly the most illustrious reputation of any at the University. It is not uncommon for students to come to the Krakenhouse specifically to study under him.

Although a fearsome opponent of the Paracelsians, Erastus is almost never found exchanging refutations and insults in the Moot Court. Instead, he prefers to trade devastating correspondences with certain members of the opposition. Most of these epistles manage to find their way into common circulation.

Paracelsians: The Alchemists

By far, the most influential physician of this age is Paracelsus. He is sometimes referred to as the “Luther of Medicine.” In the scientific debates that rage in the Moot Court and throughout the universities of Europe, the innova-

CHAPTER II: THE ORDER OF REASON

tions of Paracelsus are more frequently and passionately fought over than even the seditious revelations of Copernicus.

The Paracelsians' revolutionary ideas about medicine amount to nothing less than an all-out attack on a worldview that has been revered since antiquity — the four-fold theory of elements (earth, air, fire and water).

While the Elementalists maintain that disease is the result of an imbalance of these four elements — as represented in the four bodily humors — the Paracelsians maintain an Alchemical explanation.

According to this view, each of the organs of the body acts as an alchemist that separates pure from impure. Thus, the stomach separates the nutritional part of foodstuffs from the dross, which is eliminated through the intestines. Other organs perform similar distillations. Illness occurs when an organ fails to properly separate the good from the bad and poisons accumulate.

Just as the organs are thought to perform microcosmic alchemical rites, so the Earth itself is thought to be a macrocosmic experiment. Creation is understood primarily as an alchemical separation from an initial chaos. The Earth is viewed as a large distillation flask with a fiery center that heats underground reservoirs and lava pools, propelling them toward the surface. It is not surprising that one of the great projects for the Paracelsians is the attempt to reconcile the metaphysical and the physical arts.

The Paracelsians further break with tradition by turning their backs on herbal remedies in favor of a new armory of metallic-based cures. The medical establishment condemns this use of antimony, mercury, sulfur and other “alchemical” cures in no uncertain terms — charging that these poisons kill far more often than they heal. Still, the Paracelsian's unorthodox remedies are surprisingly effective against “incurable” ailments.

The core work in the Paracelsian canon is the *Grosse Wundartzney*. It is an in-depth study of wounds and ulcers emphasizing their cures with alchemical salves and balms. Of particular interest is the section on wounds caused by gunpowder, which is a new and ever-increasing problem.

Other important works by Paracelsus include *Von der Bergsucht oder Bergkranckheiten drey Bücher*, the first book on miners' diseases (indeed, the first book specifically on any occupational disease).

The Paracelsians are a force to be reckoned with at the Krakenhouse. These firebrand physicians are vocal in their opposition to established methods. Many pride themselves on having no formal medical instruction whatsoever. Few, however, doubt their obvious skill in rhetoric, chemistry or metaphysical discourse.

They are most at home in the Moot Court. By day, all manner of foul vapors can be seen escaping their Crucibles



that ring the courtyard. These sanctums serve as a combination of workshop, firing house, laboratory and cramped living quarters. At sundown, the alchemists emerge with the smell of chemicals still clinging to them, to clear the court for the evening's debates.

Although they are nominally responsible for all matters pertaining to the pilgrims and penitents that flock to the Krakenhouse, the Paracelsians seldom seem to take an active concern in these matters. They seem content to let events take their course. When one is about these duties, he most often treats it as a distraction from the Great Work.

Peter Severinus

Severinus' father was a physician in a small mining town called Einsiedeln. The boy grew up with a very practical knowledge of both medicine and metallurgy. He found a natural affinity for both the study and the application of alchemy.

The boy left home at 14 and visited a number of universities, but never took a medical degree. His greatest tutor was the renowned occultist Johannes Trithemius, the Abbot of Sponheim.

As an adult, Severinus amassed a vast wealth of practical medical experience by working as a surgeon in various mercenary armies that were never without work in this turbulent period. In his travels, he visited most of the countries of Central, Northern and Eastern Europe.

Little is known of his wanderings until he was called to Basel to treat a leg ailment of the famed publisher, Johannes Frobenius. In Basel, Severinus also gave medical advice to Erasmus and came in contact with some prominent scholars of the day. Peter was appointed city physician and professor

of medicine. But although he was permitted to lecture at the University of Basel, he had no official appointment with the medical faculty there.

Almost immediately, Severinus became a figure of contention. He heaped scorn on the conservative physicians of the University and threw Avicenna's revered Canon of medicine to the blaze at the St. John's Day bonfire.

Unfortunately, his patient, Frobenius, died shortly thereafter. A disastrous lawsuit followed and Peter left Basel in haste, leaving even his manuscripts behind.

Severinus comes across as an angry and distracted man who antagonizes many of those he meets — even those who try to help him. His unorthodox methods, however, have been surprisingly effectual. He was recently called to Salzburg to treat the bishop, Ernest of Wittelsbach — one of the most feared men in all the empire. Severinus accepted this commission despite the fact that the price of failure would be not only his life, but the credibility of Paracelsian techniques.

For this and other triumphs, both medical and oratorical, Severinus is revered as a great champion of the Paracelsians. He is clearly the foremost member of the loose-knit faction.

Vesalians: The Vivisectionists

"Anatomy," according to Vesalius, "should be recalled from the dead."

The Vesalians are practitioners of that most seditious of scientific pursuits — the art of human dissection. The mysterious inner workings of the human body have remained largely unexplored for centuries. Students of anatomy have contented themselves with studying the masterworks of antiquity and gathering whatever first-hand knowledge they might get from the unfortunates they came across in their medical practices.

Strict religious prohibitions, superstitions and taboos insured that no systematic exploration of the topic was possible. All of this changed suddenly and dramatically with the publication of *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (On the Structure of the Human Body) by the Flemish anatomist, Vesalius.

This volume brought together Vesalius' painstaking observations acquired from his own dissections of human cadavers, with fine engravings by Jan van Calcar, a pupil of Titian. The work took the medical community by storm.

His unorthodox methods of research and instruction came under immediate attack from religious authorities. The very thought of defiling a human body like that was bad enough, without adding to the crime the corruption of a group of student observers.

Vesalians are most often found in haunts as far as possible from the inquisitive reach of the Church. The Holy Roman Empire is a common refuge, due to the



reigning chaos brought about by constant warfare and intrigue between the powerful Free Cities of the Empire. Even here, however, the vivisectionists must be cautious not to run afoul of ancient and deep-rooted superstitions.

Much of the ongoing work of the Vesalians centers on revealing and correcting the many errors in the revered anatomical studies of Galen and de Luzzi. This practice does not endear them, of course, to the Galenist scholars and physicians that hold court in the universities of Europe.

Vesalians tend to be solitary practitioners. The Krakenhouse is a rare and notable exception to this rule. Under the personal protection of the Elector of Brandenburg, the Krakenhouse enjoys an almost unequaled measure of autonomy. This liberty to conduct their studies openly draws together many leading anatomists from across Europe.

Even here, however, each of these hermit-physicians tends to keep largely to himself. The intensity of his personal vision approaches that of a religious devotion. Many Vesalians consider themselves faithful followers of the teachings of the Church, despite its open opposition to their work. For many, a life's work is the reconciliation of art and faith.

The freedom to pursue one's own vision also draws many of the more fanatic and unstable practitioners of the vivisectionist's art. These tormented visionaries are referred to as Animists. They are usually given a wide berth even by their fellow Vesalians.

Not content to merely observe the human form in all its glorious detail, each Animist feels a driving call to improve it. Even their great triumphs evoke pity and revulsion for their unfortunate test subjects. Less successful test cases are disposed of quietly in a secluded cemetery in the shadow of the Old Forest, affectionately referred to as "the Boneyard."

As a whole, Vesalians are the most hands-on of any of the rival factions at the Krakenhouse. They take the most active role in the treatment of masses that flock to the pilgrimage site. While Galenists tend to be cerebral and Paracelsians idealistic, Vesalians possess a genuine empathy for the unfortunate and the suffering. Perhaps this affinity is due to the vivisectionists' own status as exiles from their native lands and faith.

Johannes Guinter

Guinter was born in Brussels, the son of a celebrated apothecary. He attended the Universities of Leuven and Paris. He specialized in anatomy.

Further study at the University of Padua brought him not only his medical degree but also an appointment as a lecturer on surgery. His research continually confirmed that the anatomical teachings of Galen were based on dissections of animals. Guinter openly questioned whether these models provided an accurate guide to the structure of the human body.



In his years at Padua, he demonstrated and documented hundreds of Galen's anatomical errors. His published findings aroused heated dispute that led to his having to flee Italy and to his securing an appointment to the imperial household.

Finding the politics of court life greatly wearying, Guinter begged permission to leave the imperial service in order to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which is one of very few acceptable reasons for doing so.

He never reached Jerusalem and is believed to be dead.

Being dead does not greatly inconvenience the anatomist. In fact, Guinter has found that it is a valuable ally in weathering the censure of Church and society.

Guinter was responsible for "importing" the design of the Operating Theatre to the Krakenhouse and he is very possessive of "his" Theatre. A major rite of passage for each student at the Krakenhouse is the first time he takes his place beside "the table." It is inevitably Guinter's hand steadying and guiding the student's own as he makes that fateful first incision.

Politics

The Krakenhouse seethes with barely suppressed conflict between the three rival factions. Galenists charge that the Paracelsians are a veritable legion of homicide physicians. Vesalians point out alarming discrepancies in Galen's anatomy, which they claim was inspired by the dissection of animals. Paracelsians condemn their blind gropings with the scalpel, shouting that extensive experience rendering the living dead was no basis for the belief that they might render the dead living.

Each faction is well-aware that the debates waged in the Moot Court are far from academic in their import. The stakes of this elaborate game are nothing less than deciding which of the contending worldviews is to gain ascendancy over the others.

For practitioners of the magic arts, the presence of a strong prevailing system of belief can be a formidable ally or an insurmountable obstacle. Each of the three factions wants to cast the future of the *Ars Medica* in its own image.

One man alone is required to stand above this all-consuming struggle. The leader of the Krakenhouse is always referred to as, simply, Herr Doktor. He is directly accountable to the Elector for the actions and continuing prosperity of the entire community.

As the original Count de Rottenfeld died without heir, the title of Herr Doktor is neither a noble nor a hereditary one. The choosing of a new Herr Doktor is the occasion for weeks of heated debate during which the only residents of the Krakenhouse that do not take an active part are candidates.

There is nothing so plebeian as a vote involved in the process. The debate continues until one candidate is the victor.

Although Herr Doktor wields great power, it is not unheard of for a faction to support one of its most feared rivals for this position, solely to remove him from the vital playing field of public contention.

Herr Doktor is assisted by three tenured mages of his own choosing, named the Highwaymen in remembrance of the three brigands in the service of the *Rottebritters* who became the first disciples of the Krakenhouse.

The Highwaymen are responsible for monitoring and reacting to the larger picture — the treacherous balance of power between the various covenants, chantries and magical academies throughout Europe and the Holy Lands.

The Krakenhouse, despite its humanitarian mission, has many powerful enemies. Besides the constant danger of opposition from the Church escalating to fire and bloodshed, the foremost opponents of the Krakenhouse are the Hermetic Covenants. It is unfortunate that the scholar-physician's ceaseless efforts to recover and translate the great works of antiquity have often led to its crossing paths, wits and swords with Hermetics on similar missions of rediscovery.

Significant among the new finds is a group of treatises supposedly written in Egypt by Hermes Trismegistus at about the time of Abraham. This dangerous little volume sketches out the premises for an alternate occult medicine that might pose quite a serious threat to the three great medical traditions of the Krakenhouse. There is little that Hermetic scholars would not hazard to recover this vital work.

Portus Crucis: Shipyard of the Skies



Averros wiped the sweat from his eyes with the back of a ragged sleeve. A season of sea and salt had transformed the billowing white chemise into a coarse gray wrap.

The intervening season of storms had not gone gently with Averros, either. Although the welts and bruises that had accomplished his sudden "enlistment" had long healed, he bore fresh reminders of his new life at sea. His face was browned and cracked like old leather and crisscrossed with an intricate network of lines and pocks. A man could live 50 summers amongst the shaded groves of Valencia without ever suffering the ravages of a single season on the open waves.

Averros found himself grateful for the coolness of this evening and for the languid shadows of the high mountain pass. They tempered the ardor of his ascent. Even here, far from the reach of the salt wind, it was the sea that called him onward and it was the sea that fixed his purpose.

The oceans had placed their own indelible mark on Averros. That brand went much deeper than the scorching of the sun. It was more permanent than the blue-black ink with which the sailor's brotherhood had set their seal into his very skin.

At the crux of the mountain pass, the wind picked lightly at the edge of Averros' sleeve as if trying to get his attention. Ahead of him the vista opened out and he could see the shadow of Mt. Crucis stretching away to the east. From this distance, the craggy mountain looked like a jagged finger pointed accusingly at the heavens. Then, as Averros watched, the finger seemed to move slightly, to curl, to beckon. He again wiped the sweat from his eyes, more violently this time, and stared hard against the fading light.

Yes, he could definitely pick out movement ahead, from the very summit of the legendary peak. His eyes were sharp and little escaped him — a habit from nights of scanning the unchanging expanse of black waves for the slightest sign of trouble.

It was unmistakable. Averros' mind leapt ahead, shaping the dim impressions into familiar, comprehensible forms. His first thought was of a dockside winch, swinging slowly to port, a cumbersome spar dangling from the end of its hook.

It was ridiculous, he knew. The picture properly belonged to a bustling port of call, not to some remote mountaintop closer to the dome of the sky than to the shore of the nearest sea. Still, he could not shake the impression.



As he stared further, he thought he could pick out a line of delicate ethereal towers stretching heavenward. The moon seemed to pause in its course to alight briefly on the tip of each graceful spire.

Averros was moving forward again, more quickly now, measuring his progress by marking the passage of the moon amongst the pinnacles and cupolas that crowded and crowned the far mountaintop.

As he drew nearer, all doubt fled him. The curious images at last drew into focus and he saw clearly the reaching, whisper-thin towers. He could pick out the play of great windlasses and ropes and pulleys among the rooftops. He could trace the spider web of scaffolding as the precarious city climbed heavenward on its own shoulders.

A shadow passed across the moon, which still hung low, as if catching its breath resting in the bucket of one of the great winches before moving on. Averros' heart leapt within him. Within the shadow, he clearly saw the unmistakable points of three tall masts, the intricate checkerboard pattern of rigging and the billow of the skyship's five distinctive sails.

Here then was the object of his quest, Mt. Crucis, harbor and haven of the legendary Skyriggers. Averros quickened his pace and began to whistle to himself. All around him, from the eight cardinal points, the winds began to gather.

...

It was in the year 1461 when the founders of Portus Crucis struck on what, to the unilluminated, can only appear to be the most ridiculous maritime project since the Deluge. It is not difficult to imagine the reaction of Noah's neighbors at seeing the frame of the great gopherwood ark take shape, miles from the nearest body of water. Noah, however, undeterred by their censure, completed the great vessel.

For all his faith and perseverance, it is to Noah's credit that he never attempted in later years to revive his peculiar inland ship-building venture.

The legendary shipyards of Portus Crucis, however, carry the great work forward. Perched high atop an inaccessible and land-locked crag, the hidden shipyards continually produce the finest carracks and caravels, galleys and galleons, to be found anywhere in Europe.

As each of the new ships of the line is christened, and as the wind first catches its sails, it embarks on a maiden voyage — not toward the horizon, but toward the sky's zenith.

The renowned Skyriggers of Portus Crucis are built for sailing and soaring. They ply with equal facility the ocean currents and the trade winds that ride above them. An elite few of these marvelous skyships have gone further still, catching the solar wind that blows through the screaming blackness between the stars.

History

It was in the year of Our Lord 1460, when they struck the canvas from every yard in the great harbor of Lisbon and ran up the black sails. A swift ship was dispatched to each of the four winds so that all the nations of the Earth and all the men who toiled on the deep might know that our just and beloved Prince Henry, who men called "the Navigator" for his sharp eye was ever on the Heavens, had at last reached that far kingdom and gone to God. May his soul find everlasting peace.

The scholars of the Guild des Pilotos assert that the death of Prince Henry led directly to the founding of our noble endeavor, and their reasoning is difficult to refute as it rests firmly on the rock of Aristotle's four-fold theory of causation. Without first understanding the despair of the dark days that followed the fall of our Prince, one cannot hope to retrace the steps of our founders up the treacherous slope of Mt. Crucis.

In those days, I, along with many of our colleagues, was at the school at Sagres, which the Prince had founded with his own hand and dedicated to that most lofty and fecund pursuit, the *Ars Geographica*. No city in the world could boast its equal — neither Rome, nor Constantinople, nor Jerusalem herself. Scholars and navigators, astronomers and cartographers, seafarers and explorers from the ends of the Earth came to learn and to share their knowledge at the academy. And there was a wealth of new knowledge to share.

Prince Henry had been quick to grasp the importance of promoting exploration — of launching a systematic effort to push back the boundaries of the encroaching unknown. The cynical point out that the prince had a significant advantage over his peers in reaching this realization. Portugal's unique geography — pressed as she was up against the much larger kingdoms of Aragon and Castille to the east — made it very clear that Portugal's future lay on the waves.

Prince Henry was not immune, however, to the need that drove his larger and more voracious neighbors. The nations of Europe hungered then for precious metals — gold and silver that they could mint into coins. They could trade the coins for foreign goods, as well as for the spices, silks, carpets, fruits, dyes and other exotic items that flowed into Europe from Africa, Asia and the Holy Land. Most of all, Europe hungered for trade itself, which brought the prosperity and economic growth that made nations great.

Precious metals are the wind that fills the sails of trade. Europe's native sources had already been found to be depleted (like the Irish gold deposits) or grossly inadequate to the demand (like the German silver mines). Already, princes had begun to look abroad for new and uninterrupted supplies of the gold and silver they craved.

For Portugal, looking abroad meant looking across the narrow mouth of the Mediterranean, toward the northern coast of Africa. The good prince was well aware of the

steady stream of gold that wended its way across the Sahara and into Morocco. In 1415, our ships captured the port of Cueta on Morocco's northern coast.

Given the relative size of the two nations and the difficult Moroccan terrain (alternating mountainous strongholds and desert wastes), a full conquest of that country was impractical. Prince Henry, however, struck on a daring plan that was to inspire 50 years of exploration and transform our small country into one of the strongest and wealthiest on Earth.

His plan was simple: He would tap the stream of gold at its source. To do so, he had only to sail around Africa.

No one had ever sailed any further south along the African coast than Cape Nun (a point still well above the tropics). The headland was said to derive its name from the chance a sailor had of successfully returning home should he be foolish enough to venture beyond this point.

It was widely held that the Earth would not support life any further south. It had been well-documented that further on the sun scorched men's skin black and turned the sea to blood. This was the very limit of the known world and it was another 20 years from the capture of Ceuta until a ship managed to surpass this headland and return safely.

In the meantime, however, the prince had not been idle. He had carved out ports from the islands off the coast of Africa: first the Madeiras and then the Canaries. He had even set his sites on the Azores, which would remain nothing more than a ship's graveyard for many years to come.

These ports became not only important supply points, but they also netted many ships that had been blown off course or strayed from the sure path hugging the African coast.

It was 1445 when we first rounded Cape Verde and found to our overwhelming joy that the African coast stretched east from this point.

We had rounded the tip of darkest Africa at last, or so we believed. You can imagine the disappointment that paralyzed our efforts when we learned that after years of travail, the coastline turned once again to the south.

I tell you it was a brief prefigurement of the disappointment that followed the death of the prince when we could see a half century's work coming apart before our eyes.

The year of Our Lord, 1453, brought new life to the school at Sagras. In that year, the Ottoman Turks sacked the city of Constantinople.

In 1456, Athens suffered a similar fate, driving the learned refugees further into Europe. The same year, Cadamosto established a base on the Cape Verde Islands.

Surroundings

The treacherous climb up the side of Mt. Crucis is best left to the nimble mountain goats that favor the rocky crag. Their attraction to the desolate cliffside is further evidence

of their perverse and cantankerous nature. They are certainly not above abruptly dislodging the unwary passersby.

Navigating the disused path, with its nearly vertical switchbacks and rock falls, is an initiation in its own right. At the head of the path, barely visible from the base of the climb, stands a tall iron post. From its crossarm swings a lantern, which is kept lit in all weather. The legend inscribed about the base of the gently swaying pole reads (in Greek): "The way. The truth. The light."

A persistent, if dangerous, belief states that one who has been marked by his birthstars to become a navigator can ascend the treacherous slope without misfortune just by fixing his eye on the distant swaying lantern and making straight for it. If even once the aspirant should take his eye from the light — even to snatch a quick downward glance at the uncertain footing — he is lost.

The port itself is a marvel of delicate, slender structures reaching heavenward. The mountaintop bristles with tall, reedlike towers and spires, steeples and cupolas. The buildings are precariously tall and sway in the slightest of breezes. The inhabitants of Portus Crucis go to sleep each night to the gentle rocking of the sea.

An elaborate network of hoists and stays helps support each structure, turning the mountaintop into a maze of rigging. Each strand is easily as big around as a stout man's waist, and each of the massive ropes might be made up of as many as eight intertwined strands. Overland travel is an exhausting business of picking one's way over, under and around the great coarse guide ropes. Consequently, most travel around the port is accomplished by means of catwalks, rope ladders and plank-and-tie bridges. It is easiest to swing across a gap on whatever rope is ready-to-hand, or to use a hook to slide across one of the ziplines that crisscross neighboring buildings. None of the inhabitants of the port thinks of venturing outdoors without a coil of rope and a hook at her belt.

The lower stories are hidden behind virtual walls of scaffolding. The carpenters of Portus Crucis are unflagging in their industry and have no match throughout Europe. Their delicate structures never seem to pause in their upward climb.

Even in the dead of night, after all the inhabitants and workmen alike are long in bed, you can still pick out the faint pulse of hammering and the creak of the city stretching in its sleep.

A great rivalry exists between the carpenters and the shipwrights, spurring each of the two to greater and more audacious achievements. One might think that, in a city where the shipwrights craft vessels that soar through the clouds, the humble carpenters might well pack up their shingle and leave town by dead of night. It might just as easily, however, have gone the other way. The masts of the tall ships jut proudly against the backdrop of delicate

towers. Portus Crucis boasts not only the most extensive Skyrigger shipyard in the world, but also a well-defended port, a university, a thriving marketplace, and an extensive collection of goods, treasures, stories and lore — all painstakingly gathered from the far reaches of the Earth, seas, winds, and stars.

The Dry-dock

The legendary shipyards of Mt. Crucis are capable of constructing, rigging and fully outfitting any of the six major ship designs in vogue throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. Each of the specially modified Skyrigger designs is modeled on one of these more conventional seagoing vessels.

At any given time, there is always at least one ship in dry-dock under construction. New Skyriggers are produced at a rate of about one per season. A fighting galleon, outfitted for the Deep Void and boasting 50 guns on each broadside, might take as long as a year to complete. A small caravel balloon-ship, on the other hand, might be brought out more quickly.

The dry-dock hosts any ships undergoing repair or refitting. It is common to see an entire expeditionary force of four or five vessels being specially modified for an upcoming mission. The sea, the sky and the stars are each very dangerous frontiers and it is a rare expedition that returns to port in anything resembling serviceable condition. This area is the exclusive domain of the Shipwright's Guild and is ruled over by the Master Shipwright, who is a straight-speaking, explosive man from the Isle of Erin.

The University

The University at Mt. Crucis is the legacy of Prince Henry's legendary school at Sagras. The scholars and students at Sagras were just as disillusioned and displaced by the death of their patron as were the men who served him on the high seas. Many were drawn to the ambitious new project high atop Mt. Crucis. Thus, the mantle of learning was passed, and a half-century of collected maps, skills and lore were preserved from the ravages of time and oblivion.

The Chartroom

The Chartroom is the lair of the Piloto Mayor, one of the most powerful men in Europe. From boyhood, the Piloto Mayor was the peer and close companion to Prince Henry. Together they created the greatest treasure in all of Portugal — the Royal Atlas.

As each expedition returned to Lisbon, her navigator reported directly to the Palais of the Piloto Mayor. No cargo of gold bullion was as carefully guarded in its passage from ship to town as was the *roteiros* that each piloto carried. This *roteiros* is a cache of precious manuscripts (maps, star



charts, sailing directions, log entries, sounding depths, journals) that allowed a navigator to work his unique variety of magick. More importantly, the roterios contained all the information necessary for another expedition to duplicate the pilot's accomplishment — to return safely home from those previously uncharted waters. The Piloto Mayor is the uncontested master of the Guild of Navigators. No one could hope to leave the harbor of Portus Crucis without his implicit consent.

The Harbor

The harbor atop Mt. Crucis is sheltered on two sides by nearly vertical overhanging walls of rock. On the landward side, the docks connect to the city via an intricate network of winches, pulleys, block-and-tackles, hoists, cargo nets, gangplanks and rope bridges. Goods being loaded or unloaded from the ships never intentionally touch the ground.

To the airward side, twin fortresses (the Pillars of Solomon) project out over the mountainside and protect the harbor mouth from aerial assault.

The harbor contains not a single drop of water. The docks extend out over a dizzying deadfall down the mountainside. The ships tied up at dockside bob gently on the breeze, hovering effortlessly over the menacing chasm.

At any given time, it is rare to find as many as a dozen ships in the harbor. Expeditions that return to port with their ships in serviceable condition are quickly gone again on another voyage of trade, conquest or discovery. The remnants of less-successful expeditions can be found in the dry-docks and are used as materials for future craft.

The rambling dockside is home to the halls of the Sailor's Brotherhood, numerous warehouses, storehouses, and flophouses and taverns frequented by the sailors. Many of the buildings here are squat low-lying structures that seem to have been hastily constructed beneath and between the massive guide ropes that support the towering neighboring buildings and the docks themselves.

Rats are common, both on the ground and running along the undersides of the great mooring lines. Consequently, large mouser cats have also become a common sight, both as shipboard pets and in the ground-bound businesses.

Few people venture very far from the immediate area of the wharves on the port's shadowy ground level. Those who have done so report more sinister things than rats and goats nibbling at the great cables that support the lofty city.

The Counting House

The counting house is the headquarters of the Procurer's Guild. The structure is built along the lines of a grand Mediterranean villa, with open-air courtyards, columned

promenades, and tiled galleries cooled by ornate fountains. One guest described the rambling villa as flamboyant after the fashion of the hooded cobra. Another opined that it takes one who has lived an entire life between the opposite extremes of popes and emperors to achieve such easy decadence.

This man of easy decadence is the head of the procurer's guild, Merchant Prince Marco de Ravenna. The treasure vaults of the Counting House hold marvels and secrets from the far reaches of the earth, sea and sky.

The Pillars of Solomon

The two fortresses that guard the entrance to the secluded mountaintop harbor are known as the Pillars of Solomon. They have been carved from the living rock of the mountain. They have seen heavy fighting twice in their brief history and have on each occasion proved to be unassailable.

The granite sides of the towers can shrug off 50 pound shot without even marring their surface. Each boasts massive guns that can hurl a cannonball over a mile distant. These weapons are mounted so as to be able to fire nearly vertically at need.

In times of crisis, the Skyriggers are the port's chosen first line of defense. The twin fortresses are intended to provide long-range fire support, to serve as a last line of defense should the fleet falter, and to protect the vulnerable vessels should they be caught unawares in harbor.

The fortresses and the bold marines that man them are under the command of the Governor-General.

Ships of the Line

The Carrack

This workhorse of the Age of Exploration combines the best features of both the northern (Atlantic) and southern (Mediterranean) shipbuilding traditions.

The northern vessels were study ships built to withstand the worst that the storm-cursed Atlantic could throw at them. Their billowing square sails provided great power when sailing with a favorable wind. Their hulls were clinker-built — composed of overlapping planks that made for a very strong and watertight hull.

The Mediterranean fleets were suited to milder conditions. They were lighter, faster, and their triangular lateen sails made them extremely maneuverable. They could come about in a tight circle or beat a path into the face of an adverse wind.

The breakthrough that made the carrack possible was the realization that square and lateen sails could be combined to even greater effect. The success of the carrack spurred a revolution in which three-masted vessels quickly rendered all other contemporary designs obsolete.

The carrack's central mainmast is square-rigged and provides the vessel's forward thrust. It is equipped with a single round top (the maintop or crow's nest). Its smaller masts toward the bow (foremast) and stern (mizzenmast) are both lateen sails used for steering and maneuverability.

The carrack's most characteristic feature is its long forecastle that extends out over bow. The castle is hexagonal in shape and used as a raised fighting platform, to give the defenders the advantage in ship-to-ship combat.

To the ship's stern, the fighting castle becomes a proper deck that stretches half the ship's length. The sides of the carrack are exaggeratedly rounded to shirk off enemy projectiles and when two vessels are locked side to side, the fact that the carrack is narrower at its deck than at its waterline and creates a gap that must be leapt by would-be boarders.

The carrack is steered by means of a single rudder mounted directly to the stern. A long connecting rod, the whipstaff, allows the steersman to move the heavy tiller from a cabin on the halfdeck, instead of fighting for his life on the storm-tossed maindeck.

The carrack is a versatile vessel, admirably suited to the role of either a coast-hugging trader, or an open-sea explorer. Although not a front-line warship, she is good in a fight. Her speed and maneuverability are telling advantages in skirmishes with pirates or ships flying the flag of rival nations. The carrack has become the benchmark against which all other ships of the age are measured.

The Nao

An attempt by Spanish shipbuilders to improve on the basic carrack design, the nao can be thought of as a carrack flagship. In contrast, the nao has nearly half as much cargo capacity as the carrack, which is an important advantage for taking on extra food for ocean crossings, or for stocking the holds with precious cargoes from the east.

Each of her three masts boasts a round top armed with a mounted gun that can rotate a full 360 degrees. The aft quarterdeck presents the enemy vessel with five gunports on each side.

The Caravel

Despite its small size, the caravel is renowned for its tenacity. Many a caravel has returned from treacherous ocean crossings that have left its larger counterparts foundering or lost at sea.

There are two distinct varieties of caravel: the *caravela latina* is lateen-rigged and unmatched in its bursts of speed. It has a reputation of being able to come around quickly enough to catch its own wake. The *caravela redonda* is square-rigged for keeping pace with much larger vessels on long ocean-going voyages. Many captains are willing to sacrifice some degree of speed and maneuverability to keep such a useful

vessel at their disposal at the journey's far end. Both varieties are shallow-keeled — excellent for plying coastal waterways, especially in uncharted regions where there may be danger of unknown reefs, shoals or sandbars. The caravel is flat-sterned and she boasts no bowsprit, giving her the appearance of having been ruthlessly cropped down to size. The compact vessel is amazingly resilient in the face of a storm. In a fight, the vessel's most potent weapon is its maneuverability, which allows it to disengage from a superior foe and to swoop swiftly to finish off vessels that have been damaged by the warships of the caravel's escort.

The Galley

The latest evolution of a Mediterranean design whose proud lineage stretches back well over a thousand years. A modern galley is a sleek, swift vessel, riding low to the water. Although it boasts a large lateen sail, it is propelled by banks of oars.

The term "galley slave" has become synonymous with a short, brutal, animal existence. The galley slaves spend their lives chained to oars and rowing benches. In countries where slavery is uncommon, prisoners of war and convicts are readily substituted at the rowing benches. When one oarsman succumbs to the heat and exertion, another is quickly inserted into his place and the drums boom ever onward.

This practice of using, discarding and instantly replacing the infirm is not limited to the galley's manpower. Every spar or fitting on the vessel is cut to a common standard. This telling design advantage allows the vessel to quickly recover from damage that sends other ships to the bottom of the sea. Even major repairs can be accomplished without limping back to a friendly port.

The galley's fighting style suits its rugged temperament. The vessel is swift and capable of unequalled bursts of speed. Its maneuverability, however, is quite poor. In combat, the galley rams its opponents.

The galley lacks even such militant refinements as fighting castles. It depends on crushing the hull of enemy vessels and swarming over the opposition with a blood-thirsty mob of boarders who had little or nothing to lose. The galley is not, however, exclusively a fighting ship. With its speed and reliability, the galley excels at carrying important news, dignitaries or perishable goods between the various ports of the Mediterranean.

The Galleass

Something of a mule, the galleass resembles an ill-conceived cross between the galley and the carrack. The design is generally praised for its ambition while simultaneously scorned for its execution.

In theory, the idea of combining the galley's speed and durability with the carrack's maneuverability is very ap-

pealing. The galleass features the three-masted rigging popularized by the carrack — a design which, according to popular wisdom, ensures both power and control. Unfortunately the triple masts also require a higher and wider deck, raising the banks of oars further from the water and making rowing a Herculean task.

The one real fighting advantage of the galleass is the fact that its foredeck is low to the waterline. The carrack, with its characteristic high fighting castle, cannot effectively fire straightforward. The galleass, however, can mount ponderous guns both fore and aft. These armaments allow the vessel to fire on the enemy as it closes. In many cases, it can cripple her opponent before it can come broadside. The galleass can also bring its ram to bear at close quarters, where it strikes treacherously close to the waterline. The force of the blow is often enough to drive the prow of the enemy ship under and send it to the bottom.

The Galleon

The uncontested master of the high seas, the galleon boasts three complete decks. From her gundeck, she can unleash a broadside of 50 full-sized guns to both port and starboard. Resistance melts away before her like fog at midday.

Even from a distance, it is easy to pick out this ship's tall profile as well as the billowing yards of extra canvas she flies. In fair weather, the galleon runs up two full square-rigged sails on each of her main-, fore- and mizzen-masts.

Besides its impressive combat capabilities, the galleon's great size makes it ideally suited to taking aboard extra provisions, marines, or cargoes. One of the major disadvantages of the galleon is that she cannot put to sea without attracting a great deal of attention. When a full battle group of three or more galleons (and their accompanying support vessels) puts to sea, the deployment is no longer a matter of a nautical expedition — it is a dramatic move in the complex game of international diplomacy.

Skyriggers

Skyriggers are based on the same six basic designs that dominate the harbors of more conventional ports of call. When a Skyrigger appears on the horizon, it might be mistaken for a ship of the line. As the distance closes, however, radical departures from the standard design become evident to even the dullest of lookouts.

There are eight basic skyrigs — methods of overhauling a standard ocean-going vessel so that it might soar to the clouds and beyond. Most skyrigs can be fitted to any of the six conventional ship designs. Not all of the 48 resulting combinations, however, have survived the transition from drawing board to shipyard. Designs that have yet to be successfully constructed are classified as *conjectural*. From

Fleets and Expeditions

The lone exploratory vessel or solitary ocean-going trader is largely romantic fiction. The dangers of the deep are such that only the most foolish or headstrong braves them alone. Even in the calmer and well-charted waters of the Mediterranean, there is safety in numbers.

A typical expedition consists of a thoughtfully assembled group of three to five ships. The expedition is led by a captain-general who commands the flagship. When selecting the best mix of vessels for longer exploratory voyages, the captain-general begins with a large supply ship. This vessel serves as a mobile storehouse from which the other ships might be resupplied en route. On the return voyage, its holds can be filled with the fruits of the expedition's labors.

Next, the commander's thoughts usually fly to protecting his floating supply line. The expeditionary force should contain at least one escort ship to fend off the ravages of pirates and privateers.

Only the most extravagantly financed expedition could boast a galleon for its flagship. Such a commission would be a sign of special royal favor — it comes only as the reward for years of unflagging service, and the appointment is always fraught with intrigue and treachery from unexpected quarters.

Commanding a nao is a mark of distinction reserved exclusively for that elite group of captain-generals who serve the very wealthiest of patrons — the Italian merchant princes, the Dutch trading monopolies, the private hereditary fleets of the Spanish admiralty. Expeditions with less influential sponsors might still expect to specially outfit their flagship with a handful of guns to discourage predators. Even a tight pack of caravels might be armed with a few light guns to harry an enemy while the main group makes good its escape.

If the captain-general expects heated opposition on his mission, he may select additional fighting ships to compliment the powerful broadsides of his flagship. A carrack equipped with a bank of lighter, long-range guns might provide fire support, and a galley or galleass adds a decisive advantage in close combat.

The expeditionary force should also contain one fast ship, able to race to the nearest friendly port either to fetch help or to bring good tidings of a successful mission. If this ship is a shallow-keeled galley or caravel, it might prove its worth performing scouting and sounding duty in unknown coastal waters. Expeditions that do not include such coast-runners have to sacrifice valuable storage space on deck to carry pinnaces — small single-masted ships that might be quickly assembled and deployed for such purposes.

the time a fledgling design first manages to “leave the nest” — to depart the dry-dock under its own power — it becomes classed as *experimental*.

The main obstacle before an experimental vessel is its shakedown voyage — a most demanding trial in which an experienced crew of Explorators does its best to undo all that the master shipwrights have so lovingly and painstakingly created. During its shakedown, the ship is exposed to the most hazardous conditions that the thrill-seeking Explorators can re-create. These conditions routinely include a series of freefalls, splashdowns, ethyrskips, inversions, collisions and tailspins. The crew systematically jams and misfires all of the weapons. Designs that survive these tender ministrations unscathed are pronounced sky-worthy — the seal of approval that allows other Skyriggers to be produced based on the successful prototype.

Skyriggers are just as at home skimming above the waves as they are slicing through them. There is no significant difference between sailing on the ocean currents and riding above them. Only at the transition point between the two do things become somewhat challenging.

It is common for Skyriggers to splash down or make seafall during their journey. This solution is practical to the problem of taking on additional provisions in the course of a long voyage. Very few ports can receive an airborne Skyrigger.

The aerial docks of Mt. Crucis are surely unique. Any airman who claims to have certain knowledge of another such port of call is surely spinning a yarn. There are certain natural harbors among the world's highest peaks. Knowledge of such safe havens, however, is highly prized and carefully guarded.

Cloudships

The very first Skyrigger christened in Portos Crucis was the cloudship *Ambition*. This tried-and-true design remains the most popular skyrig in production.

The high gleaming prow of a cloudship is the sight most likely to catch the visitor's eye during a trip to the harborside. Popular convention holds that at least one cloudship is always in port at any given time. The fishwives' prophesy that there will be a day when no cloudship graces the harbor, but from that day forward, no vessel will ever find its way home to the fabulous port.

The cloudship owes its enduring appeal to the simplicity of its execution. It features a special skyrig that involves fitting the vessel with huge, almost comically oversized, prow, keel and rudder. Each of these components is crafted of pure silver.

As any hedge wizard could tell you, the mystic power of silver lies in its ability to cleave unerringly through the air. From the days of most ancient sagas, potent “blades of light” were cunningly wrought with silver edges — for it was well-

known that each of the elements had taken a solemn oath not to impede the noble metal, which served as the herald of the gods. Likewise, silver arrows were thought to fly swiftly and unerringly to their target.

This skyrig derives its name from the peculiar observation that the clouds themselves seem to part before the vessel's silver prow, as if reluctant to hinder the sacred metal. A cloudship rides both wind and wave with equal ease, and its transition from one element to the other is seamless. The vessel climbs to the skies with stately grace, like a warrior-king's chariot cresting a hillside.

Clockwork Automata

Automata take to the skies under the power of intricate mechanisms, gears, springs and pulleys. One of the most impressive designs replaces the banks of oars on a conventional galley with huge, wooden bat wings with polished brass struts and fittings. The mechanical wings beat with a clockwork precision that shames even the most demanding galley master.

Most automata are crafted to resemble mythic beasts. From a distance, it is often difficult to distinguish between the automaton and the creature itself.

A clockwork dragon might belch fire via a complex system of vents and billows. Alternately, the beast might breathe forth a great cloud of grapeshot from a battery of concealed guns. Other automata, such as the famous storm-eagle design, feature great claws capable of snatching up boulders or flaming debris to drop on hapless ground targets.

Automata are expensive to build and maintain. The owner of such a vessel is often channeling the resources of an entire city into the craft's upkeep. These ships tend to be temperamental. In combat, a wise captain avoids head-on confrontation, as even light damage can be disabling if any of the vulnerable critical systems are struck.

Perhaps because of the staggering investment of cash and engineering that goes into producing each new automaton, these Skyriggers tend to be the most prestigious of all the skyships. Each of these vessels is built according to a unique design and a vicious rivalry exists between patrons. The commissioning of a new vessel is always shrouded in a web of secrecy, intrigue, bribery, espionage, treachery, sabotage and murder.

Ætherships

The elegant Ætherships are an awe-inspiring sight. Even the long-time inhabitants of Portus Crucis, who might be expected to have grown somewhat jaded from long exposure to the fantastic, look up with wide eyes when the shadow of the graceful Æthership glides overhead. This Skyrigger has a very distinctive profile. Rising above the Æthership's billowing sails a further cobweb of gossamer rigging extends, linking the ship to one or more great canvas balloons.

The Æthership runs on the ancient arcane principle that each element seeks its own ground. Water runs downhill to the sea. A rock dropped from the deck of a Skyrigger speeds to its native Earth. A cask filled with air and submerged beneath the depths fights its way back to the open sky. Similarly, if one could capture a sample of the elusive substance that fills the void between the stars, that ethyr would find a way to return to its home in the heavens. Given enough of the rare element, it would be possible to lift an entire ship and its crew into the heavens.

The great balloons of the Æthership are coated and sealed with pitch or tree sap to prevent the escape of the rare element. The Æther is harvested by Skyriggers on their return trip from the Void. These vessels cast their canvas "nets" on the cosmic waters. As the ship speeds Earthward, it drags the canvas in its wake — inflating it. The topline is then pulled tight and the opening tied and sealed. The inflated balloons help check the skyship's speed as it plummets toward the Earth. Back in port, these balloons are carefully removed and stored for outfitting later expeditions.

Fighting Kites

This experimental skyrig was developed in response to the need for an agile airborne attackship. It is a great mistake to assume that sailing the tradewinds is less fraught with danger than navigating the seven seas. Dragons, rocs, griffins, harpies and other beasts are not above tackling an entire shipload of fighting men. Pirates riding beasts or stolen airships, prowl the cloudscape, intent on mayhem and plunder.

The name of Portus Crucis is not universally loved. Like any prosperous trading center, the port has acquired its fair share of rivals and even enemies. Foremost among its detractors is the influential Mediterranean island-port of Majorca. Although best known for their conventional fleet, the Majorcans have, of late, launched several successful Skyrigger expeditions — including a daring nighttime raid on the harbor at Alexandria. The avarice with which the passionate Majorcans view their wealthy rival is always balanced precariously on the brink of open hostility. Some Skyriggers claim that the Majorcans are behind the recent decisions of several east Mediterranean ports to close their harbors to the ships of Portus Crucis.

Fighting kites are capable of dizzyingly sharp swoops and turns. They favor a few heavy short-range guns and rely on their swiftness and maneuverability to evade the enemy's weapons, penetrate his defenses, and deliver a crippling blow. Such vessels also feature a massive harpoon gun (aft) with a strong winch for drawing in wounded prey. The winch line can be quickly severed by a lever-blade beside the spool to keep the ship from being dragged to its own destruction by a freefalling target.

Ghostships

So named for its eerie appearance, this vessel hovers menacingly in midair, with its tattered sails lit from below by green and white incandescence.

The obscure alchemical transformation that gives the vessel both its buoyancy and its luminous appearance is derived from a compound of lime, lichen and quicksilver. The entire hull is sealed with this reeking paste in lieu of the more conventional pitch. The foul compound soaks into the planking over the course of several night's application, devouring the wood from within. The structure that remains is rendered remarkably light and surprisingly dense. The major drawback to the process is that the hull becomes quite brittle. Often the shot from an enemy cannon causes a jagged section of planking to shatter and fall away like a broken mirror. These gaping holes have only added to the ghostship's mystique.

A conservative coating of the "wraithlight" is often applied to the canvas and rigging as well, rendering it as shimmering and ephemeral as cobwebs in moonlight. If too much of the substance is applied, however, the ropes have a tendency to snap when pulled taut.

The men and women who sail the ghostships are teasingly referred to as "Haunts" by their fellows in the Sailor's Brotherhood. Ghostships are not renowned for their fighting prowess, and their unusual countenance renders them unsuitable for most trading missions. These vessels are, however, ideally suited for solitary missions of discovery, treasure hunting, or espionage.

Voidships

The fearless explorer of the Outerdark must expect to endure the perils of extreme cold that can freeze blood in its course. She must be prepared for the hailstorms of boiling rock that rain down on the unwary. She must remain ever-vigilant against the mind-rending abominations that dwell behind the stars.

The voidships themselves appear pitifully unprepared for the peril and madness that await them. Their graceful sails boast no canvas, but are instead strung like harps with resonant strands of precious metal. Although the wind tears unheeding through the sails, this strange rigging does a remarkable job of capturing the music of spheres — the sublime harmonic pattern of the stars and planets in their courses. It is this music that propels the ship through the Deep Void. A conventional vessel would hang helplessly, suspended in limbo, midway between Heaven and Earth.

Cabals

Despite the seeming unity of purpose that joins the tight community high atop Mt. Crucis, the port is home to a number of groups — each of which harbors its own

distinct, and often conflicting, agenda. The guilds are the major players in these power struggles. Each occupation has banded together to promote the interests of that profession. Guilds fulfill a three-fold mission: to protect, educate and regulate the practitioners of their trade.

Sailor's Brotherhood

The bulk of every crew is drawn directly from the ranks of the Sailor's Brotherhood. Their practical sailing skill and knowledge of sea lore are the lifeblood of any expedition.

The Brotherhood is primarily concerned with ensuring the best possible treatment, training and treasure for its members. Guild members are easily identified by elaborate tattoos that serve as their credentials. Any old salt can read a sailor's rank, achievements and ports of call at a glance. Battle scars are often worked into the artwork, adding to their story. Guildsmen take great pride in comparing these markings at length.

Society of Pilots

The Society of Pilots is entrusted with guarding the mysteries of navigating the seas, skies and deep void. The ship's pilot is regarded with an almost religious reverence. His skill and judgment are the tenuous guide rope that leads the ship and her crew home again.

No single member of the crew, including her captain, is as indispensable as the piloto. Membership in this select group is quite limited. Even the bustling Portus Crucis, heir to the great school at Sagras, can boast no more than a dozen master navigators.

Piloto Maestros are always in short supply. While at sea, a single master pilot sails aboard the flagship and is responsible for keeping all the ships together and on course. He is aided in this daunting task by a team of journeymen and apprentices — one for each ship in the expedition. Every evening, the pilots gather in the Maestro's cabin to calculate their current position, speed and bearing. They then receive their sailing instructions for the following day.

Navigation is, at best, an imprecise science. Devices such as the quadrant and sextant can be used to fix the height of the sun above the horizon. Armed with this information, the experienced pilot can calculate his latitude — his distance north or south of the equator — with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

His exact position, however, still largely remains a matter of guesswork. There is no reliable means of gauging a vessel's longitude — its east/west position. Pilots make their best estimate of their actual position by using a system known as Dead Reckoning.

Dead Reckoning relies on the fact that given a fixed starting point, if one knows both the direction and distance traveled, it is possible to calculate one's current position.

Ranks

The Brotherhood recognizes the following ranks: ship's boy, swab, seaman/airman/voidsman, specialist, ensign, bowsun, second mate and first mate.

- **Ship's boy**, the lowest rank, is reserved for sailors under the age of 12. In most cases, these youths are apprentices and receive no wages. A ship's boy might be a manservant to the captain, or an assistant to the cook. He may be a stowaway forced to earn his keep, or the by-blow of an airman following in his father's footsteps, or simply an overcurious lad who pried too deeply into the secrets of the mysterious Skyriggers.

- **Swabs** are adult sailors still working out their sea legs. The "title" derives from the labor in which they spend most of their time — swabbing the decks and washing down the holds.

Swabs usually sign on for a flat fee in return for service on both legs of the journey. Pay is a fraction of what a regular seaman earns, as a swab is also compensated with valuable training and experience.

- A seasoned **seaman** has mastered basic skills, logged at least a year at sea, and earned the respect of his fellows. As such, he earns one copper coin each day he's away from port as well as one full share in the profits of the expedition. A small caravel might sail with as few as 15 able seamen. A galleon might boast as many as 80 without taking into account her compliment of marines.

Skyrigger postings are divided into three classes: seagoing, airgoing and voidgoing. A seagoing expedition spends half its time on the waves. Most Skyrigger voyages fit this category.

Flight introduces many added dangers and uncertainties into the mission. Weathering a storm at sea, although a terrifying experience, is nothing like the death sentence of attempting to ride out a gale from the air. Flying also renders simple mistakes — like falling overboard — fatal. Similarly, a ship foundering at sea has a much greater opportunity to effect repairs than one plummeting from the sky. Because of the added dangers, airmen are compensated at the rate of three copper coins for every two days of service. Each also receives his full share in the expedition's profits.

If voyages into the clouds are dangerous, expeditions into the Deep Void pose an ever-present threat to both the life and sanity of each crewman. The Void is utterly intolerant of even the slightest misstep. To falter is to perish — this is the voidsman's code.

For the perils they endure, these fearless explorers are paid a mere two copper coins for each day of service, along with their rightful share of the profits. The wharfside of Portus Crucis taverns ring with tales of expeditions that have brought back treasures so rare and wondrous as to make rich men of the entire crew. Most often, however, the wonders with which the Voidships return are priceless only in the scientific sense. It's important to note that such talk is not common to all seaports; sailors who boast of such exploits outside a Skyrigger port soon bring Inquisitors down on them.

- The **specialist** is a seasoned veteran who has mastered a skill indispensable to the survival of the expedition. The ship's cook, lookout, and helmsmen are good examples of this position. Specialists usually command the respect of the entire crew, although they can just as easily inspire envy or distrust among their fellows.

A specialist receives twice the compensation of a regular sailor (two copper coins per day at sea, three in the air, four in the Void) and as a double share in the profits.

- **Non-commissioned officer** ranks include the watchman and the bowsun. Each position is compensated three times the normal rate, with a triple share of the profits.

- The **first** and **second mates** are the highest ranks of enlisted men. These two men form the critical link between captain and crew. They are responsible for seeing that the captain's orders and the pilot's instructions are carried out swiftly and efficiently. They are responsible to the Brotherhood for the safety and success of the mission. In compensation, the mates receive five times the normal pay rate and a proportionate share in the profits.

The pilot makes a reckoning during each four-hour watch, plotting each new position on his roteiros.

In a favorable weather, the steersman maintains the pilot's course by sighting along the line of recognized celestial bodies. In foul weather, the ship's large brass compass reveals the true course. This crucial navigation is permanently mounted on a pedestal at the helm.

When sailing into the wind, dead reckoning became even less exact as the ship was forced to repeatedly change directions, tacking back and forth across the wind's path to make headway.

To estimate the ship's speed pilots cast overboard a small piece of wood tied to a rope knotted at regular one fathom intervals. By counting the number of knots that passed through his hands in a given period of time, it was possible to make a rough estimate of the ship's speed and the distance it traveled during a watch. This simple navigational aid was known as the ship's log, a name that was later applied to the book in which these measurements were recorded. The logbook also noted any other significant events that occurred during the watch.

Each small error in plotting the vessel's current position was compounded by the fact that it was passed along as an incorrect starting point for the next calculation. It was common for a pilot to believe himself to be hundreds of miles from his true position.

With all these uncertainties, it is not surprising that sailing instructions tend to be as much a matter of folklore as of science. The most means of navigation is to stay close to a known coastline. When forced to strike out on the open sea, pilots like to "run the latitudes" — to sail north or south until they strike the latitude of their destination. Following this invisible line to their chosen port of call is then a matter of tenacity and good fortune.

The best set of existing directions to guide the ambitious pilot to the shores of the New World simply reads, "South 'til the butter melts, then due west."

Sebastian Castille

Sebastian Castille was not a man accustomed to the company of death. He was renowned, however, as someone who was comfortable and collected in unfamiliar territory. He gathered his resolve. Sebastian Castille was a navigator.

There were few ports of call on which he had not himself called. He had cut his teeth on the jeweled cities of the Mediterranean. He had learned to walk on storm-swept decks off Cape Verde. He had stolen his first kiss in the spice-scented markets of Baghdad. He had first killed a man over a woman in the streets of Veracruz. He had sailed under the flags of both Spain and Portugal. There was no harbor that was closed to him.

In the Charthouse high atop Mt. Crucis, there was a great atlas. It contained the accumulated knowledge of the

mighty sea-faring nation of Portugal. It was said that any landfall ever made — even those only glimpsed through the haze of great distance, time, or delirium — could be found in the Atlas.

The responsibility for continually updating these voluminous charts belonged to the Piloto Mayor, one of the most powerful men in all of Europe. He was never without the key to the Chartroom, which he wore around his neck on a heavy chain of crude iron links, each as large as a man's fist. Students speculated that the Piloto Mayor must be a man of poetic nature, one who wore this cumbersome chain to remind himself of the burden of his great responsibility.

The chain was actually a reminder of another kind, a souvenir from a land that never appeared in the Atlas — a land that lay hidden at the bottom of the sea. The Piloto Mayor and a novice pilot named Sebastian Castille had unwillingly visited this Realm at the invitation of the Barbary Coast pirates. Those iron links were all that remained of the chains that draped the two men when they were cast overboard.

"Lost your first ship," the Piloto Mayor was fond of recounting. He paused dramatically before the ornate and purely decorative fireplace in the Chartroom. "And I believe your first captain as well, God rest what passes for his soul."

The Piloto Mayor continued ticking off the sausage-like digits of his right hand. "The entire crew, all of the cargo that would not float, and my own roteiros — five years off my very life. You will understand that I could hardly fault the pirates for wanting to drown you. Nor is it any wonder to me that the sea cast you up again."

"My friend," Sebastian said, "You have a rare and morbid flair for the nostalgic."



The Piloto Mayor smiled widely and poured generously, sloppily from a delicate crystal decanter. "You must try," he continued patiently, "to be more careful with your things."

Procurer's Guild

Despite its humble beginnings, the Procurer's Guild has risen to a position of preeminence among the guilds of Portus Crucis. The Procurers are not only the most influential of the five major guilds, they are also the most ready to wield this power to manipulate people and events toward a desired end.

The residents of Portus Crucis are almost entirely without native food supply. This is not to say that the founders did not choose the location of their shipyards with great care. There is no site within the borders of Portugal that offers such a sheltered natural harbor for airgoing vessels. Fresh water, another critical concern for any seagoing venture, is available in great abundance from rainwater and the many mountain springs.

Since the very beginning of the port's history, the citizens have domesticated small herds of the mountain goats that dot the mountainsides. Goat herds keep their flocks penned in high rope corrals among the outskirts of the maze of guide ropes that support the towering city. From these herds, the residents enjoy a steady supply of fresh milk, cream, butter and cheeses.

A few of the hardier breeds of sheep have also been introduced to the rocky grazing land atop the mountain. It is not surprising that the inhabitants of Portus Crucis have always considered mutton a great delicacy. It has become the main ingredient in the stews and meat pies for which the residents quite rightly pride themselves. There is a strong undercurrent of animosity between the shepherds and goat herds who are only too aware of the limited amount of grazing land available to support both professions.

The Procurers rose to their daunting challenge with great ingenuity. Their first step was to secure a trading partner — ideally one whose bountiful supply line was not prone to be cut by warring states, robber-barons, fickle tariffs, flood, famine, snow-locked mountain passes, plague, pirates or any of a dozen other potentially fatal interruptions.

This partner must also be discreet enough not ask too many of the wrong questions.

The Procurers found an ideal match in the Hanseatic League. Although already in their waning years and scarred by decay and corruption, the Hansa were Europe's first true mercantile powerhouse.

Founded in northern Germany, the mysterious and influential Hansa had begun as a humble association of merchants and towns. They cornered the herring market and soon became the sole provider for the entire Baltic region. They were soon a force to be reckoned with — a mercantile league spanning over 100 trading cities.

Consumed with her disputes with neighboring nations, France has never had the opportunity nor the inclination to develop even an organized merchant fleet, much less a navy. Hence, the French ports — even Marseilles, the Mediterranean jewel in the French crown — had a reputation for being unregulated, unscrupulous and unruly.

Nantes was far enough from both the front lines and the king's court to be an ideal port of call. All that remained to make the Procurer's ambitious plan work was a vessel to carry the supplies on the last leg of its voyage. A modest fishing boat could accomplish the trip down the friendly and well-charted coast to Portugal. The final overland stretch, however, posed a nearly insurmountable challenge. Setting aside for the moment the expense of carting a shipload of barrels to the base of the mountain, and the Herculean task of hauling them up the sheer cliff face, the fact remained that such a large and curious expedition could not be carried out with any secrecy.

To meet this final challenge, the Procurers commanded the San Andreas, the Skyrigger prototype — the first and only such vessel to have survived its shakedown voyage. The Procurer's heavy-handed tactics in wresting control of this vessel set the stage for a long-standing animosity between the two groups.

The success of the cloudship's first supply run blunted the edge of this open antagonism, but suspicion and hostilities are rife. The Shipwrights were quick to grasp that as long as the San Andreas continued to bring loaves and fishes to their new mountaintop shipyard, they would be free to work their miracles of wood and canvas. The Procurers also helped ease tensions by commissioning the aerial shipyard's first creation, the cloudship Ambition.

The Procurers take a very active hand in the political struggle that accompanies the announcement of each new expedition from the harbor of Portus Crucis. The guild has a strong prejudice toward trade missions over risky and unprofitable voyages of discovery and conquest. Guildsmen also go to great lengths to ensure that only the most lucrative destinations and routes are plotted.

Although the voice of the Procurer's Guild always urges caution and prudence, it has backed some rather daring expeditions into the unknown when the potential rewards for doing so justify the risk. These speculative ventures have even included a number of remarkable raids to plunder the wonders of the Deep Void. It is rumored that the labyrinthine vaults far beneath the Countinghouse hold marvels and horrors never meant for this world.

Marco de Ravenna

Background: Vicious and conflicting rumors have a way of preceding Ravenna. Evidence suggests that in his younger days, the expatriate Merchant Prince was none other than the Red Lion of Ravenna, one of the most



colorful commanders to emerge from the ceaseless power struggles that ravage his native Italia.

The epithet is thought to arise from Ravenna's unchecked savagery on the field of battle. Sources close to Ravenna, however, nervously dismiss such whisperings and point out that the nickname might just as easily derive from Ravenna's namesake and patron, St. Mark the Evangelist, whose symbol was the lion.

Rumor also has it that Ravenna's meteoric rise to military glory ended suddenly when he was forced to resign his commission after striking the head from an insubordinate officer. Whatever the truth of this incredulous claim, it is certain that he left his homeland under something of a black cloud and, since that time, he has only added to his reputation for intemperance. Ravenna has a fatal attraction toward impossible odds that has earned him a reputation as an infamous gambler, spendthrift and something of a rogue.

He fences with two weapons, in the style of his native Italia, and he is as at home on the field of honor as he is on the field of battle.

Shipwright's Guild

The Shipwright's guild is responsible for all aspects of construction, repair and maintenance of the Skyriggers. No vessel leaves the port without a representative of the guild on board to protect the shipwrights' interests. The ship's carpenter, or shipsman, is a respected member of the crew. In times of crisis, he does not hesitate to take command of repair efforts and to press his fellows into service as well. He is responsible for keeping the vessel shipshape the entire time it is away from port.

The shipsman knows his vessel and its capabilities better than any man alive. The role of shipsman is a lifelong duty. Crews, pilots, even captains, are transferred from vessel to vessel over the course of their careers. The shipsman's bond, however, is unseverable except by death, destruction or disgrace.

All of the shipwrights take an active hand in the design and construction of each vessel. When the new ship's frame is laid out, all of the guildsmen gather at the site. Each casts a nail, its head stamped with its owner's distinctive maker's mark, into the empty pitchbucket. The Harbormaster draws the first nail and hammers it into place, forever joining the newly selected shipsman and his solemn charge.

When the vessel leaves the dry-dock for her shake-down voyage, her shipsman leaves his place at the shipyard, never to return.

The Shipwrights are proud of their handiwork and their history. The first Skyrigger model was conceived and designed at the school at Sagras in the years immediately preceding the death of Prince Henry. Credit for the first workable design belongs to a secretive society within the university, calling themselves the Eye of Horus. The archives of the Shipwright's guild maintains the names of the original 12 masters — renowned shipbuilders, inventors, mathematicians and mystics from across Europe and the Near East who had gathered to study and to teach at the university.

It did not take members of the Eye long to move from a feasible concept to a working small-scale model. They pressed forward with a speed born of desperation. Each expedition returning to the great port of Lisbon brought dire news in those days.

The African coast beyond Cape Verde, which had to everyone's elation turned eastward, now turned to the south again. Hopes were dashed and funding for exploration trickled to a standstill. Africa had not been rounded after all. The coast stretched away south into the insurmountable distance.

Refugees were streaming into Lisbon, fleeing the sack of Constantinople and Athens by the ravaging infidel Turk. Each ship returning from the Mediterranean was packed with as many of the displaced as could bribe, sleep or sneak their way onboard. The one blessing in this steady stream of human misery was the fact that many learned men, well versed in astrology, medicine and the mystic arts, found their way to the school at Sagras.

New Spanish ports were sighted along the African mainland. It was a direct challenge to Portuguese supremacy along the Emerald and Ivory Coasts. Furthermore, tensions between Aragon and Castille, which were so necessary to the security of their tiny neighbor Portugal, seemed to be quenched by the announcement of the betrothal of Ferdinand and Isabella.

The Eye of Horus was aware of the dangers these revelations posed. Perhaps more disturbing were rumors of the waning health of their beloved sponsor and protector. With redoubled intensity, they chased their elusive goal.

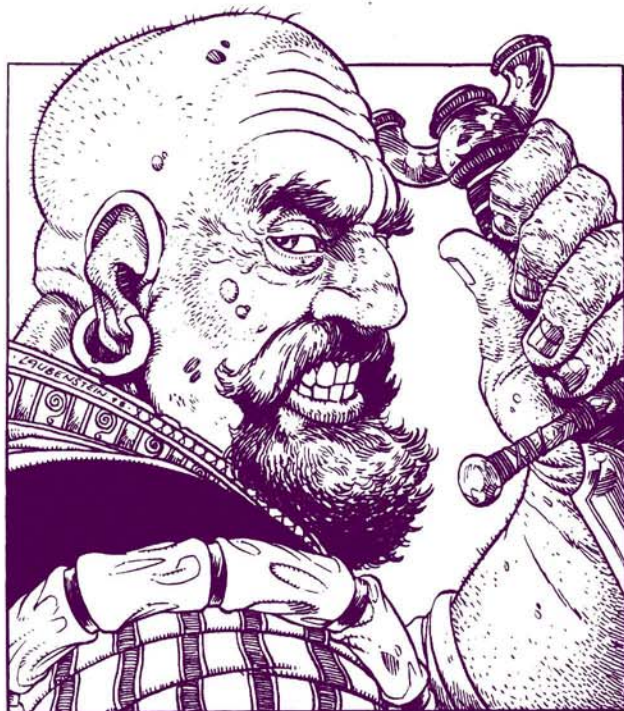
They knew it was folly to even consider constructing a skyship within plain view at the shipyards of Lisbon. The eyes of the entire world were fixed on that harbor. Their plans required a much more secluded locale.

They chose the sight for their first shipyards with care. Far from prying eyes, just off the coast of Western Africa, lay the Azores. This island chain was universally recognized as a possession of the crown of Portugal, but the prince had been unable to carve out a successful foothold there. The main obstacle was the treacherous coastal waters — a fearsome adversary whose domain was marked by one of the largest known ship's graveyards.

It was among the shattered hulls and tilting masts that the Eye of Horus established their covert shipworks.

In that very same year, the Portuguese carrack, *San Andreas*, was reported lost at sea off Cape Verde — a common enough fate in those storm-cursed waters. In reality, this ship, which had been secured through a carefully arranged “mutiny,” was whisked away to the hidden shipyards. The *San Andreas* was fitted with the first skyrig.

The concealed shipyards off the Azores are still an important port for repairing and resupplying the Skyriggers that cannot make it back to Portus Crucis. Despite the difficulties that followed the death of Prince Henry, and despite the repeated attempts by Spain and Portugal to “route out the buccaneers” operating in the vicinity, the shipyard still thrives.



The Azorian shipwrights are well aware of their tenuous position and yet continue to lead the way in pioneering new Skyrigger designs. While the dry-dock at Portus Crucis is fully capable of building ships from scratch, the shipyards off the Azores rely solely on refitting captured vessels. They are particularly proud of their ghostship skyrig, which is a key tool in keeping the curious at bay.

Miquel del Ferrara

Background: Miquel del Ferrara, Captain of the *Belle Donna* and a feared and respected warrior on the high seas, lay awake in his cabin. He listened apprehensively as if trying to recapture the sound of the distant tapping. He caught himself holding his breath and cursed aloud. Angrily, Miquel thrust himself out of bed and stomped up to the main deck.

It had been three nights now since they had lost the shipsman overboard. The Spanish privateers had caught them unawares and the running gun battle that resulted had taken a heavy toll on both ship and crew. And even now, after three nights, Miquel's ears still strained after the sound of that damn tapping. As many times as he had wished Old Tom hanged or drowned, he would have kissed the shipwright full on his toothless, rotting mouth were he to climb back out of the sea this very night.

The ship was badly battered and taking on water. There was no stopping it. It was all they could do to slow it. Even at this hour, Miquel he could pick out the flash of buckets in the moonlight as they were passed from hand to hand.

Miquel slapped the nearest man on the back and called something encouraging down the line. His mind, however, wandered and his hand kept straying to his belt where the handles of sword and pistol customarily protruded. He missed the familiar weight of them. He thought of Old Tom.

“Sometimes I can still feel a twinge in it,” his shipmate would say. He would wave the stump of his right arm, where years before a cannonball had torn the limb clean off. He would lean forward confidingly. “Sometimes, it feels like somebody's shaking my hand. I swear it, I can feel his grip. I don't know who, I don't even know where, but somebody's shaking my hand.”

Old Tom wore a wooden cup over the stump. “So as to always have one handy for drinking or dicing.” He had a disconcerting way of nervously drumming his fingers on the bottom of it. Miquel suspected that Old Tom enjoyed making his shipmates uncomfortable.

At this point, however, even Old Tom's damn rappy tapping would be a welcome distraction.

Politics Shadowy Owners

Each expedition, then, is a potential battleground for interguild struggles. Portside conflict between the Society of Pilots and the Sailor's Brotherhood, for instance, is sure to spill over into suspicions and plotting on the high seas. Conflicts between the Sailors and the Admiralty is fuel for mutiny. Strife between the Shipwrights and Procurers might well end in sabotage, etc.

At the same time, it is important to note that each ship's crew tends to form a very tightly knit unit within itself. Entire crews have been known to follow a charismatic

captain from one ship to another. Men that have fought storm and pirates together are not likely to forget their companions even when many years and subsequent expeditions intervene.

Thus, it is known for a particular pilot and procurer, for example, to challenge the decisions of their respective guilds in order to further their joint interests.

Also, this same sense of shipboard camaraderie can lead to fierce inter-ship rivalries. Portside taverns bolt their shutters when the crews of the *Victoria* and the *Catalina* are in the harbor at the same time. Even within ships of the same expedition, the prudent captain-general insures that there is little mingling between the various crews.

10-Sphere





Chapter III: The Council of Nine

Lord Cabot's Grange: A Test of Trust

"... when the evils that arise have been foreseen (which it is only given to a wise man to see), they can be quickly redressed, but when, through not having been foreseen, they have been permitted to grow in a way that every one can see them, there is no longer a remedy."

— Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Three riders came from the south. One, clad in humble robes that had him mistaken for a priest at times, on a patient gray mare, another garbed as a wealthy noblewoman, on a fine riding horse, and the last on an indifferently handsome but long-winded chestnut gelding. The latter wore a jack of stout leather and a sword was at his side. Wherever they rode, he kept the gelding ahead of the rest, and his eyes were always watchful.

They came to a neat moat that bordered a great house's garden and held their horses steady while two servants opened the heavy gates that barred the single wooden bridge. In those few moments, the woman indicated the place with a gesture. "What make you of this place, as a soldier?" she asked.

Her bodyguard took one more glance. "Pleasant enough," he said, "pretty, but no castle. The moat is fit to delay bandits, but soldiers would bridge it in an hour. The walls are thin, the towers small, and the windows many. A true fortress would be atop that hill, not down here in the valley."

The first rider spoke now, as he did but rarely. "All true," he said, "but some buildings have stronger foundations in men's hearts and in the future than on the earth. Which is what even the Order of Hermes must hope here, my lady. One who we Crowned Ones think most promising tends this crucible — and he promises a strange and gleaming alloy, of dreams and old gods and righteous wrath, if his Great Work succeeds..."

Amidst the Dales

Lord Cabot's Grange is a small and important Covenant that marks a cooperative effort between English Solificati, Verbena and Aided Euthanatoi. Such cooperation is still a new and rare thing, and many Awakened eyes have turned toward this fortified manor house, waiting to observe how the experiment might develop.

Thus, the Grange is clearly a Covenant in Spring, but it is the turbulent, rain-lashed spring of northern England. Even disregarding the likelihood of friction between the various mages of the Covenant, it must deal with the fact that it has become a sometime military headquarters. It shelters not only eccentric alchemists and witches and pagans whose nature has become too widely suspected,

but also furious hunters whose sole concern is the slaughter of members of the Order of Reason.

Some feel that the physical nature of the Grange itself is wrong for its new role, as it is a grand home rather than a rugged fortress. It nestles in a valley, amidst a scattering of ancient standing stones and minor circles whose power is discernible by especially sensitive Verbena and the analyses of the subtlest Solificati. Its owner draws on the material wealth of a well-established wool-farming area, and he was born into a branch of an ancient, noble family. But despite its advantages, the Grange is a turbulent place. Who needs the Order of Reason when your own fellows might be out for your blood?

History

When the Traditions of Britain met in open council, there were those who spoke of building — new hearths and new philosophies. With the Compact of Callias newly brought down from Horizon and proclaimed, there was much talk of working together. With the Decade of the Hunt and the Siege of Stonehenge still recent memories, there was much proclamation of the need for eternal war against the Daedaleans, and more considered speech about the need for strongholds in war.

Amongst all this, an uncertain voice sounded strangely wise. Lord Michael Cabot was considered competent enough by his fellow Solificati, but now his ideas left them bemused. He spoke of the unpredicted strength of alloyed metals. He admitted that he had been in conversation with pagan witch-women on his own estates. He offered a roof for those who might need shelter. A few at least among his listeners chose to accept his offers.

Thus, several rode back with him to his family seat, which was becoming a place of power — a recently rebuilt manor house, not really fortified but defensible against small assaults. They proclaimed the place a sanctuary to the Traditions and to the fae, and they adapted it to its new purpose. Soon, strange riders were passing through Lytton Dale in the night, and strange conferences were taking place by sun and moonlight and by the flares of alchemical forges. The pagan witches of the Dale became advisers to these mystick workings, and wild-eyed followers of old, dark gods took charge of the stables and of strategy.

But Lord Cabot's Grange remains uncertain of its highest purpose. Is it to be a War Chantry, with all that implies of the likelihood of annihilation within a few years? A college of melded powers, pursuing strange lore with little regard for the pressing concerns of the moment. Thus far, the debate on this issue has been courteous — but tempers are being tested, especially as Lord Cabot himself repeatedly counsels caution and restraint to unswerving destroyers.

And whenever visitors come to the house, especially members of the Traditions in good standing, each faction seeks their support.

Surroundings

Lord Cabot's Grange is located in the area where the rolling hills of rural Derbyshire descend to the coastal plain of Cheshire — a region that retains a wild and romantic aspect even in the 20th century, when roads and railways push through the hills, and great ports and industrial towns sit a few miles away in any direction. In the 1400s, this immediate area was given over almost entirely to sheep-farming, and inhabitation is sparse enough that the inhabitants of the Grange may go about their business largely undisturbed.

The Grange sits in the shelter of a steep hill in the valley of Lytton Dale. It lies well off any noteworthy roads, but something about the area — good soil in the valley, a south-facing slope to the hillside above — makes this spot feel pleasantly sheltered and even idyllic. There are many part-fallen ancient stone circles along this valley wall, which are actually Crays. There are no persistent or regular Shallowings in these parts, but there are occasional strange moments. The Solificati of the Grange are seeking to plot any patterns. The Crays do bring forth Tass, but in elusive forms. The advice of local witch-women is helpful in sorting through berries, mushrooms, moss, and spring water for quantities of more than matter.

There are no villages very close to the Grange, although there are many shepherds' cottages round about, with some grouped together in twos and threes. This distance reflects an old tendency in the family to withdrawal into rural seclusion, and it adds to their reputation for eccentricity among other lords. Most nobles prefer to dwell by a decent-sized village with a market to fill their larders and extra hands. Servants from the Grange must make tiresome journeys every few days to keep the larder filled.

The Grange and Grounds

The Grange is a modern building and makes few pretensions to the status of a castle as the mortal world knows such things. Its walls are steep and solid enough, embellished with turrets at each of its four corners, and topped with crenellation, but they are also pierced with numerous windows. (The mundane arts of the Solificati sometimes include glass-making.) The house may be an imposing tower, but it is built of brick and is lightly decorated externally with a little fancy brick-work. Even the turrets and crenellations have the look more of embellishments than of serious defensive measures. (Of course, its true defenses have more to do with the occupants than with the structure.)



The space around it is naturally level and has been smoothed and cleared over the centuries that the Cabots have ruled. Now, there is a square moat and neat gardens, which include a lush herb plot, low hedges shaped to form an enigmatic maze (created to Lord Cabot's own design), and a pleasant walk between rose bushes. There are additional buildings tucked away behind the main tower, both within and outside the moat.

Normal visitors approach along a well-maintained track at most points, which leads to the one bridge across the moat. It is barred with a heavy gate and watched day and night. The bridge itself is wood, made to be dismantled and lifted away in large sections in a few minutes, should a siege be anticipated. Then comes a straight, gravel-strewn path that leads to the front door.

The Main Hall and Kitchen

Most of the ground floor of the Grange consists of a single room — a great hall. It is furnished with simple wooden chairs, stools and tables, and it can swiftly be adapted for use as a dining room or audience chamber. The other main room on this level is a cramped kitchen, which has access to the cool cellar, which is used for food and drink storage. The house has a sophisticated system of chimneys and flues, so cooking smoke is efficiently channeled away.

Living Quarters

These are a jumble of many private rooms, laboratories, and servants' quarters; the latter are smaller and separated from the gentry's living areas, albeit with enough linking doorways to make the servants' jobs easier. Oak paneling is plentiful, especially where the gentry can see. Lord Cabot and most of his guests sleep in grand four-poster beds. The lord's personal quarters, which are sighted immediately above the great hall, are the usual Solificati chaos of valuable ornaments, rare and exotic materials, bizarre alchemical tools, and notebooks. The Three of Lytton Dale share a set of rooms, which are decorated simply. They do not suggest the actual power and status of the occupants.

There is also a small room adjacent to Lord Cabot's quarters, which serves as a communal library.

The Higher Levels

The highest floors of the Grange are used for storage and as accommodation for junior servants. Ceilings here are lower and fireplaces smaller and fewer. However, the entire house is well-made and relatively draft-free by the standards of the age.

There are walkways behind the crenellations that line the roof and stairways that lead up to these "battlements,"

but the Grange is poorly set for defense. It would take too long to deploy troops up here, and keeping them supplied with ammunition would be difficult. However, the decorative turrets at each corner of the building serve as functioning watch towers, and they may be manned if Cabot has cause to expect trouble.

Cabals

The established, Awakened household of the Grange is divided into three cabals. Lord Cabot himself is the master of the place in the eyes of the mundane world, and perforce acts the part in practice much of the time. But, when great matters of policy are to be determined, an informal council, made up of the leading members of the three groups, along with the faerie “ambassador” Celidas, usually convene. Cabot is the acknowledged leader of the place in the eyes of the Traditions, although it is no secret that the Chantry is divided into factions with ideas of their own.

Lord Cabot's Circle (The Scholars of the Wordless Book)

Members: Lord Michael Cabot (Solificati), Nicholas of Norwich (Solificati), Blue John (Verbena), Donal of Mourne (Euthanatos)

Background: When Lord Cabot volunteered his home as the foundation-stone of a new and extraordinary work, helpers and allies formed about him. Nicholas of Norwich is a fellow alchemist and friend of the new leader whose wisdom he values above rubies. Blue John is a minor but admired figure among the pagan covens, and he was inspired by Cabot's impassioned speeches. And the dour, aging Donal of Mourne perceives that destruction will fall on his own folk if the ventures that this English lord proposes are not successful.

Lord Cabot's Circle remains the most influential cabal within the Grange, and its members spend much of their time either dealing with the mundane requirements of the house or representing it before the rest of the Traditions. Time has made friends of the four, and they spend time discussing magickal theory and their views of the world. For this reason, Nicholas refers to them as “The Scholars of the Wordless Book.” He would love to see them grow into something of an academic college. However, this alliance remains a loose one of convenience. It would not be at all hard for circumstances to divide it.

Lord Michael Cabot

Background: Michael Cabot was born the second son of a minor aristocratic house, and grew up with scholarly inclinations. These took him to the University



at Oxford, where he took such lesser, temporary holy vows as were needful to secure his place there. In truth, he was neither especially godly nor inclined to blasphemy. His concern was with natural philosophy, although that led Michael to the somewhat dangerous ground of alchemy. Contemplation of increasing abstruse texts in turn led him to slow-growing awareness of the uncanny. In time, he commenced study under one who was a Solificati. His Awakening looked set to be but a matter of time.

However, Michael would have remained an obscure and peaceable scholar were it not for the fire. By strange coincidence, this fire occurred on the very evening when he returned from Oxford to visit his father and brother out of filial respect. As his horse turned its head into Lytton Dale in the gathering dusk, he saw the flames before him.

Michael's father was already dead by the time he reached the house, for he was killed when the main staircase collapsed. His brother lay dying, having been trapped by flames in a brave attempt to save his parent. Michael mourned and struggled to help organize the firefighters and save what was possible of the house — and somewhere in the course of the evening, he Awoke. Perhaps that is why his Daemon speaks from the midst of a flame.

Fire purifies and reshapes matter — and life.

Image: Lord Cabot's appearance reflects his true age, which is somewhere in his 40s. He is thick-set and not tall and looks very much a scholar. He often looks worried and rarely smiles. He dresses in the good-quality clothes of an aristocrat.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a sincere Christian believer, although your faith is heavily colored by alchemical ideas and would be considered eccentric, to the point of heresy, by a conventional cleric. You do not enjoy the sight of pagans and faeries riding forth from your land to destroy devout Christians, but it may be necessary. The Hunt is surely a flame that is sent to burn certain impurities out of the subtle compound that is the Church (and there is much in the Church that needs repair). This idea sustains you.

You perceive paganism as a moral necessity. If the Church had no rivals, its great work of bearing witness would be lost; thus, paganism is a necessary shadow to Christian faith, without being the foul poison that the Nephandi represent. Still, this idea places pagans in a difficult light. And what is more, you find yourself personally attracted to Jane Woode, a young witch to whom you have given shelter. Having recognized her Awakened soul and magickal power, you must treat her as an equal. It is not that you would otherwise behave like a brutish aristocrat. You are too proud a scholar to succumb to raw lust. But the differences between yourself and Jane — in rank, in faith, and surely in destiny — make the situation difficult indeed.

Quote: *That which is transformed transforms the world. Each of us here will thus undergo transformation — knowing or unknowing. I am concerned that mine own transformation is not fully known to me, for I fear that I am blind.*

The Three of Lytton Dale

Members: Mother Barnes (Verbena), Jane Woode (Verbena), Hilda Charnway (Verbena).

Background: A pagan coven, native to Lytton Dale, who the newly Awakened Lord Cabot identified and subsequently invited into his new Chantry, the Three are not especially powerful — but they are knowledgeable about the land and its magickal and mundane aspects. They have determined to carry themselves with pride, despite their lack of social rank in the mundane world, and despite the fact that some members of the Chantry regard them as only having gained membership by luck rather than by strength or status. To the outside world, they must pass as servants and washer-women in the castle household, but this fact does not worry them; the wise do not concern themselves with surface appearance.

Mother Barnes is the acknowledged leader of the coven. Jane Woode is competent enough in the arts of Life, but she is still young, and Hilda Charnway is little more than an apprentice, although she shows promise in several spheres.

Mother Barnes

Background: Born and raised in the shadow of Lytton Dale, Dillie Barnes took up midwifery, then the art of the wise-woman, and then the old beliefs. With a husband 10 years in his grave and three children safely married off and villages away, the ache in Dillie's bones told her that she had been too slow to teach others what she had learned — but luck brought her clever Jane Woode, and then the promising Hilda Charnway.

All the while, she had heard something of what was befalling in the lands beyond the Dale. Dreams and the words of the occasional wanderer mentioned great councils and fierce hunts — but good fortune and a little art kept Lytton Dale peaceful. Mother Barnes made sure that her apprentices were always respectful to any fae who passed, too. And once or twice such asked for help — but no more than food and a little healing.

Then, as the Three of Lytton Dale went about their work, they sensed a spy near them. Young men from the villages tried such tricks on occasion and were sent on their way with mockery or, if necessary, a little fear. Yet, it was no shepherd-lad, but the new, strange lord of the Dale. This matter might have seemed dangerous, but Mother Barnes looked into the man's eyes and saw a hot fire there.

Perhaps there was danger, but not what Mother Barnes had first thought.

He spoke to them and swore that he would make no prosecution. He even asked questions about their work that were not entirely foolish. Later, he helped their healing, proffering strange and expensive salves rendered out of herbs and spices never seen in the Dale. He used



rituals from musty books. The lord brought others to the Dale — many of them believers in the old ways, albeit with strange and blazing passions in their hearts. And speaking of strange passions, Mother Barnes was no fool. She saw how the lord looked on Jane Woode. (But he is true to his protestations of fairness, and does the girl no wrong.) He even opens his door to the Fair Folk, while showing the sense to ask Mother Barnes how to ensure that such dealings are conducted safely.

And the Dale has been visited by others who are truly mighty in the Craft. Mother Barnes has spoken with Nightshade, who is as deft a priestess as mother has ever met. She likes the woman, although like too many these days, Nightshade seems too taken with vengeance. And what good did vengeance ever do?

Image: Mother Barnes has never learned to control her own aging. She may lack the power, or perhaps it just never occurred to her. She is an elderly woman, wrinkled and wizened, but still passably spry. She wears plain peasant dresses. She goes sky-clad for major ceremonies and workings but regards it as pretentious (and cold) at other times — and she has no time for pretension.

Roleplaying Hints: Let it never be said that the Three of Lytton Dale did not know how to conduct themselves in fine company. You may be old, with aches in your bones, but you have not outgrown your manners — and you know how to be polite without treating anyone as anything but an equal. You do not talk a great deal because you wish to make your words valuable and valued. Above all, you are a pragmatist.

Strange days in Lytton Dale, though. Strange days indeed.

Quote: *You may call it the Sphere of Life. I call it a comfrey poultice. And I call this boy a damned fool for not coming to us sooner.*

The Blazing Spear-Shaft

Members: John Carpenter (Euthanatos), Maire Jones (Euthanatos), “Lord” Celidas (Sidhe of House Fiona).

Background: It was always agreed that Lord Cabot’s Grange should serve to sustain the embattled Ancient Powers of England — or be a mystick fortress from which the struggle for survival could be prosecuted. Thus, the Hunt claims the right of riding forth from this place. The hunters needed immediate aid and strategic thinking, and they left some of their number around the hearth. A cabal formed that represented their interests.

The Blazing Spear-Shaft consists of whichever vengeance-minded pagans or fae happen to be in residence at the moment. However, the permanent members of the cabal are two Aided Euthanatoi who have accepted the arcane role of strategists, advisors and prophets of Destruc-

tion. As the Chantry came to make common cause with the faerie folk, Celidas, a sidhe representative, came to the house. Because of what he represents, he has come to be treated as a member of the Spear-Shaft.

This cabal is wild and deadly. It exists for vengeance and slaughter. Even the other pagans in the house find it frightening. However, its determination and acknowledged importance, and the patronage of the honored Mistrudge Verbena councilor Nightshade, make the Blazing Spear-Shaft hard to defy.

John Carpenter

Background: John Carpenter was born into a humble family of craftsmen in the city of Winchester, in the cozy houses that huddle round a great cathedral in the shadow of a great royal castle. However, in the hidden cellar of a neighbor’s house, the child John found an older, stranger thing — power and faith. The secret priest who tended the ancient shrine took to the lad and taught him about the great wheel of life and death.

John believed devoutly in what he heard; it appealed to his sense of rightness. Over the years, he rose in the councils of the faith, ever declaring that he served the Wheel. He rode with the Hunt and he spoke of its justice. At length, he came to Lord Cabot’s Grange to speak for the needs of destruction and to plot strategy. The Hunt is less active now, but the wheel continues to turn...

If you asked Carpenter where his faith lies, he would answer, justice. But for him, justice is hard to distinguish from retribution, and retribution is little different than bloody revenge. He believes that life is a wheel that turns and crushes those who have destroyed. And for a pagan,



he has a strong sense that every human being is guilty of some great sin. He sees the Decade of the Hunt as retribution for Wyndgarde's March, and not something that needs justification beyond that. At heart, John probably suspects that General Wyndgarde was an agent of retribution for some past wrong.

Image: Carpenter is a great, shaggy, unshaven bull of a man who looks more like a blacksmith than a priest. In battle, he wields heavy hammers or axes — or Forces magick. He does not hide his feelings unless he has to, although growing up as a pagan in a Christian town made him an adequate liar if he needs the skill. He dresses plainly, although his clothes are usually new and well-made.

Roleplaying Hints: You are not a politician by nature, but you hold that it is your duty to argue for justice, and your stubborn convictions enable you to wear down subtler opponents in debate. You do what you feel you *should*, claiming the full rights and privileges of the Chantry without concerning yourself whether it has been agreed on by others. Thus, the Chantry often finds itself pursuing the interests of the Hunt, whatever its other members thought was policy.

You have never yet considered violence against others of the Chantry, but if you ever thought that they were opposing justice, you would not discard the idea.

Quote: *Aye, death is fair, by and large. What gives you the right to set your wants against the balance of night and day?*

“Lord” Celidas

Background: Celidas (woe to anyone calling him “Lord” in his presence) is an aged sidhe indeed, remembering even the darkness and fall (as he sees it) of the Celts throughout the early Middle Ages.

Celidas was one of the Tuatha de Danann in name and position, a feared and revered faerie warrior known and sung about throughout the isles, particularly in his beloved Snowdonia, where he approached the status of the native tribe's god. As a noble and honorable warrior, he became identified with the protection of the land, and both he and his mortal followers sallied forth on many occasions to protect their domain from invaders. Thus, when the Christianized tribe of the Briganti began to encroach on the lands of the Celide, they fought and ensured their downfall and Celidas' future.

Their resistance meant that they were wiped out by the forces of the Briganti in a battle so minor that it was not even recorded. Their protector was doomed to a much worse fate: hearing the name chanted by the warriors as they rushed to battle, the soldiers of the Briganti brought back news of a god in the hills who

encouraged his followers to fight to the death against invaders. The monks of Saint Columbia, employed at that time in the task of converting that entire stubborn land to their new religion, responded in the same way that they did to tales of the pagan gods: They suppressed and destroyed them.

In 50 years, the name of Celidas was not spoken or sung in any of the ancient sagas or tales. Not even in the Mabinogion does it survive. In that time, the name of Celidas was destroyed.

He survived as many of the sidhe did by hiding in the hills, collecting Glamour where he could. Most of his kind departed for Arcadia, but for reasons neither they nor he understood, he stayed, observing the growth and change of the peoples and way of life he had loved. Many might have imagined that Celidas would hate those who did that to him and would seek revenge. Yet, he did not. Perhaps because as he watched over the centuries he saw the conquerors he hated and the people he loved become one in the same. Or perhaps because he understood the difference between the past and the present.

Now, though, he sees another force coming, *another* that seeks to destroy tales and honor. He won't fight against those who destroyed him before, but those who seek to destroy others now? Aye, those he fights.

Image: A sidhe lord in all his power. Celidas does not bother to hide either his nature or his Glamour, and his appearance alone has been enough to startle whole rooms of arguing mages into silence. He sometimes seems to blaze with light, his clothes are of finest silk, and he carries a long Celtic sword at all times. He moves with the deadly lightness of one of the finest sidhe warriors.



In personality, he is unpredictable and often touchy: His code of honor and his sense of insult are strange even by fae standards, and he ignores statements or insults, particularly those that gibe his name and rank — that would have the speaker butchered by any other noble, human or fae, while erupting into a terrifying rage at apparently innocuous things.

Celidas is quick to rage, and equally quick to calm and forgive. However, by that time it is often too late, and the mages in the Grange have learned to step extremely carefully around *this* powerful but unpredictable ally.

Roleplaying Hints: You are mercurial and unpredictable in most things, to the point where many humans and some fae find you unsettling and frightening. However, you are a compassionate, forgiving and reasonable individual who has given up the thought of revenge against a foe whom most would hate for the rest of their lives. In general, you look to the future, but with a substantially different and ruthless viewpoint to most mages.

When interacting with you, characters should never feel they are entirely safe. You may by turns be gentle and forgiving, ignoring a massive insult or risking your life to help a peasant child on the road, only to verbally or even physically assault someone seconds later for a slight that others didn't even notice.

Quote: "Yes, we should all be prepared to sacrifice our lives — as I am — even for a mundane child." (Seconds later.) "We must kill them all."

Consors and Servants

The Grange can muster a full working household, although the numbers are slightly lower than might be expected for a manor of this size — about 15 servants in total — as the resident mages are accustomed to self-reliance. Of course, Lord Cabot has had to ensure that the servants he retains or employs are willing to tolerate association with his strange household. Fortunately, he has an excellent steward, John Welland, an old family retainer, who advises him well. The Three of Lytton Dale are well-acquainted with most families in the area and know exactly who shows tolerance for pagan ways. An additional number of shepherds are employed by the estate, but they live in cottages up and down the valley. They can be called on for any short-term project requiring additional labor, and they are mostly loyal enough to warn Cabot of any strangers they see lurking.

Most servants are men, but some are married or otherwise part of families. Their spouses do not live in the Grange, and some divide their time between the great house and cottages in the Lytton Dale village. There are no full-time men-at-arms, although some of the grooms are competent longbowmen and own some

scraps of armor. If the place came under frontal assault, they and the mages would have to hold off the attack until allies from the Traditions and fae are summoned.

The only servants in the place to have serious authority in the household and estate are Welland and a butler. The latter, along with the cooks and brewer, are used to strange interference in their work by the lord and his friends.

Politics

Although the divisions within Lord Cabot's Grange are more potential than active, the great danger is that they cut right through the resident cabals. They manifest in arguments over policy, but these arguments grow more heated every week.

On the one hand are those who see the place as the headquarters of the Hunt and the work of the Hunt as far from finished. This faction includes the Blazing Spear-Shaft, who count on support from Donal of Mourne. However, the older Euthanatos feel weary of slaughter and foresee a need for peace as well as a threat of destruction. The Verbena feel sympathy for this opinion, although individuals from this Tradition within the Chantry are not hunters by nature. As for Celidas — he is fae, and his ideas of the world are others' frenzied dreams. He represents the Hunt, but none feels safe anticipating his sympathies.

The obvious opponents of this view are those who would make the Grange into a place of scholarship, such as Nicholas of Norwich. Cabot wishes to use the Chantry as a means of examining all aspects of magick, and of merging those elements that seem compatible. Such elements include devotion to the Wheel, but the first thing to do is to study.

The Three of Lytton Dale find themselves in agreement with this idea. They are uncomplicated rural wise-women at heart, and although they are pagans who recognize the Verbena as their sisters, they are used to the idea of merging whatever ideas accomplish their ends. Their rituals include recognizable Christian fragments, and they are willing to learn of new medicines from the Solificati. They find the pure, ancient beliefs of the Aided Euthanatoi, with their invocation of dark old Celtic powers, unnerving. Even Blue John finds these three witches a little lax. In any case, they have known the lord as a friend (of sorts) longer than they have known these others. The pagans of the Grange are by no means united.

And lastly, to add to the confusion, the Grange is open to visitors, who are likely to find themselves drawn into its debates (and its potential internal battles). The most likely eventuality is for the Blazing Spear-Shaft to press for some great military project with the ominous

support of a passing war party, but visiting Solificati or Heretic scholars are as likely to find Nicholas of Norwich publicly asking them to support his ideas, or to agree with him that war parties striking directly from this area are likely to draw Daedalean attention to this small and lightly defended house.

Future Fates

From *A Walking Guide to Northwest England*, 1996:

"...Further up the valley are handful of shattered brick walls; to reach these, the path passes over a partly-filled ditch. This is all that remains of the moated house from which the Cabot family once ruled this area as feudal lords.

"Lytton Dale Grange was clearly an impressive building; some accounts from the Tudor period suggest that it was even comparable to Hardwick Hall, or Lord Cromwell's tower at Tattershall, although it may not quite have matched the scale of either. Evidently, the Dale's sheep were a profitable business. However, the prosperity that built the Grange seems, ironically enough, to have destroyed it a little later; when it fell into disuse in Elizabethan times, bricks from its walls were apparently used to build shepherds' cottages on what used to be its estate. The last of the Cabot family moved out of the remnant of the house that they were still occupying after a fire in Civil War times; they had taken the Royalist side, which must have wrecked any chance of their regaining prosperity.

"There are also faint traces of a couple of stone circles, further along the way, but it took aerial surveys to confirm this. One or two of those shepherds' cottages have substantial slabs of stone in their structure, which has lead historians to suspect that these Stone Age ruins, too, were assailed for building materials."

Doissetep: Jewel of the Ancients, Fortress of the Aethyrs



Alamantrah stood as still as the stone gargoyles amongst the battlements atop the soot-black tower. Around him, the elements seethed with grandeur and fury, unnoticed by the wizard. A thousand conversational bids were considered and discarded, as the one he had sent for approached. As the

younger magus ascended the final steps to the lofty perch, Alamantrah alighted on his gambit.

"Porthos, a matter of some concern ails me. Your name drew mention as one possessing both the honor and discretion requisite to the task." Alamantrah saw the suspicion rise in the haunted eyes of the Adeptus. The elder magus smiled gravely and continued, his beguiling golden eyes reflecting only worry. "You are aware that many Magisters keep liveried servants, eschewing those of the Covenant proper. It is a matter of law that even the leaders of Doissetep may not intercede between a master and those forsworn to him. Even the offspring of those in livery are bound to such a relationship until they reach majority."

Porthos' eyes lit with bitter fire at the mention of children, but he remained silent. Alamantrah immediately knew that the scheme would be successful. Fitz Empress had lost his family scant decades before. It left a weakness by which others might exploit the promising Hermetic.

"Brother, it is with heavy heart that I must reveal that there exists within the Covenant a certain Magister Templi of House Guernicus whose foul proclivities have come to light. I can take no official action to safeguard the offspring of those in his employ. Should the little one be mysteriously liberated I would owe you a debt of gratitude."

As Porthos warmed, the older wizard elaborated the details and silently planned his next move. He had been assured that the whelps had been enchanted to believe their Quaesitor lord had subjected them to cruel lusts. If Alamantrah were fortunate, the judge would never know what caused the disappearance of his youthful subjects. Of more import was that Porthos, who was himself not far from mastery, would be accustomed to service. He would seek, for reasons of honor and habit, to expedite the "good faith" of Alamantrah and his co-rulers.

Heart of the Order

Before humans began recording history, Doissetep was a prize coveted by the greatest of sorcerers. Now it stands, raised to the Aethyrs and unconquerable, as the seat of the Order of Hermes' might. Power surges like life's blood through the corridors. The ancient Covenant is enjoying the first flowerings of a second Spring, nurtured by the blood of those who have given their lives in the stronghold's defense.

While many magi of Doissetep, particularly the sorcerers of House Flambeau, seek to do battle with the Order of Reason, war is by no means the primary goal of the Covenant. Most believe that the Hermetics as a whole must consolidate their power before seeking out enemies. Recruitment is a major aspect of this effort. Tytalan enchanters comb both university and village in

search of promising apprentices. Great pains are taken to ensure that Doissetep remains in contact with all Hermetic holdings on Earth. Neither do the magi overlook the advantages of temporal power. Not only do the ritualists seek an iron grasp on universities and the growing merchant class, but monarchs and nobles make tempting targets of domination. Not all of the wizards' endeavors are tactical in nature. Members of Houses Boniassus and Verditius lead the way in expanding the boundaries of magick itself. Unhampered by the forces of disbelief, these practitioners of the **Great Art** experiment. Such mighty feats would surely draw the Scourge of God were they not performed in the Realm of Thunder and Twilight. Though greatly removed from Earth, the mysticks of Doissetep do show concern for the lot of the common man and woman. Many sojourn to the villages of their birth to improve crops and cure plague.

Doissetep was moved from the Pyrenees to the Vadum of Forces scant years ago, and the new Otherworldly Realm is far from settled. Nature runs riot here with a violence inimical to all life. The great mountain on which the ominous castle sits is shielded from the elemental chaos that reigns over the Aethyric world. The fortress itself is squat and foreboding, but new construction promises to add a fantastical element to the ancient structure.

Few Hermetics can restrain themselves from occasional bouts of intrigue. The masterful statecraft of the Chamber of Deacons, which holds absolute authority over the Covenant, ensures the stability of the great aerie. No move escapes the magister lords' scrutiny, and they excel at turning the plots of lessors to their advantage. Many matters are at flux within the labyrinthine corridors of Doissetep; however, the velvet glove and iron fist of the leadership ensures the Covenant's continuing legacy.

Recent Events

In the past two years (1448-1450), the forces of fate have spun a tapestry of changes for the Antediluvian Covenant. Not since the Order of Hermes took Doissetep in the ninth century has the mystic stronghold withstood such upheaval.

Just two years prior, many feared that the ancient edifice would fall. The Grand Chancery, elected by convocation of Doissetep magisters, was crippled by internal descent. That strife allowed several of the more influential cabals to intrigue for more power. Embattled, the ruling tribunal was forced to give concessions to the ambitious factions. The Grand Chancery was composed of only a single magus from each of the three most powerful houses of the time: Boniassus, Quaesitor, and Regnatus. The Fraternal Order of Guernicus, a cabal of

Quaesitor high arbiters, placed one of their number on the ruling council a mere fortnight before the Daedalean attack in 1448. The placement of a second Quaesitor galvanized the rank and file of the Covenant against its leadership. Although no sect had the will or support for open rebellion, the masters of Doissetep had no hope of stemming the tide of intrigue against them.

Rumors abound that a Doissetep cabal conspired to aid the Order of Reason's fateful assault. Scant evidence has come to light. Many attach religious significance to the **calamitous results** of the Covenant's first and only attempt to sally forth during the siege. As the Hermetic host was getting ready between the outer and inner walls of the Pyrenees castle, the Grand Chancery reviewed the troops. Daedalean archers, armed with English longbows, charged well within the demonstrated range of Flambeau's sorcerers militant. The Prometheans suffered far more casualties than the wizards in the assault; however, Doissetep's ruling council numbered among the few dead.

Only days before the attack, a secret Quaesitor tribunal was convened to hear evidence of infernalism implicating Chancellor Thaler, Primus of House Regnatus. While those charges were never proven, a host of lesser charges were successfully levied. Its Primus disgraced, the entire house soon fell into obscurity. House Regnatus had first risen to power within the Order as king-makers of the Common World. After their fall, however, the other houses divided the fallen sect's dominion amongst themselves. Those who had once been powers behind the throne soon found their Collegium disbanded in favor of a house that had previously been under the banner of ex Miscellania.

Out of the ashes of the fallen Grand Chancery, a new ruling council, the Chamber of Deacons arose with vigor. Few in the Covenant dared contest the new leader's claim to power. The magus lords, all luminaries within their respective houses, inspired a terrible nameless dread in their rivals. When Deacon Primus Alamantrah *bani* Flambeau addressed his fellow sorcerers with an angelic host attendant on him, only the most skeptical amongst the audience doubted his divine right to the office. Moreover, Doissetep's new leadership offered hope of survival. Rumors circulated that for months prior to their ascension, the ruling cabal had acted as a shadow court, organizing the grand design of transporting the castle to the Otherworlds. The chamber did propose that titanic feat as their plan to lift the Daedalean siege. Immediately, the Hermetic forces divided into two groups. One group was prepared to raise the fortress to the Aethyrs, proceeding with mysterious efficiency and great haste. The other wizards manned the battlements and defended the walls against the terrible contraptions of the Prometheans.

By the Summer, a breach of the castle walls seemed imminent. The Daedalean siege weapons exacted a grave price from defenders. Many wizards, once dismissive of the craft-mages, feared that these upstarts would prevail. Finally, the main force of the Prometheans was brought to bear in a final assault. Enduring terrible losses, they scaled the outer wall and slew all they found there. As the Gabrielite advance guard surged forth on the inner defenses, the heavens split and Doissetep castle began to rise from its earthly moorings. Many amongst the Cabal of Pure Thought were in awe at the spectacle. Those of the other Conventions, however, pressed the attack. Volunteers for the Hermetic rear guard were passed over in favor of political opponents of the chamber. These hapless rivals were left on the battlements of the inner wall with a motley of consors and mercenaries. As the mercenaries attempted surrender, the Order of Reason struck savagely, slaughtering all and razing the remains.

The Covenant met the challenges of the Vadum of Forces with valor and the unconquerable will of the Magus Rex. The greatest mountain of the Realm was quieted from its violent rumblings by weary magisters. Many of the younger sorcerers quested for and found great sites of power. Other wizards traveled to the Umbral Courts, securing compacts of amity and elemental defenders for the fortress.

The Chamber of Deacons did not hesitate to shore up its successes. The Covenant charter was rewritten and ratified. The new charter expanded the powers of the ruling council, making them closer to princes than magistrates. The price of these privileges was that the membership of the elite was to be expanded to include a single representative from each house. The ruling tribunal, however, has been slow to enact this last edict. The process of selection began at due pace, but the chamber has rejected the nomination of any magister who opposes policies already in place.

As of 1450, only one house has successfully raised a member to the chamber. Several other houses grumble at the delays but appear to be mere months from seating a representative. House Quaesor, which held such a preponderance of power within the Grand Chancery, is a noted exception. Guernicus has nominated half a dozen magisters, all of whom are neutral toward the ruling council. The Deacons have suggested several more positively disposed candidates, with little result. Tensions mount, but both sides are committed to preventing their disagreement from weakening the Covenant as a whole. Most Hermetics predict a resolution to the impasse only after the other houses have seated a magus amongst Doissetep's leadership.

The Land of Thunder and Twilight

Although Doissetep is protected from all but the greatest perils of the Vadum of Forces, the Realm itself is under the dominion of nature, not sorcerers. Lightning constantly tears the sky and lashes the blackened infertile soil. Mighty gales threaten to flay flesh from bone in an unending series of hurricanes and tornadoes. Terrible quakes tear mountains from their seats as new peaks arise from the earthen crust. Many of these natural giants spew deadly ash, covering their treacherous cliffs with a desolate gray blanket.

Although no life has adapted to meet the harsh demands of the Realm, a wide variety of spirits inhabit the region. Some appear to be very simple entities embodying elemental and other natural forces. The more sophisticated spirits serve the Umbral Courts. Occasionally, Doissetep's sorcerers seek an audience with these greater Umbrood, but only the wisest of magi can fathom the arcane maneuverings of Heaven's hosts.

The inhospitality of the Realm is a source of some enmity between magisters and their underlings. Only the most accomplished or well-prepared of wizards can venture into the Otherworldly hellscape and remain safe. Servants, disciples and some adepts are trapped within the castle for their own well-being. To move safely outside requires the escort of a magister or the protection of an Adeptus skilled at manipulating the natural forces.

Doissetep Castle

The ebony fortress squats atop its mountain like an enthroned titan. New construction surrounds the ancient edifice, however, creating an incongruous effect around the bastion of the Order. Slender new spires have begun a laborious ascent to the heavens. The new structures, while dark of color and gargantuan in scale, have little of the ominous nature that the older portions of the castle exude. The new towers are reminiscent of fairy tales.

The heart of the structure is constructed of battered black stone and is two cubits thick at the weakest point. Strange colors from the unearthly sky play across the courtyard. The giant iron gate retreats slowly in an agonizing scream of metal on metal.

The majority of the interior is gloomy and austere. The few wall hangings are obscured by the passing of centuries. Icy air, devoid of moisture, protects the innumerable libraries of the Covenant from premature doom. Less populous portions of the castle suffer vast drifts of

dust and cobwebs. Torches magically crafted to last for years burn with a green flame, illuminating the hallways with an eerie glow.

The Hall of Convocation

Gigantic pillars of polished marble dominate this audience hall in the center of the castle. Decisions that effect the entire Order are made from here. All Hermetic convocations are held in and around this room. Likewise, the Chamber of Deacons meets here for all but the most private of discussions. A vestige of more barbaric times, a great Certamen circle is inlaid into the marble and gold floor. The high vaulted ceiling provides a clear luminescence far superior to the torches lining the corridors. Tapestries leaven the austerity of the hall and remind viewers of past glories.

The catacombs

The silent labyrinthine passageways and forgotten chambers of Doissetep's low reaches are seldom explored. This subterranean expanse contains a portal to Earth, however. Visitors are usually transported directly to the castle proper after their arrival. Intruders find only a daunting maze. Wards have been placed on the gateway itself, alerting the Covenant's defenders of all guests. Thus, invaders can expect to encounter a number of deadly obstacles within the catacombs before reaching well-prepared wizards above.

The Powers that Be

Although Doissetep lost some of its precious membership during the Daedalean siege, the Covenant is still one of the largest in existence. Currently 8 cabals reside here. The agendas of these groups vary. Some crave the power of the chamber but lack the strength to claim it. Others merely wish to consolidate the Order's or their own might. However, no two cabals truly agree as to how to go about this task.

Court of the Dragon Ascendant

Members: Deacon Magistra Maeve Diannis *bani* Tylalus, Deacon Primus Magister Mundi Alamantrah *bani* Flambeau, Deacon Magister Erling Damask *bani* Boniassus, Deacon Magister Lord Auguste d'Aiguillon *bani* Mercere, Magister Cosimo Borgia *bani* Tylalus, Magister Xenophon *bani* Tylalus, Adeptus Silvano Auric *bani* Flambeau, Adeptus Adamantios *bani* Flambeau

Background: The mighty Court of the Dragon counts four of the five Deacons among its membership. The cabal's agenda has changed several times over the decade that its member magi have been collaborating. At its founding, the wizardly coven sought mysteries of the Umbral Courts. Its



Otherworldly quests met with success, and much sorcerous lore of practical use was discovered. By this time, however, Doissetep was suffering under weak rulership and greedy magisters. Perceiving a chance for true power in the Covenant, the cabal formed a shadow court and set the stage for their own ascendancy.

As the ruling elite, the Dragon Court keeps a careful vigil over its subjects. While the Deacons pursue individual agendas, they cooperate amongst themselves and rule well for fear of revolt. Cabal members who have not been raised to the chamber spend much of their time reviewing the great volumes of information gleaned by Maeve's twin spy networks. No one in Doissetep can avoid such dread scrutiny; however, the ruling council avoids overusing such misbegotten knowledge. After all, lack of subtlety can cause heads to roll.

The Drua'shi – Seekers of Truth

Members: Magister Andras Locere *bani* Mercere, Adeptus Regimius *bani* Mercere, Adeptus Valery d' Agneau *bani* Ex Miscellania, Adeptus Aleksandr Koziol *bani* Ex Miscellania, Adeptus Fausto Verri *bani* Ex Miscellania

Background: The members of this promising cabal seem to have an altruistic commitment to strengthen the Order of Hermes as a whole. The Drua'shi have a number of accomplishments to boast of, including assisting in the creation of several smaller Covenants and an important role in Doissetep's defense during the Promethean's initial attack in 1448. The Seekers' motivations are colored more by the desire for personal glory than inherent nobility.

After the Mistridge Tribunal, the Drua'shi began to concentrate their efforts on enlisting sorcerers of rival Traditions. Attempting to follow in Baldrick La Salle's footsteps has brought little reward for the cabal. La Salle seeks allies for a common cause. The Seekers, in contrast, pursue dominion over what they see as lesser magi. While the sheer knowledge and resources of the Doissetep magi is impressive, other mystics are simply unwilling to accept servitude.

The Fraternal Order of Guernicus

Members: Adjudicator Magister Mundi Aurelius *bani* Quaesitor, Magister Domingos De Queiroz *bani* Quaesitor, Magister Gheorghe Vasilache *bani* Quaesitor, Magister Maximino *bani* Quaesitor

Background: Scant years ago, this fraternity wielded tremendous power within both the Covenant and the Order. Although still vastly influential and centuries old, the Doissetep branch of the group has suffered severe

setbacks recently, and its membership is on the decline. Even pessimists believe that House Guernicus is to gain its seat in the Chamber of Deacons. But the ruling council is diligently reallocating the cabal's base of power in the meantime. The Deacons are not so bold as to attempt to strip away any of the Praetors' judiciary authority, however.

The Order of Guernicus has all but conceded any hopes of controlling Doissetep in the near future. They do, however, have designs on the Judicium Hermeticum (the council ruling over the entire Order of Hermes) itself. The archmagus Aurelius has held a chair on that vaunted tribunal for a half-century. The cabal has no plans to put a second member in such a seat of power, fearing the outrage such a feat might instill. Instead, the judges seek to gain influence through blackmail and other nefarious means. They have even discussed the possibility of threatening the compatriots and families of Judicium members. Calmer heads among the fraternity balk at such villainy.

Children of Pythagoras

Members: Adeptus Porthos Fitz-Empress *bani* Flambeau, Adeptus Milovan Djuric *bani* Ex Miscellania, Adeptus Panagos *bani* Flambeau, Adeptus Rashepses *bani* Boniassus, Discipulus Gotfried Holst *bani* Verditius, Discipulus Hugh Wickham *bani* Ex Miscellania

Background: Many of the more established Cabals consider the Children of Pythagoras to be a group of youths. But most of the Children are about 40, youthful only in the jaded eyes of Doissetep's centenarians.

The Pythagoreans have distinguished themselves by solving problems that have plagued the Covenant for centuries. Whether it be settling age-old disputes or finding the vital clue that allows an elder Boniassus to continue his research, the cabal brings new insight to ancient impasses. The niche seems to fit the Children's agenda perfectly: They gain a chance to prove themselves in the eyes of the Order, while not becoming mired in Doissetep's Byzantine politics. Some members have dreams of claiming power, but none wishes to enter such a dangerous arena now.

Lords of the Chamber

The chamber currently holds unprecedented power over the Covenant. Almost nothing escapes the notice of the combined expertise of the Tytalan and Mercere spy networks. The Deacons of Flambeau and Tytalus personally control the greatest masters of Certamen in the Order. Even the Judicium Hermeticum, whose sovereignty eclipses Primus La Salle, is influenced by the lords of Doissetep.



Deacon Magistra Maeve Diannis bani Tytalus

Maeve was born under the name Ninette Augereau, the eldest child of a minor French noble house. As is the custom, she was passed over for titles and positions of power in favor of her brothers. Wise beyond her years, she was certain that she could make better use of the opportunities given to her brethren. Instinctively, the girl sought out Lawrence, who was a retired tutor who lived in a small cottage on the manor. Impressed by her spirit, Lawrence gave Maeve lessons in history, politics and accounting. He also engaged her in debates over philosophy, morals and strategy, and so Maeve's mind grew to be keen and quick. Lawrence always claimed he sensed a "destiny" in Maeve.

Maeve Awakened in the aftermath of a tragedy that befell her family. Mercenaries of a rival family broke into the keep in the dead of a winter night, slaughtering the family and ransacking the house. The household servants who escaped scattered. The only other survivors were Maeve and her youngest brother Michaut.

Lawrence, actually a magus from the Order of Hermes, was questing to find the perfect apprentice. He found that disciple in Maeve, who learned even more swiftly outside the confines of her parents' home. She seemed to show no grief for the loss of her family and progressed swiftly from novice to Adeptus. Soon after arriving at Doissetep, she took on her Irish name. She believed it created associations with the wild Verbena in the mind of her compatriots. Hermetics never admitted to being

intimidated by the wild nature mystics, but the new name engendered a modicum of unspoken respect.

As she approached adulthood, Maeve's interests began to develop most keenly in the arts of strategy in magickal warfare. Though she adored and respected Lawrence, she sought lessons from many Cabals amongst the Order. Ever desirous of challenge, she amused herself with pranks on members of Tytalus, who were reputed to be ever prepared for attack. Her schemes brought her acknowledgment and grudging respect from the house. She became a member.

Maeve was a terror as she clawed through the Tytalan ranks. The pranks she engaged in as a Zelator grew into deadly games of misdirection. Those who dismissed or opposed her soon lost all that was dear to them. Other strategists of the house learned to fear her cunning and to dread her terrible mental puissance. Those who were slow to learn were quickly suborned to her will.

Maeve is now Deacon of House Tytalus. She adheres adamantly to the customs of the house. Disciples and adepts are required to be well-versed in the ways of combat, both magickal and physical. Students are regularly tested in surprise combat drills, and punishment is severe for the student who does not take such drills seriously. Maeve engages gifted adepts in combat. She knows from personal experience that an attack may come at any time, and so one must be forever vigilant.

Maeve maintains a spider's web of trusted spies. She utilizes powerful scrying and thought-theft spells to maintain the honor of these agents and the veracity of their reports. Through Mercere Deacon, she has secret access to one of the greatest networks of informants in the world. Having proven herself the equal of any magister, the sorceress is content with her position amongst the Covenant's elite. Should someone jeopardize her hard-won privileges, however, there is no telling what she will do.

Maeve remains close to Lawrence, who is her primary advisor and trusted confidante. Word has reached her of the possibility that her brother is still alive, now aged to infirmity. She desires to visit him in the near future, but she feels bound to Doissetep for the duration of the changes that the ancient hold must endure. Maeve's greatest fear is that her brother might be taken by the Order of Reason and will one day be used as a pawn against her.

Appearance: Maeve appears as a young woman of wiry physique. She has a thick mane of mahogany hair. She dresses in a blending of men's and women's clothing, designed to provide the best aspects of comfort and practicality.

Roleplaying Hints: You are determined and you project supreme confidence. Strategies and contingency plans come naturally to you. Never enter a situation

unprepared. You are willing to listen to others' ideas but have little patience for foolishness.

Word: Sapienza (Latin: wisdom. Maeve seeks perfect knowledge of all things temporal. She believes that only through this knowledge is it possible to apprehend matters beyond mere human understanding.

Quote: *You think the Daedaleans care if you've had your supper, Adept? I'm telling you to fight! Now!*

Deacon Primus Magister Mundi Alamantrah bani Flambeau

Background: Born in Antioch amid the slaughter and flames of the Crusades, the dread wizard Alamantrah has ever been a creature of war, a bastard child of infidel rape. Because of the disgrace, his Islamic mother left him to fend for himself at an early age. Life as an outcast amidst the ravages of war was fraught with a thousand perils, but the canny youth quickly learned to predict the tactics of both Crusader and Saracen factions.

Although true childhood had already been stolen by conflict, the youth who would become Alamantrah found his Path before he could rightly be called a man. On the outskirts of the Byzantine Empire, he discovered a hermit sage willing to take him on as an apprentice. The hermit rarely resorted to sorcery, but he was an expert on many subjects, including goetia. Soon Alamantrah had learned all that the sage was willing to teach of the black arts. However, he remained with his teacher and his library for several years afterward. In time, a new wave of Crusaders pierced the veil of illusion surrounding the remote dwelling of both sage and apprentice. Caught unprepared, the youth was forced to flee while his elder was robbed and murdered.

The young sorcerer joined a band of mercenaries. No longer would he remain victim to greater powers. He resolved to be the master of his own fate, and such mastery requires power. He clawed his way to suzerainty of the rough force, but his last vestiges of sentiment died in the pillage and plunder of soldierly life. As leader, the magus militant was able to mold his troops to his will. Spirits were bound into the soldiers' weapons and mounts, and the men were retrained into an elite cavalry. Repeated victories brought recruits, wealth and renown.

Already something of a legend, the powerful hedge wizard was courted by the Order of Hermes. He rebuffed the Order and was reluctant to part with power and independence for an unknown cult. In the decades that followed, Alamantrah encountered several magi of various factions. He was surprised to discover that these strange sorcerers were able to wield the eldritch arts with seemingly no preparation. His own evocations, while potent, always required hours or even days of ritual. He sought counsel from the spirits. The entities advised



taking no action. Additionally, as they had stated on previous occasions, the Umbrood warned him against approaching the Order of Hermes or other magical societies. This time, however, the magician perceived that they spoke in fear for their own sakes rather than concern for his future. The sorcerer was determined to discover the source of the spirits' apprehension.

The wizard soon traveled by flaming spirit chariot to Doissetep's gate. He was admitted and introduced to worlds previously undreamed of. The continued exposure to true magick of the Hermetics quickly brought Alamantrah to a full Awakening.

Alamantrah's rise to power within House Flambeau was predicated on a variety of strategies. Marshaling only a small contingent of Flambeau magi and common troops, he routed Tremere forces on several occasions. Similarly, he was able to blunt the blade of the inquisition, misdirecting the religious scourge to innocent villages and away from the domiciles of Hermetic sorcerers. Other gains were secured through Certamen. By publicly insulting certain rivals within the Covenant, Alamantrah cause his enemies to challenge him to a magical duel. Such battles are rarely fatal in normal circumstances. The dread wizard, however, often reduced his opponents to ash within moments of the altercation's commencement. The magus was not averse to subtler and more devious means as well. By presenting an open threat to enemies, his more secretive intrigues to gain allies went undetected. The wizard would engineer disasters for those whose allegiance he wished to gain. Then by laying

the blame on another, Alamantrah created common cause with the magus from whom he wished succor.

While he still chafes for a position on the Judicium Hermeticum, Alamantrah has turned much of his attention of late on the twin tasks of shoring up the defenses of Earthbound Hermetic Covenants and combating the Order of Reason in general. Those who have seen him on the battlefield in active defense of his brethren describe him as an unearthly terror. By binding powerful Umbrood who have many servitors, the wizard has been known to field entire legions of spirits. Even Scourgelings inadvertently Awakened by titanic Hermetic magick can fall subject to the Archmagus' dread will.

The old wizard also concerns himself with currying favor in the Umbral Courts. In that arena, many of Alamantrah's machinations have ended in frustration. His cavalier dominion over certain potentates has made him pariah in many Aethyric circles. In the meantime, the archmagus fumes and plots more elaborate schemes.

Appearance: Alamantrah looks much like what one expects of a near-legendary wizard. His long hair and beard, white with age, flow nearly to his knees. Yet his great mane does not fully conceal his tall, emaciated frame and swarthy features. The magus' great golden eyes are often aflame with a hellish mad intensity that is difficult to look on. His gestures tend to be sweeping but are made with a casual mien, as if the Deacon were used to speaking before a large audience.

Roleplaying Hints: The mantle of leadership is a visible aura around you. The idea that someone might challenge your authority seems preposterous. To those who have proven themselves, you display an infectious fraternal camaraderie. You constantly seek to inspire younger mages to greatness. After all, that power will be at your disposal sooner or later.

However, centuries of existence have left you out of touch with the common man. Your only understanding of most human concerns is in a tactical sense. Twilight wages a silent but protracted war with your senses. Although you refrain from interacting with such visions in public, you are plagued by hobgoblins. These creatures often escape to run amok amidst Doissetep's halls, despite the eldritch you might wield to prevent it.

Word: Aldaraia (Enochian: Will) Few choose an Enochian term as their Word, because vocal recitation of the language occasionally raises unwanted mystic power. Alamantrah insists that his choice of creative Word aids in aligning his will with that of the Most High.

Quote: *I see in you the first glimmerings of great power. It is necessary that your mettle be tested in order to bring this power to light. You must venture to the Desert of Eternal Suffering in the Realm of...*



Deacon Magister Erling Damask bani Boniassus

Erling Damask has the unenviable task of ensuring that the ruling council is perceived as noble statesmen rather than base villains. While the other Deacons take care to camouflage any nefarious activity they feel is necessary to engage in, Erling strives to keep the grumbling magi of Doissetep happy.

The Boniassus sorcerer is aware that his appointed task is nigh impossible, but he excels at determining who cannot or need not be appeased. Strangely, it is often the most powerful of magi that receive no favors from the wizard. Consors and lesser magicians are easily pleased. A few extra freedoms and showings of respect are sometimes enough to garner enduring loyalty. Magisters, however, are rarely satisfied until they have the lion's share of power and resources. Damask does court the Covenant's potentates. He selects only those who can provide a maximum of advantage to the chamber, and he is loath to give away any resource or title that might be used against the ruling tribunal later.

Erling's devotion to his house is apparent in all that he does, and has never been disputed. Members of his own and other houses have noticed a change in his approach since his elevation to the Chamber of Deacons. He has become convinced of his theory that the direction for Hermes' future lies with its adepts and other young mages. To further that end, he has undertaken the task of making certain that these junior members, at least those of House Boniassus, have all the Quintessence, laboratory space, and other support needed. He believes

that with petty impediments removed, the young sorcerers can create to the fullest extent of their abilities. Thus, great quantities of Vis have been funneled to junior researchers at the expense of elder magisters. This act has garnered the enmity of many powerful magi.

In council, the master of Boniassus does not deviate from the will of the Deacons to preserve their vaunted station. He, like the other lord of Doissetep, may have a private agenda, but it can be followed only with the hierarchy in place. The chamber permits Erling's aggressive reallocation of resources, seeing it as a part of his otherwise masterful statecraft.

The diplomatic magus has begun to fall in love with one of his former apprentices. He has refrained from acting on these unseemly desires, but he is tormented by longing. For now, the magister merely dreams of retiring to a faraway Realm with his beloved.

Appearance: Erling Damask's features are carefully crafted to be grandfatherly and non-threatening. His bald pate surmounts a delicate face with gentle blue eyes. White robes make up the majority of his wardrobe. The councilor's movements are slow but performed with a certainty that betrays a fierce determination to the trained eye.

Roleplaying Hints: A consummate diplomat, your kind manner and tactful words rarely fail to soothe ruffled feathers. Your conversations are usually a subtle blend of flattery, attentiveness and insight. Even those who are not inclined to be civil can often be embarrassed by your calm politeness into checking their tongue.

Word: Aegis – Erling's creative Word follows the same lines as Boniassus' Word *Parma* (Latin: to shield). The Councilor sees himself as the shield under which adepts of house and Order may grow unhindered.

Quote: *I can understand why even a perceptive mind such as your own might come to that conclusion. If we examine the details thoroughly, the misfortunes to which you have alerted me can each be put in their proper contexts.*

Magister Deacon Raffaele d'Arezzo bani Verditius

The great enchanter Raffaele d'Arezzo is perhaps best known for his creation of the *Canna Annae*. This prized treasure, taking the form of a large twisted staff, allows Hermetic masters of only moderate accomplishment in the True Art to extend their lives. Until his appointment to the council, Raffaele's brilliance and dedication to research rivaled even the luminaries' of Boniassus. He had managed to withdraw completely from Covenant politics whilst retaining an adequate share of resources and useful apprentices. It is because of this renown and disinterest in intrigue that both house and chamber chose him as the

first outsider to join the tribunal as a Deacon. All others of repute favored the agendas of the Verditius or were seen as lapdogs of the tribunal.

Raffaele was not pleased by his appointment to the chamber. Others of his house made it quite clear that he had little choice in accepting. The magus was immediately assailed by a confusing array of offers, threats, bribes and other intrigues. However, the vast concentration he had developed as a researcher was not without its uses in his new office. It took little time for the new Deacon to familiarize himself with the political climate and decide on his course of action.

With subterfuge and care, he has initiated a two-pronged plot to hold the chamber to principles of justice. In council, he fosters the belief that Deacons from the remaining unrepresented houses must be appointed quickly in order to avoid further revolution. Much of this line of discussion is focused on House Quaesitor. Doissetep's rulers agree that Guernicus must be represented in order to quiet tensions. Raffaele's fellows demand, however, that the Quaesitor magus must be loyal to the existing leadership. Thus, the other part of the Verditius wizard's effort involves finding the perfect Guernicus candidate. The enchanter seeks a judge who is loyal to the powers that be, but both honorable and courageous. Once raised, the Praetor must not balk at fighting his fellows in the pursuit of justice. It is Deacon Maeve Diannis that makes this second effort both difficult and dangerous. Few can shield themselves from her mental prying and none can be certain of their success in defense. Despite his enormous discipline, even Raffaele



believes Maeve has and will continue to discover details of his agenda.

Raffaele d'Arezza's motivations seem obscure to those around him. Of late, he has hidden such knowledge even from himself. Since his Awakening in the backlash of a fatal Scourging of another Doissetep mage, he has taken care to seem oblivious to all but the task at hand. His slow but steady rise from consor to apprentice, and much later, to magister, left him relatively free of hubris. However, his manner of thought and speech has become ever more Byzantine. He rarely addresses a topic directly but steers conversations subtly. When he succeeds, others come to the conclusions the Verditius magus desires.

Appearance: Raffaele is in his 40's. His slightly portly frame and squinting eyes complete a drab countenance. He dresses in decorative cloaks and tunics ornamented with magickal jewelry.

The enchanter's movements are casual and understated. In council, he calculates each gesture to draw a minimum of attention to himself.

Roleplaying Hints: Conversation is a much more dangerous endeavor than research at Doissetep. You approach such peril with the utmost care. Strive to be three steps ahead of those around yourself while revealing nothing. When speaking, occasionally bring up matters seemingly unrelated to the topic at hand in order to steer the conversation toward unstated ends. Also, draw attention away from yourself whenever practical. A low profile can do wonders both for one's efficacy and life expectancy.

Word: *Abducere* (Latin: divert) Raffaele originally chose this term in dedication to the manipulation of certain mystic energies (i.e. time). Now it has a more straightforward use: diverting the attention of others.

Quote: *While the questionable loyalty of any men-at-arms we might recruit is a topic of some import, similar quandaries arise amongst other factions. Perhaps the rote of sincerity detection Master Ulrich von Falke bani Quaesitor recently developed may be of interest.*

Magister Deacon Lord Auguste d'Aiguillon bani Mercere

Background: Auguste was born into a French noble family of some repute, but he was cursed with an excess of surviving older brothers. Auguste, like his brothers, had been taught both letters and leadership since his birth. However, since multiple siblings survived childhood, their father feared division of his holdings after death. Like many in this situation, Auguste's father sent the supernumerary children to a monastery.

Monastic life held little interest for Auguste, who had already intuited a basic understanding of the magickal



arts from Greek texts. Prior to his expulsion from his father's lands, he had already been in contact via messenger with a group calling itself the Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross. Upon leaving, Auguste headed directly for a meeting with that organization. It turned out to be a Tytalan recruiting front for the Order of Hermes.

Auguste's Awakening was birthed in disorienting visions of faraway lands, seen through the eyes of his messengers. Over decades, the noble magus developed these abilities. With the amplification of Talismans bartered from House Verditius, he was able to speak and be heard by Hermetics throughout Earth and in many far Realms. Wielding this sorcery, Auguste quickly rose to a position of leadership within Mercere.

Although Auguste's clairvoyant network brought him great influence within his house, it also attracted attention from others seeking power within the Covenant. While many sought to parley with the recently recognized Magister, Maeve Diannis, aided by the rest of her Cabal, used powerful group sorcery to enthrall his mind utterly. At first, Auguste fought his mental reins, but the spell was thorough and subtle. His personality was almost entirely unchanged, but his loyalty ultimately lay with Maeve. Now, tragically, he strives to obfuscate any evidence that might bring light to his enslavement. Having first hand access to the Mercere spies, he is unlikely to fail in this concealment.

Auguste enjoys his position in the chamber and currently sees no reason to question his covert devotion to Maeve. As a Deacon he has even joined her Cabal, the

Court of the Dragon Ascendant. He believes it his own decision that his clairvoyant network be used primarily for magical espionage. He hunts for those plotting against the ruling tribunal with a vigor equal to that of any of his compatriots. The magus lord is not without his own ambitions, however. Auguste was at the forefront of pillaging House Regnatus' power. Via his communications magicks, he plans to exert a shadowy grip on the monarchs of Europe. Appreciating the scale of his own audacity, he proceeds slowly, but he intends to claim interest on his 'stolen' birthright.

Appearance: Aquiline nose and predatory eyes dominate Auguste's face. Were it not for his well-proportioned body, he would resemble a goblin. His unkempt red hair and high-pitched voice do little to assuage this effect. The Magus' style of dress, however, is conservative. His dark tunic and robes are rarely accented by anything more than a single silver clasp. There is a dramatic tension in the magus' movements. To the keen of eye he appears to merely act relaxed while actually experiencing an overwhelming flood of sensations.

Roleplaying Hints: There is a vaguely menacing air to your serious demeanor. For a master of a house whose primary concern is communication, you are far more inclined to cunning than diplomacy. Whenever possible, cut to the heart of a matter rather than dispense pleasantries. Though you are not without feeling, sentiment is not a weakness you can afford to display.

Word: Nett (Old English – Network) Even before Awakening, Auguste believed that a great man must be a spider at the center of a web. In magick, this philosophy has brought the power and glory he has craved since youth.

Quote: *Of course, I'm familiar with the matter. Let us not mince words. What are you willing to offer for the information I have? Should your offer be found wanting, I doubt you will survive overlong in ignorance.*

Politics among the Enlightened

Intrigue comes as second nature to most Hermetics. Thus, Doissetep has been rife with plots since the Order seized the castle in A.D. 876. There have been times when such iniquity has threatened to destroy the Covenant utterly. The current masters of the ancient stronghold use the serpentine maneuverings of their subjects to fortify the battered edifice. Would-be despots find themselves checked, and younger magi gain unprecedented opportunities. Conflict sharpens the instincts of victors and the defeated as well.

Stability through conflict would be an impossible dream were it not for the seemingly unassailable position

of the Chamber of Deacons. No intrigue escapes their notice and popular support has allowed them to rewrite the Covenant charter to their advantage. These mighty potentates have an impressive array of skeletons in their closet, though. Were such secrets to be revealed, anything could happen.

Doissetep's intrigue is not limited to the castle walls. There are few things on Heaven or Earth that the Hermetic's do not seek dominion over. As Baldric La Salle quests to make allies of rival sorcerers, many magisters see a remarkable opportunity. Indeed, many within the Covenant feel it is their preordained right to rule these "lesser magi." The rigorous and formal training of the Hermetic arts lead many to believe that all other practitioners are little more than half-schooled savages. Most Doissetep residents realize that they haven't the resources to forcibly subjugate even the disorganized Seer of Chronos. Plots abound, however, for controlling the scattered Traditions once they join in common cause.

Recently the Judicium Hermeticum has decreed that Doissetep must allow rival sorcerers to join the Covenant. Several of the Deacons are offended by the decision. Others see it as a scheme to gain a measure of dominance over the wayward Traditions. Those trained by the "superior" methods of the Hermetics are expected to return to their "backward" people in time. In theory, the magi, now civilized, are to then rise to power amongst their own, while still serving the interests of the Order. Any magus who joins Doissetep without being well-versed in Western mysteries can expect to be treated with disdain.

Horizon: The Future's Brightest Star

Lisbet clung to her small perch high atop the massive building that was nearing completion. Her ragged hair lifted in the light winds stirring in the just constructed Realm, and her skin tickled in wonder. She felt such awe as she gazed over the landscape, from the building below her with its high parapets and multi-faceted windows, to the forests and mountains that lay in the distance, waiting to be explored!

She laughed softly in anticipation. She had seen so much of the Realm from her viewpoint, more than even the sorcerers who toiled daily within the city and the outlying borders. She observed, hidden, as the great elder magi made their spectacular plans. Lisbet watched, beyond notice, as the younger disciples and servants formed bonds of friendship

that overcame differences of circumstance and birth. Lisbet felt she had grown very wise since the twist of fate that brought her to Horizon.

Horizon, the newly born Realm, is the wellspring of the dreams of a few magi. They magi shared their devotion with a few others: the friends, students and servants who make their homes within its boundaries. Together they have created something to outlast the ages.

Lisbet was thrilled! Soon, the gates were to formally open, and even more magi were to arrive. But in her heart, Horizon lived already, and the visions it inspired were real.

Lisbet's form shifted and changed from a scruffy young girl into a sleek black crow. She spread her wings triumphantly and flew, with Horizon glowing brightly below her.

An Era of Spring

A day will come when Horizon is to be the brightest star of all the Covenants in all the Realms. It is to shine like a million candles, providing hope and direction to all within its gates. Today, it is newly born, a dream finally made reality.

1450: 1450 was an embattled year. The Order of Reason's destruction of Doissetep was just two years past, the second Mistrige Tribunal was the previous year, and the Craftmasons were defeated that very year in the Battle of Flames. In response, the Primi constructed a haven — a Realm far from Earth, where the magi of diverse paths could meet, share, grow, and unite to battle their mutual enemies. It was a wonderful dream, that people from different lands, backgrounds, beliefs and cultures could meet peacefully.

The 10 Primi, one from each path, save the Dreamspeakers, who sent two, resolved that each has to contribute a portion of power to build this palace of hope. Dedicated souls, they knew their people could not refuse to be part of this bright dawning of a new era. Alibeh-Shaar spoke for the Ahl-i-Batin, also known as "Batini," or "Subtle Ones." He made it plain that he was merely the earthly voice for "Murshids," who were greater sorcerers who had achieved an otherworldly status. Wu Jin traveled far from the east to speak for the Akashic Brotherhood, but he also stated that he was not their leader, but a representative. The darkly insightful Chakravanti were represented by their Primus, Chalech, who observed the discussions and arguments carefully from beneath his hooded cloak. Valoran of the Celestial Chorus raised his voice in deep conviction, certain of the importance of an alliance and leading those who believed the same. The Dreamspeakers' two, Star-of-Eagles and Niaoba, may well have been one, for the bond they shared was a marriage of spirit as well as form. The Order of Hermes' Baldric La Salle was in attendance, as this gathering was his own idea. The Sahajiya, known as the

Seers of Chronos for their gifts of parting the veils of time, were embodied in ideal by Sh'zar the Seer, who brought passion and impetus to the assembly. The diplomat Luis d'Estes spoke for the Solificati, and he lent skill and focus to the newly born circle of diversity. Nightshade of Verbena brought the unfettered primal force of her magick to the Council. It was her dream, along with Valoran and Baldric La Salle, to bring magi from many cultures and beliefs together. One astounding note is that these three were able to dream and to plan of the alliance of Horizon, given the long-held hatred of the Order and the Choristers for the Verbena. The other two consider the Verbena to be corrupt. These three were able to rise above the pettiness of their teachings' prejudices to something far greater. Their example was one from which everyone should take a lesson.

And so it began. It was decided that the first major step in the construction of the Horizon Realm would be the Columns of Power, which would form the base and essence of everything that the Realm was to be. Each Primus returned to his or her homeland to convince their followers of the importance of this undertaking. They would present the necessity of the contribution of a focus of power by each participant, so that the new Realm would be a part of them all.

Sh'zar of the Seers was the first to contribute, and he gave the Gediz Caves to begin the construction. The others, either inspired or shamed by his swiftness, all responded quickly with their own contributions. Throughout the year, each Primus announced the dedication of a place of power to the realization of this dream. The roster was soon complete.

1452: A Minor Tribunal was held in the Gediz Caves to dedicate the Columns of Power to support Horizon. The Primary List was impressive. The Gediz Caves in Turkey; the Floating Tip of Lyonesse in France; Stonehenge, Chalice Hill and Glastonbury Tor in England — each was a legendary mystical knoll in its own right. Also, Loch Ness in Ireland, home to ancient, deep-dwelling beings who wish no ill; Nemi Lake in Italy; the Dragons of Guilin in China, a long-held ancestral place of worship; a spirit-swept desert in a far away, primal land; Artaxerxes Court in Persopolis; the Canyon of Qu'Dali, and the library of Alexandria in Persia. The event was joyous, as those involved were swept into the tide of the birth of a new era.

Magi resistant to the idea refused to participate. They felt that the coming together of so many magi who held opposing philosophies indicated weakness and corruption. But most shared the convictions of the Primi, that this was to make them stronger and more united, and was to bring a new age of magick to the world. These supportive magi also realized that uniting, even with those whose ways were strange and heretical was neces-



sary. The threat of the Order of Reason was far more immediate and deadly.

1453: The real work began. In rituals that crossed all boundaries, blending belief and methodology, the magi began to bond the columns of power to one another and to build their Realm. The workings were beautiful things to behold, primal and furious. They blended the best of the magi's practices, from arcane ritual to primordial spirit, crafting from their blood and art a new world. They drew from each other's energy and learned from one another as well. Some were even inspired to reconsider long-held bigotry, in the force of such pure magick.

Yet somehow, to the horror of all involved, tragedy struck. The magi's Great Work was to draw the attention of an Umbral lord. Urushlakhg'run considered the location they had chosen as his own, and he was quick to fight for it. He lashed out furiously, forcing the magi into battle. The destruction inflicted by the great spirit was sweeping, gouging the earth of Horizon with inhuman claws, leaving great gashes that would be called Sleeping Giant Inlets. The Columns shuddered and heaved, but somehow they stood. The battle was won at Keyhole Pass, but at a terrible cost. Qi-Nagi, a young apprentice to Nightshade, made a stand against Urushlakhg'run, as other magi fought the effects of his destruction. She fell in the attempt but distracted the Umbral lord long

enough so that other magi could stand strong against him. He was banished and imprisoned beneath Horizon Range. The survivors dedicated the river Qi-Nagi in honor of their slain sister.

Those who had opposed the construction of Horizon used the Umbral lord's attack and Qi-Nagi's tragic death as evidence of the correctness of their objections. Some began a campaign of whispers against Horizon, some spoke openly, others began verbally sparring with Horizon's most dedicated supporters. But their voices were like the hissing of snakes, and their actions were the minute stings of mosquitoes. As the construction progressed, they soon became silent. Such was the life of the dream as it grew into its own.

1454: Construction in 1454 was no easier than the previous year. The Primi remained dedicated to the dream of Horizon, though the strain of their efforts was beginning to show on them. They were determined to complete their undertaking, but they disagreed about how to do so. They argued over the placement of the Columns of Power, they argued over how to shield and protect them. It was decided that Crystal Bastions would be constructed around the City of Concordia. These were to help direct all Quintessence into the very center of Horizon, the Council Chambers, from where it could be distributed to all.

Almost too late, the Primi became aware that this increased flow of Tass was attracting Umbrood and even more horrifying spirits. The Primi selected three skilled warrior mages to protect the boundaries so hard won against attack by these beings. Arianne of the Euthanatos could deal death as swiftly as she spoke of the joy of life. The Dreamspeaker Im'Rihn was a powerful fighter who moved with the guidance of a thousand dead warriors. The guard from the Akashic Brotherhood did not speak, but Wu Jin called him Son and said Do ran deep within him.

The first challenge came swiftly. Horizon's borders were assailed by ravenous creatures called Ch'ikch'h'jkla. They fed on Tass and had targeted Horizon's Quintessence supply to feed their swarm. The guards stood tall and fought bravely, and so the first battle was won.

Infernal forces from the deeper Umbral reaches attacked soon afterward. Their motives were indecipherable and mad, but such are the actions of fallen magi. They were defeated and damned for it.

The third onslaught was by Umbrood allied with Urushlakgh'un. These were determined to set their master free from his imprisonment by Horizon magi the previous year. This matter proved to be the most challenging battle of all for the heroic guards. Though sorely injured, all survived.

The battles became known as the Three Tests of Faith to those who spoke of them. At last even the staunchest objectors began to realize the power and good that could be brought to the world through unity. A very few continued to grumble, but their ill will was either ignored or protested. Everyone was joyous with the thrill of victory.

Tragically, it was not to last. The Order of Reason, ever-implacable foes, launched a careful and shattering attack on four of the nine Columns of Power that formed the base of Horizon. The effects were tragic and almost ruinous. The Horizon Guard set to defend Lyonesse, and then Stonehenge, where sympathetic fae eager to protect a place of enchantment joined in the fray. Others did not fare as well. Chalech withdrew his Column, for he was forced to use its energy as he battled against the Order of Reason. The Canyon of Qu-Dali was lost entirely, and is thus far in the hands of the Order of Reason. Some day it shall be reclaimed by the magi with true rights to it.

Horizon lost many valiant magi in those battles, as enchanters from every persuasion and path came together to defend against their common foes. Don Horenzio, who brought so much insight and happiness to everyone he encountered, fell that day. But he left a legacy—a spell called Urgency, to add swiftness to the completion of all tasks.

There were rumors that the few remaining opponents to Horizon had betrayed their fellow magi to the Order of Reason. It was considered suspicious that the

Daedaleans knew exactly how and where to strike most effectively. Surprisingly, there was no inquisition, as there might have been on the earthly Realm. There were discreet inquiries on the part of the Primi and concern among the younger adepts but no grand trials or Certamen. Horizon was near completion. Those who did not share the dream merely left, and how they fared on their own was the will of the fates.

1465: Magi worked twice as swiftly to ready Horizon, in part to enthusiasm and in part courtesy of Don Horenzio's Urgency enchantment. The date for completion had been announced, and all hurriedly prepared for the arrival of new Council members, and those who would live and work within Horizon's bright Realm. The studies were lined with books from all lands and ages. Beautiful draperies woven from material fine and lovely hung from the walls. Laboratories sparkled shiny and new. Whispers circulated that Star-of-Eagles and Niaoba would announce plans to marry at the opening festival. Even the youngest apprentices wondered if the fae, who had shown such interest in Horizon's future before, would grace the hall with their presence. Everything glowed with a soft, beautiful radiance. Horizon was complete.

Mapping Paradise

Since it opened its portals, Horizon has had a steady population of around 2000, a mix of magi, their families, pupils and servants. One day, the Realm will be peopled by more than 10 times that number!

Council Chambers: The Heart of the Realm

The Council Chambers form the heart of Horizon, located in its spiritual and physical center. The edifice is being constructed in an amalgamation of styles, representing the different worldly cultures brought together. Yet the blend is not jarring but harmonious, the different architectures combining into one another in awe-inspiring magnificence. The magi who designed the construction deemed it an outer representation of the harmony the Primi are aspiring to promote within its walls. A high, domed roof tops the building, circled with 10 windows through which Tass are funneled. The sun's light and warmth shines through an oculus placed at the dome's pinnacle.

The interior furnishings of the chamber are beautiful and ornate statues and vases. Magick-crafted wall hangings adorn walls of the richest wood inlaid with metals of silvery purple hues. The tapestries, in keeping with the old manner, retell the story of Horizon's construction, of its heroes' battles and sacrifices.

The Council table is round, surrounded by 10 chairs. Nine are for the representatives from each of the paths, plus one more for guests. Upon each of the chairs carved for the Council is inlaid a precious gemstone to represent a sphere of power. Quintessence connects the glowing gemstones to its essential Column of Power.

Around the Great Room of the Council Chambers are other rooms. An Archive houses books of magick, history and other papers of significance. For more private discussions between Primi, there is a more secluded meeting hall. Doorways lead from the meeting hall to the chambers and to the subrealms as well. These portals are still under construction subject to the individual tastes of the Masters of each subrealm. The private chambers for each of the Council Magi are also here, each appointed in the taste of its occupant. There are additional private rooms for visiting magi and other guests, and each are decorated in a splendid, comfortable manner.

Guards are stationed around the Council Chambers. They are a force expanded beyond the first three who originally defended Horizon's boundaries. In most cases, the guards are ceremonial, for all entrances to the Realm, Chambers, and subrealms are magically warded. When a breach does occur, the guards react swiftly.

A Zen Garden, Calm Surrounded by Fury

The Council Chambers are surrounded by gentle rolling hills, with winding pathways and serene landscapes. Hardly a city at all, the area is Concordia, and it is home to most that dwell within Horizon. Surrounding it is a wall of fortification called the Diamond Wall. Although not actually constructed of diamonds, the wall's surface reflects its namesake's impenetrability. The surface of the stone wall is carved with runes and stands 50 feet tall. Nine bastions have been placed on the walls, each with its own guardian.

The people of each Craft tend to keep close to their own kind, but the boundaries are not rigid and are set only by the will of the ones who follow those somewhat arbitrary borders. A great deal of trading and movement exists between the sects, born of curiosity as well as necessity. The cultivation of this spirit of co-operation on a daily basis is what will mean Horizon's survival. The city is torn with petty differences, which are usually solved with the assistance of appointed magi within the Realm.

As the Realm becomes more real, fabulous places have been made or are being planned. They represent much of the nature of the area that they are located in, but some are surprising in their placement.

Within the Place of Spirit lies the Tao Temple, a gift of the Akashic Brotherhood. The temple is said to heal the soul and aid seekers of enlightenment. A new

custom seems to be forming, as a dedicated group of Dreamspeakers arrives to chant devotions on most mornings. The temple is carved from the wood of the blue bodhi tree, which is found only in the Akashics' subrealm. The carving is the inspiring shape of a rising flame.

The Heart of Time is home to the Sruth na Mblath, a rainbow-colored Garden of Eden tended by the pagans. Within its tranquil acres are flowers and herbs of every imaginable kind. Its scents are serene and intoxicating, so it is no surprise that the garden is a favorite gathering place for many Seers of Chronos, as well as other magi.

The Dream-speakers of the Dijiionondo-wanenake Cabal are constructing a gift to the Order of Hermes. "The Spiral Arches" are 70 feet high, constructed of crystal elm wood, and will be placed in the Storm's Center, named for the forces the Order controls. The Dream-speakers say that once the Spirals are in place, those standing beneath them can peer into an Umbral Realm and commune with the Spirits there.

The Qi-Nagi River, named after the brave apprentice who fell to Urushlakgh'un flows through five of the city's distinct areas. On the banks of the Qi-Nagi stands Merekades' Tavern. Merekades, a Verbena apprentice, built and runs the Tavern. She believes that everyone involved with Horizon should have a place to sup and relax, and share a tankard of ale and conversation. The Tavern serves simple food from a variety of locales. The drinks are beers and ales, although finer wines and unfermented fruit juices are available. On most nights, there is a performance by a poet, singer, or other type of bard to add to customers' enjoyment.

The Tavern is a large room with a bar, with tables and a hearth. Merekades feels the hearth adds a welcoming touch. Meals are cooked in a kitchen behind the bar, out of the customer's sight. There are many guest rooms where travelers or the weary can stay for the night. Merekades' Tavern was unofficially the first structure in Horizon to be opened, as she offered hospitality to those involved in the Realm's construction from midway into the venture.

The landscape surrounding Concordia is either serene or an untamed wilderness. Green fields roll outward from the city, sending fragrant wafts of fresh grass scent across the countryside. The many lakes' clear blueness sparkles brightly in the clear sunshine. Copses of verdant trees stand stately and tall, despite their tender years. Someday villages will flourish and grow here, nurtured by the beauty and abundance that surrounds them.

Beyond this welcoming valley are forests that grow primordial and wild, echoing the newness of the world. The trees grow tangled and thick, challenging the skies' light to break through. Only the bravest venture into these permanently shadowed woods. Farther still are ranges of tall, stately mountains, rising higher into the

sky than any earthly range. The mountains of the Horizon range have both magickal properties of protection and the size to protect the Realm from attacks from earth or the Umbrood. At nightfall, the sky around the range is broken by glowing purple lightning or eerie glows. In caves deep beneath the heights, dragons rule in elemental fury. Several foolhardy mages have attempted to gain an audience with one of these dread predecessors to humanity. Those who failed to bring vast sums of Vis in appeasement did not return. Other fell beasts such as ogres and griffins dwell amongst the peaks and the land beyond. All must be wary or fall prey to the great wyrms. Though formed by the magi of Horizon, the Range has barely been explored. No one knows what strange wonders the heights and crevices contain.

The continent of Posht is untamed and only partially explored. It is a land of raw beauty and incredible dangers. Where Concordia and its surrounding areas represent the calmer face of nature, Posht is reflective of an ancient time, with its lush jungles and active volcanoes. Early expeditions into the land were lost in the violent eruptions, or in the shifts of the moving Earth. Explorations of Posht have been delayed until the magi can adequately prepare for the land's hazards.

The celestial orbs that grace Horizon's sky are imbued with magickal properties as well. The sun emits a comforting golden warmth that neither poisons nor burns. The sun is believed to give power to the mages inner spirit, and some swear the rays of the sun give those who receive its light a greater ability to love. Horizon's three moons, which are continually full, are said to cause transformation to the land and its creatures. A goat could become a griffin overnight, and that path that was becoming so tedious might disappear entirely!

The Cabals Within

Three major Cabals have formed during Horizon's brief history. Each reflects an aspect of the Realm's purpose, and all have made significant contributions to its completion.

The Order of Sanguinity

The Order was formed in direct response to the threat of the Order of Reason; it was formed by magi determined to find the most effective way to eliminate the Daedaleans. Rather than formal discussion, the Order's meetings were complaints and boasted threats against the Conventions, liberally peppered with insults and name-calling. The Order of Reason's attack on the fledgling Horizon galvanized the Sanguinity to unite and launch directed strikes against the Daedaleans. They began training their members in information-gathering and surreptitious acts to assist in the ongoing war. Devon Freemantle, a Master of the Order of Hermes, leads the group in spirit though not title. Early in his career,

the Order of Reason attempted to turn him and persuade him to betray his brethren. Ever since these overtures, which Devon viewed as defaming his dedication to the Hermetics, he has viewed the Daedaleans as worthy only of complete destruction. Other members of the Sanguinity have equally potent motivations for detesting the Order of Reason. At meeting, the bases for hatred are not discussed, only courses of action for annihilating the enemy.

The Horizon Guard

This multi-Tradition Cabal of magi was formed following the appointment and success of the initial three guards chosen to defend Horizon. Following the Three Tests of Faith, the effectiveness and necessity of guards was irrefutable. The three guards who were first chosen to defend Horizon became heroes and set an example of camaraderie that the Primi hoped others within the Realm would follow. The Council of Nine realized that more guardians would be needed as Horizon's boundaries grew, and it made it known that the Horizon Guard was recruiting members. Most who applied were already inclined in those more carefully aggressive tendencies. The fourth member to join the guard was Qi-Nagi, apprentice to Nightshade of Verbena. The Cabal has an official membership of 13: the original three guards who regularly patrol the perimeter of Concordia, nine who watch the interior of the city, and one who guards the portal of the Council Chambers. Unofficially, there are other members who carry messages and keep their eyes and ears open.

The Builders of the Dream

The magi known as Builders of the Dream were brought together for the purpose of designing and fabricating Horizon. Beyond the Council of Nine, they were the souls who believed in the dream of Horizon from its inception. The Cabal was primarily formed of wizards who view magick as something to be practically applied. They dedicated themselves day and night to its completion, from the carving of the Realm from the Umbra to the construction of the buildings on the completed world. They are working on the outlying structures, though at a more relaxed pace. Many of their members are still recovering from prolonged use of the "Urgency" spell.

The Council of Nine Ali-beh-shaar Murshid, voice of the Ahl-i-Batin

Background: Even before his Awakening, the great Murshids (Batini Masters), who guide the Batini, subtly guided Ali-beh-Shaar. The play of light and shadow or



the words of beggars revealed secrets of the hidden word to the youth. The Murshid (Batini Disciple or Adept) to whom Ali was apprenticed suffered in magical bondage to a powerful *djinn*. They arrived in the fabled City of Brass where the youth was traded among several djinni as if he were some sort of prize. Finally, and inexplicably, he was released. Lost in Realms far removed from the world, Ali wandered in a seemingly aimless fashion. In a befuddlement of recent Awakening, he stumbled into an earthly *khanaqah* (Batini lodge).

Amongst the other Hidden Ones, Ali learned quickly and achieved the enlightenment and status of a Murshid. Although he was not one of the ancient Murshids who lead the Ahl-i-Batin, it was to Ali-beh-Shaar that Sh'zar the Seer addressed his offer to join in an alliance of wizards. The Subtle One was skeptical: Why ally with infidels just to fight other infidels. He passed on the message to the hidden masters of the Batini, however, not wishing to overstep his authority. Within days the elders of Mount Qaf sent him to represent all the Ahl-i-Batin as Primus. No word of explanation was provided, only the demand that he discover the answers for himself.

The Batini soon found answers, but not to his liking. Many of these magi were not the infidels who masterminded the Crusades against his people, and they were often targets of the Church. Philosophically, it was more difficult to make sense of the great Murshid's decision. Many of the infidel practices seemed anathema and their way of life backward. Many European sorcerers who counted themselves mathematicians had no concept of the number zero. Were it not for the Ahl-i-Batin, Concordia would most likely have been built without an

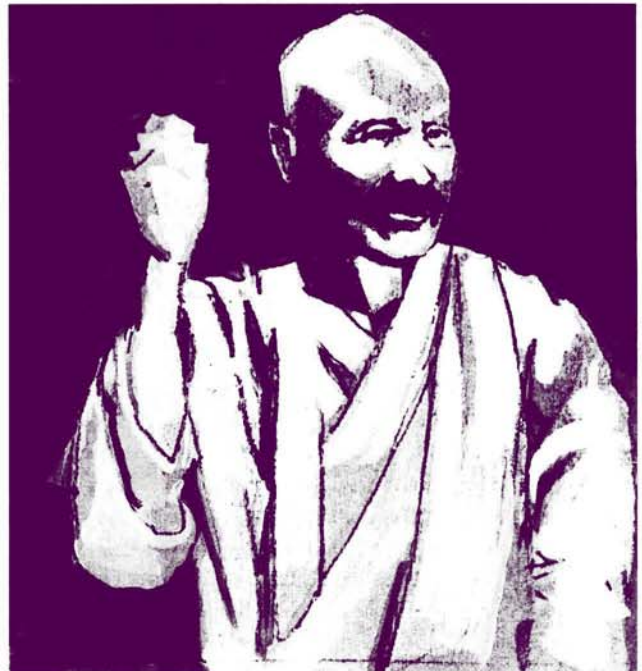
aqueduct. Only recently has Ali realized that the Subtle Ones are allying with the foreign magi for what they can offer to the infidels rather than vice versa.

Appearance: Ali's beguiling golden eyes dominate his otherwise dark features. His clothing is conservative and designed to help him blend in with those of other cultures. Only in ritual does he dress in the finery of his homeland. The magi's smooth gestures and magnetic voice combine to create a hypnotic effect that most find to be ingratiating.

Roleplaying Hints: Although there is an edge of formality in your dealings with mages outside your Tradition, you are committed to creating unity amongst all will-workers. There is a drama to your words that makes even the driest of topics exciting. The air of exotic mystery you exude is entirely unconscious.

Wu Jin of the Akashic Brotherhood

Background: Wu Jin was born into the Hakka, wanderers who primarily populated the northern regions of China. During his travels with his family, he witnessed wonders as well as horrors. The intricate beauty of isolated temples and carvings from the finest of jade affected him as profoundly as the ruins left in the wake of recent battles. The impression these sights made on his youthful mind led him to seek the ways of inner peace, while training his body to steely perfection. The story he tells of his Awakening is that a giant blue water snake came to him one night as he sat before the river meditating. The snake spoke to him of his future and showed him images in the water's depths. He came away from his prayers that night with his eyes opened to the



path before him. Wu Jin has since become a master of Do and beloved of his students, all of whom he instructs with a cheery affection.

Wu Jin believes that each of the Akashic brothers (and sisters) is responsible for his or her own destiny, as ultimately is every human being. But Wu Jin also knows that wisdom and knowledge can be the path to the most perfect destiny. He views Horizon as an important spoke on the wheel of the universe. He rarely volunteers opinions, but when asked for one, he cuts to the heart of the matter. He feels that allegories are fine for young students who need to be taught to think, but that clarity serves all best in communicating ideas.

Appearance: Wu Jin is of average height and solidly built. He appears younger than one might expect of an Akashic master with his strong face only singed by wrinkles and with his black mustache. His demeanor is fierce but frightens only the ignorant or the very young, or those with whom he is engaged in battle. He has shaven his head and dresses primarily in loose silks.

Roleplaying Hints: Observe carefully all that transpires. Convey an air of watchful good humor. When asked for an opinion, offer it directly and with little preamble, but without rancor. If your personal history is discussed, refer to it with quiet pride.

Chalech, Primus of the Chakravanti

Background: Born amidst famine, Chalech grew up with sickness and death in his village and family. The famine eventually abated, but the youth was permanently marked by the tragedies of his childhood. Strangers seemed uncomfortable around him, though none could precisely name the source of their ill ease.

Chalech eventually left his home with his goals indefinite. In his wanderings, a gang of brigands ambushed him. Finding nothing of value on him, the thugs attempted to drown him in a nearby river. As he hovered closer to death than life, the Awakening mage was escorted through a vision of the chaotic forces of nature. He saw the hidden side of the Cycle of Life and Death, the purification of Oblivion and the method of the Return. Chalech recovered already in the care of a Chakravanti Cabal. He has never asked whether those fellow death-mages merely foresaw or instigated the bandits' attack, but he believes the latter is more likely.

Perhaps the most notable accomplishment in the life of Paramaguru Chalech is his instrumental role in uniting the numerous and far-flung death-mystery sects into a single Tradition. Although it was Sirdar Rustam who organized the First Samashti, Chalech's presence prevented the meeting from degenerating into chaos and distrust. He was the guide who led the great and subtle rite that bound them into a cohesive group.

In Horizon, it is said that Chalech's insight justifies the tension that results from the presence of the Chakravanti. The Archmage understands the growth and decay processes of both individuals and groups to an astounding, almost godlike degree. For every trial that the Mage who pioneered Horizon faced, a thousand more were deftly avoided by the Ancient's foresight.

As Primus, Chalech is the first to hold supreme power over the Tradition. However, many Chakravanti watch him carefully. Should the Paramaguru show excessive hubris or turn on the Tradition he leads, other death-magi stand ready to correct the situation with the good death.

Appearance: Chalech's dark but animated features are deeply lined. His aquiline nose and depthless eyes occasionally reflect kindness or humor but are more often mysterious. The darkly vibrant robes that the Paramaguru prefers lend a small measure of life to his skeletal visage. His long years of working closely with the ways of death and transition have imparted to him Jhor, also called the Death-Taint. Chalech, however, does not move like an old man. His gestures are swift and assured, without hint of palsy. His grip is firm and his voice melodious and vital.

Roleplaying Hints: State your viewpoints simply but firmly. Do not flinch from hard truths. You take pleasure in simple things, but your unearthly wisdom makes itself known in subtle ways even to the blindest eye. The serenity of death resonates homogeneously throughout everything in your proximity.



Valoran of the Celestial Chorus

Background: Valoran came to the Celestial Chorus many years after the Mercy Schism — the event that tore the Choristers from the bosom of the Church. But that event, and his own understanding of it affected Valoran's dealing with his own sect. He realized that there were many ways to lend a greater glory to the One, and that a variety of voices created a richer harmony. Valoran is more open-minded than most of his fellows, and he presents this viewpoint to the other Choristers with varying degrees of success. Many find his ideas strange; some believe that he has been corrupted by the pagans and shamans and has become a heretic. Valoran prays that other members of his Tradition expand their outlook based on his example. To this end, he is a staunch supporter of Horizon, even though as a whole, his Tradition is not. He feels that the only way the Chorus will not become archaic and useless is through regular contact with the others.

Appearance: Valoran wears the robes of a priest and the mien of a scholar. A book of some type of lore is rarely far from his reach. In his youthful days, he adored riding, and he still dons riding gear. He is tall compared to his brethren and carries himself with a bearing that speaks of a noble birth.

Roleplaying Hints: Speak with quiet determination. Those whose minds are closed frustrate you. Show great concern for the future and the Celestial Chorus' place in it.



Star-of-Eagles and Niaoba of the Dreamspeakers

Background: Before Horizon was born, Star-of-Eagles and Niaoba were brought together through the Iwa. Through their seeking, they realized that their souls were connected. When the call came from Nightshade of Verbena to join the Council of Nine, they both knew they were drawn together for a larger purpose.

Appearance: Star-of-Eagles possesses the proud bearing and introspective calm of a much older shaman. He wears his black hair tied with a woven thong in a single plait down his back. He is slow to smile, but his smile is infectious. Niaoba is beautiful and elegant, her body untouched by flesh-shaping rituals. She wears her hair unexpectedly short and favors soft tunics in rich colors. When these two are together, the love between them is self-evident.

Roleplaying Hints: United to build Horizon, these two are rarely separated. One completes the other, and what one lacks, the other has to spare. Speak hopefully of the uniting of many people and its importance in the face of the coming storm. Display gestures of affection to your partner unashamedly.



Baldric La Salle *bani* Quaesitor, representative of the Order of Hermes

Background: Few know anything of Baldric's youth before his arrival at Doissetep. He was the child of consors to the noted Hermetic researcher Sylvain Lorilleux *bani* Boniassus. His early childhood was relatively idyllic, as Sylvain's remote and fantastic Realm proved to be a safe haven from the cruelties of earthly life. Though aghast at his fellow Hermetics' arrogance regarding mages outside the Order, the young Mage was diplomatic enough not to mention his own egalitarian beliefs. He grew to mastery but remained in obscurity.

In the wake of Order of Reason attacks, Baldric put forth a proposal before the Judicium Hermes. It asked for leave to seek allies outside the House of Hermes. Doubting much would come of it, the Judicium agreed and gave Baldric narrow parameters in which he could negotiate.

After facing many dire perils both temporal and infernal, Baldric found success, convening the first Mistridge Tribunal. In this, the Hermetic leaders saw a chance to expand their power base. Thus, they gave the magus full representative authority over the Order.

Though many Hermetics still think that other mages should be subsumed into House ex Miscellania, Baldric is having a small measure of progress in getting the Order to agree to an egalitarian structure between Traditions. Fortunately, Baldric finds negotiations with the other Primi to be less difficult. Their philosophies may be diverse, but they share a dream. Though not the greatest of Mages on the

nascent Council of Nine, Baldric is committed to creating and preserving the Traditions legacy.

Appearance: Baldric has a delicate, elfin face. His dark red hair is white at the temples. Several errant hairs in his goatee and mustache have gone snowy as well. The Magister wears white ceremonial robes with gold trim, adorned with a stylized golden sun on the chest.

Roleplaying Hints: You are an idealist. And now that your dream is within your grasp, you have become more driven. This fire can be seen in your infectious charm. Your impeccable tact serves you with a readiness equal to your magick. You are unflappable in the face of adversity. This determination and spirit has a way of shaming or inspiring others to similar virtues.

Sh'zar of the Seers of Chronos

Background: Sh'zar embodies all that the Seers hold sacred and all that the other Traditions find frightening about them. He is a master of prophecy and seduction and is said to have honed his talents over lifetimes. Despite his wild veneer, Sh'zar is a dedicated man of peace. When charisma and charm do not work their own magick, he uses the spells of a hookah and exotic smokes. By the end of his counseling, bitter enemies often emerge as friends, with their differences dispersed in herbal fumes. His charms are not as effective with the Council, who view the Seers with suspicion.

Sh'zar has been with the Seers for many years. Before Awakening, he became fascinated with the legends of Shiva and Kali, passion and chaos. He explored the truths embodied therein, plunging into the pursuits for



which the Seers are known. In the midst of his indulgences, he Awakened.

Sh'zar is well-known for his three familiars and guards. Adamu is a fiery hawk, Ka'bah and Kadishtu are two large and ornate male peacocks. They accompany Sh'zar everywhere, and they have been known to assist him in rescues. He had a vision of the threat posed by the Order of Reason. That prophecy inspired him to make other magi aware of the coming trials, and of the importance of uniting.

Appearance: Sh'zar is a honey-skinned man of 30. That is his current appearance. He shapes his flesh and changes his appearance at a whim. He has flowing dark hair and dresses in fine draping robes. He is aware of the Seers' reputation and tends to play up to it stylistically. He desires that everyone become aware of the beauty within.

Roleplaying Hints: Be charming and aware of your audience's needs. Make each person you are speaking to feel like she is the most important one you could be spending your time with. Always try to steer your listeners to the most harmonious solution to any disagreement.

Diplomat Luis d'Estes of the Solificati

Background: Luis d'Estes truly deserves the title "diplomat." While most Solificati are perceived as arrogant and dismissive, Luis projects an air of quiet assurance and self-confidence. If asked about a magickal procedure, Luis explains it with care and patience.

Luis is descended from a regal background; his forefathers were Spanish lords. He reaped the benefits of a gentle upbringing and a formal education. Luis became fascinated with chemical compounds and with legendary and magickal uses of such combinations — in short, alchemy. He had heard that these alchemists could be located through a diligent search, and so as he approached adulthood, he left on his quest. Luis searched for two years, following leads and weathering disappointment. He found Javier Ballesteros, who was the chemist of a small village in the south but also a member of the White Lion Guild. Through persuasion and the completion of several "trials," Luis convinced Javier to accept him as a student. For many years, Luis learned and was determined to know the true secrets of transmutation.

After 10 years of devoted study, of transcribing texts and learning symbols, Luis was brought into the secret fellowship of the White Lion Guild. He watched the formation of the Order of Reason and raised his voice in protest when they began to place constraints on the members of their Order. The Crowned Ones, he stated, were more than featureless peasants in a hierarchy. The alchemists agreed and left the Order.



Luis had learned the value of uniting for the exchange of knowledge and the coalition of resources, and he was able to impress these ideas on his fellows. The united magi became the Solificati.

Appearance: Luis has the style and bearing of a Spanish lord of the era. In Council, he attends formally dressed, bearing his family's crest on his vest or coat. He is well-groomed and very much an elder statesman. In his laboratory, he wears older clothes that allow him to work, spill, and not concern himself over any mess that might occur. The mean clothes do not hamper his dignity, however.

Roleplaying Hints: You are no less arrogant than your fellows, but far more discreet in displaying it. When addressing a problem, if the answer is obvious, carefully guide those around you toward that same solution.

Nightshade of the Verbena

Background: Nightshade didn't come to the Verbena, she was born to them. Her mother and her mother's mother were wise women, midwives, and herbal healers. In the days before the Christian monotheists taught hatred and fear of women, they were the ones the villagers came to for medicine, advice, wisdom and comfort. They were unfettered by the mores of others and ran wild beneath the moon! Nightshade grew up with these freedoms — her mother was a Bacchante, who tasted her lovers' flesh and left them bleeding in the dawn chill. Nightshade was born of such a union, and the magick ran thick in her blood.



Nightshade was initiated as maiden under the moon, and her grandmother prophesied a rich, but difficult, future. She saw a palace and she knew that Nightshade would help bring the vision to fruition.

Nightshade, along with her deceased lifemate William Groth, was one of the first magi to share in the dream of Horizon. She heard Sh'zar of the Seers speak of the coming threat of the Order of Reason and knew the truth of his fears. Nightshade and Groth met with Valoran of the Celestial Chorus and Baldrick of the Order of Hermes. Though the three were not natural allies, all recognized that the trials looming in the future were more important than their differences.

Nightshade and Groth became joined in a Great Rite and established a core sect of Verbena. Once their marriage rite was complete, they resolved to find other magi of different paths and invite them to the building of Horizon. Groth traveled east and encountered the Akashic Brotherhood, but he met his end before he could return. Nightshade traveled west, discovering the Dreamspeakers, whose ties to nature were close to her own. It was her encouragement that resulted in Star-of-Eagles traveling to meet with the Council.

Appearance: Nightshade's beauty is wild and untamed, not the carefully groomed artifice of courtly ladies or the simple comeliness of village maidens. Her hair falls free and unbound, and her expressions are without guile. In Council Chambers, she wears dresses with intricate hand embroidery.

Roleplaying Hints: Show careful respect for the beliefs of others, but do not tolerate any disrespect they give to yours. After all, your gods pre-date theirs, and your ways are as old as humanity. Take joy in your rituals and your magick. Believe in the importance of peace, but not at the expense of freedom.

Conflict in Paradise

In the beginning, almost no one believed that Horizon could ever be. Most of the magi eyed each other with suspicion, the hatred born of fear of the strangeness of those from other lands. The scholarly Hermetics refused to work with the Dreamspeakers, whom the Order considered to be unschooled and savage.

Yet the magi knew that something had to be done; a pact of some kind had to be formed, or they would all fall to the Order of Reason. The birth of Horizon was an act of desperation on the part of most of its supporters, as much as an act of vision on the part of a few.

The magi began to build Horizon. Altercations broke out regularly over minor differences and long-held grudges. The Primi did their best to dissuade the instigators of these skirmishes, but many of the reasons behind the fights ran deep.

The Primi's method of control was a hierarchy that involved small select circles of adepts dedicated to each Primus. The individuals who made up these circles were chosen based on their obedience to their Primus and on their ability to think beyond the limits of their experiences. Once selected, the devotees were charged with the task of keeping the peace and setting an example of behavior for others within the newly born Realm. The method was successful in quelling fights and furthered the acolytes' education in the practical matters of statecraft for magi.

The Primi and their followers made stirring, heartfelt speeches about the necessity of uniting all the magi, and the importance of Horizon for their continued survival. Leaders stressed that the real enemy was the Order of Reason, not fellow magi, regardless of any other differences. Some magi who stood in objection were converted by the most moving of the speeches, especially those of Sh'zar the Seer.

The most damaging opposition to Horizon came from those who worked quietly within the Primi's trusted ranks. These betrayers thought of themselves as loyal to their sects and truly believed that Horizon who bring them doom and disgrace or corruption. This utter conviction made these traitors dangerous, as they act with the certainty of the rightness of their actions.



CHAPTER III: THE COUNCIL OF NINE

Mariano Rossini was one such man. He came to the Celestial Chorus after many years of service to the priesthood. His devotion to God was undisputed and he firmly believed his gifts were the result of the depth of his piety. He became Valoran's most trusted aide and confidante.

Mariano did not understand the Chorus' excommunication from the main body of the Church. He could not see the greater good in such an action and perceived this rejection as an affront to his dedication. Valoran's mad scheme of uniting with heathens and witches was an even greater insult. He began to believe that Valoran had been possessed or seduced by pagan ways and that the Chorus would become tainted if they followed the Primus' course of action. If the Celestial Chorus became corrupt, the Church would never reinstate them, and Mariano's faith would have been in vain.

When tragedy began to plague Horizon, Mariano was secretly, sinfully joyous. Yet each tragic event seemed to deepen the other magi's determination to complete this blasphemous work they had undertaken. Mariano could stand no more.

It was he who revealed the secrets of Horizon to the Order of Reason prior to the attack in 1454. He felt that if Horizon and all that it represented were destroyed, the

purity of the Celestial Chorus would be restored. He would be their new leader. Or if he fell, then he would be a martyr.

Ultimately, the order of Reason's attack failed, and the dream of Horizon grew stronger.

Mariano withdrew in disappointment and fear of discovery. He suffered a profound crisis of faith and confessed his betrayal to Valoran. Rather than making the matter worse by bringing public scorn and distrust on the Chorus, Valoran handled the punishment quietly by exiling Mariano, sentencing him to remain alone with his search for God.

The adepts of all of the paths were overwhelmed with the task of Horizon. Though they all longed for the peace, few could agree on how that should best be accomplished. The Primi struggled to give the bickering factions common ground to work toward, but long-held fears of strangers' ways conflicted with the enlightenment the adepts-masters aspired to encourage.

It took tragedy to overcome the fears with which most of the magi viewed their fellows. Solidarity between the groups increased and hostilities decreased, as Horizon's true foes, the Umbrood and the Daedaleans, launched attacks. Thus, it was through adversity that Horizon finally united.

10-Sphere





Chapter IV: Independent Covenants

The Lickspittle Players: A Feast of Fools



*We've got magic to do just for you
We've got miracle plays to play
We've got parts to perform, hearts to warm
Kings and things to take by storm
As we go along our way*

— "Magic to Do," Pippin

*Good evening, good gentles, and thank you for pausing
along your way to listen to the tale presented by our humble
troupe, the Lickspittle Players.*

*We hope, as ever, that our little play has brought a smile
to your lips, a tear to your eye, and given you pause to think.
For the story continues on, my friends, long after the curtain
has fallen and our little band is but a memory from seasons
past among you and yours.*

*And thank you, good wife, your generosity is appreciated by
each of us humble Players more than you may ever know.*

A Player's Lot

Few people in Europe have the freedom — or the occasion — to travel as much as Players do. Without being tied down to a shop, a household or a plot of land, they come and go from town to town as the spirit moves them, sometimes remaining in a hospitable town for a season, sometimes departing before dawn's light graces the road. Their visits are anticipated by local folk, who come as much to hear news and tales of far away places as they do to see whatever piece the Players are presenting that day.

But such freedom does not come without a price. Traveling Players are looked on by many as lower than dogs on the social ladder. At least a dog knows its place and remains loyal to its master. For every hearth that welcomes their merry music and cautionary tales, a dozen more chase them out with broomsticks and switches. They are accused of being plague carriers, brigands, layabouts who tempt good Christian souls to



vice and sin. In some areas, parents shoo their children inside when the caravan's bells and fifes are heard in the distance... though when they do, their children sneak out the back window to see what all the uproar is about.

Like other traveling troupes, the Lickspittle Players are a motley group of misfits and outcasts, whose talent alone marks them as different from their fellow laborers even if they did not share a common gift for magick. Their talents range from music and dance to carpentry and textiles, and together they form a nearly self-sufficient community. Magickally, they run the gamut from Verbena to Void Explorer, and Solificati to Seer of Chronos, yet somehow, a common purpose has brought them together when others in loftier climes have failed.

History

The Players began in England some years ago. The number of seasons that have come and gone since then has never seemed significant enough to bother recording. The troupe first came together as part of the Harvest Festival in Bath, when various trade guilds each put together a short sketch for the entertainment of their fellows. The majority of the tales were Biblical in nature and owed much to the medieval tradition of "morality" plays. In those days, Malchcolm was the organizational force behind the group.

Only Malchcolm and Anne remain of the original troupe of five. Alain was an enthusiastic member of the audience and later joined as a full-fledged member. Bernard insists that the changing faces are one of the

In Time of Plague

The plagues history records are not the only ones to claim lives across the face of Europe. While these are in many cases the most virulent and were responsible for the deaths of entire villages, disease is always with the people of the 15th century. When disease sweeps across the continent, public gatherings of all sorts are viewed as potential places where the malady may spread from one person to the next. For this reason, during times of plague, most cities ban public performances from Players and are strict in enforcing this rule.

During times such as these, the Players sometimes try to outrun news of the plague and settle in an area that has not yet been stricken. For as much as Anne and others would like to stay and tend to the afflicted, the Players know that no one wants to host a motley band such as theirs if they were to find out they had just been in a plague village.

troupe's greatest strengths, for it is through interaction with new people and perspectives that Players and audiences are best able to learn and grow.

Whither Wander We?

Like other traveling folk, the Players' route is largely seasonal. In the summer, they can be found as far north as Britain and the low countries, while with the coming frost, they turn their wagons south to the Mediterranean and milder climes.

Despite the fact that the majority of the members of the Players are native to England, their travels have taken them to the furthest corners of Europe. Now and again a country lord or especially progressive noble in town invites the Players into the courtyard to perform for the local nobility, but for the most part, their audiences consist of laboring folk, craftsmen and merchants.

The Play Is the Thing

The Lickspittle Players draw on a wide range of traditions, as befits their varied backgrounds and interests. They are familiar with the old medieval morality plays, in which an allegorical tale instructs the audience on the particulars of the "correct" way of thinking and living. Depending on who among the Players is determining the evening's fare, these sometimes stray into subversive matter.

Their most popular plays are those inspired by the Italian *comedia*, in which stock characters representing archetypes such as the dashing young lover or the cuckolded old man enact comedies of situation and character that leave their audiences gasping for breath with merriment. Even when the audience does not speak the same language, the physical comedy and familiar situations make these sketches universal.

Home Is Where the Heart Is

The Players typically travel in three wagons, sometimes supplemented by one or two carts, depending how many people are in the group at the time.

The wagons are essentially boxes on wheels, with sheets of elaborately painted canvas tied down at each corner. From time to time, the Players paint over the old scenes to depict new settings for their plays — the ramparts of a castle, a peasant's hovel, a rocky seacoast or a forest glen. When on the road, wagons carry all the Players' belongings and supplies.

The Horses

To the Players, the troupe's horses are as much (or more) a part of the group than the human members. Anne's natural affinity with the beasts has kept them

calm even when traveling through chaotic markets on their travels — and when they have occasionally been witness to events beyond the ken of most mortals.

The beasts always get first drink when the Players come to an inn or a stream, for the troupe knows that without healthy horses, their traveling days would be over. One of the horses, an ancient nut-brown stallion named Jarvis, has somewhat more rarefied tastes — he refuses to drink water unless truly parched, preferring red wine over mountain-stream water any day.

Dramatis Personae Malcholm

Background: Although his parents were highland-born, Malcholm lived all his life south of Hadrian's Wall. Entering monastic life at 16, Malcholm was a cleric in the cloister at York for much of his adult life. When, at 32, he was informed that he had inherited a small shop from an uncle in Bath, he took it as a sign that it was time to put aside the monk's habit and rejoin the world. As much as it pained him to leave behind the life of God, which was the only life he had ever known until then, he heard the voice of an angel calling him onward, to embrace the life he had left behind as a youth. Malcholm continued to do the work of the Lord, but among the Lord's people and not shut away from the world.

He sought to learn all he could of the world, and he found that the Lord does indeed work in mysterious ways.

Image: Hale and hearty at 53, his steel-gray hair and green eyes convey the perfect combination of world-weary experience and fatherly affection toward his fellow Players.



Roleplaying Hints: You've seen it all before, but you never tire of it. The world presents a thousand challenges to faith undreamed of in the world of the cloister, but you meet each new challenge with the full force of your faith behind you. You abide things that some insist are un-Christian, but from what you have seen of the world, God trusts his singers to act according to the dictates of their conscience — so long as you are following the song of praise resounding in their hearts.

Quote: "It's a new world we are living in today, my friends...with new challenges and new dangers."

Bernard Solificati

Background: Alchemy is the process of refinement through which one transforms what is base into what is most valuable. And so it is with the spirit. One would not expect base metal to turn to gold without any outside influence, and so it is with the mortal soul. In order to understand oneself, one must understand each individual facet. Through the art of performance, Bernard seeks to refine and perfect each element of personality, to better understand himself and the world around him. Bernard's training among the Solificati has served him well, and each day he finds new applications for what he humbly refers to as "the alchemy of self."

Image: A man of medium build in his early 30s, Bernard is a canvas on which any persona may be painted. He is handsome, but not so handsome that he cannot portray a leprous beggar believably. His hair is medium brown and shoulder-length and is a near-perfect match in color for eyes that can appear warm and mild or dark and flashing, depending on his mood.

Roleplaying Hints: You can be all things to all people...when you choose to be. Your quest to understand



yourself sometimes clouds your understanding of others, and you know this to be your greatest flaw. Though you are easily distracted, you seek to overcome your mercurial nature and learn to identify and understand those aspects of others that are like — and different from — yourself.

Quote: "You do me great honor to offer such kind words. But my performance was flawed this evening, sir, and I cannot accept such accolades in good conscience. Return tomorrow, and perhaps the spirit of the work will find good seat within me then."

Alain

Background: Born the son of a dairy farmer in the Channel Islands, Alain first saw the Players at a festival in England when he was 17. Enchanted, he thought of nothing else until the following autumn when he made the decision to leave home in the hopes that he might apprentice himself to the Players.

Though he is not a will-worker like his fellow Players, Alain understands more of their struggle and is committed, despite the fact that he does not share their gift.

Image: His fair locks reach down to his shoulders, and his slender frame sometimes seems too fragile to withstand the hard life of a traveling Player. Though no longer a youth, he has retained an optimistic view of the world that sets him apart from his traveling companions.

Roleplaying Hints: Your wide-eyed enthusiasm is mistaken for naiveté by some, and you'll admit that sometimes you speak without thinking. Even so, you know full well that sometimes learning from one's mistakes can be the best way to learn.

Quote: "Did you really like it? I've always been inspired by tales of romance, too... they speak to the best parts of each of us."



Karl Gertzwein

Background: The son of a sea captain from the Baltic coast, Karl Gertzwein has always been fascinated by each new story he hears. Tales of lands across the sea enchant him, but no more than tales that take place just down the road.

After a brief apprenticeship period as an Explorer of the Order of the Grail, Karl set out to make his own way. He crossed paths with the Players in Nice and found in them kindred spirits and a new purpose for his life.

Karl seeks to learn the tales of all people. He is an explorer of the mortal imagination, chronicling those things that don't show their face when grownups are around. A charismatic man and an astute scholar, Karl has become the playwright of the group after joining up with them several years ago. While he does not presume to set down lines for the other, he defines the tales they tell.

Image: With dark hair falling in careless waves across a furrowed brow, Karl is often cast in the role of the melancholy lover — or the villain. His strong voice and athletic build give him a commanding presence that has caused more than one young lass' heart to flutter.

Roleplaying Hints: Listen first, and take the measure of your audience. If you know what perspective they are speaking from, it is simplicity itself to tailor your speech in such a way that they are more receptive.

Quote: "Indeed. Well, I am certain that a man of your learning and stature will not hesitate to demonstrate that the generosity of your heart is matched by that of your purse. Is that not so?"

Gulia

Background: Born in a brothel not far from the shadow of the Vatican, Gulia Awakened young and began a journey of self discovery that took her from the Barbary Coast to the highlands of Scotland. She is a masterful musician and dancer, with her beauty marred only by a milky film covering her right eye. As a child, her mother believed she was blind. She has trouble seeing in dim light and at long distances. But her diminished sight in the mortal world seems to have strengthened her sight into the invisible world.

Gulia uncovered her gifts for magick under the tutelage of an elderly gentleman in Florence who introduced her to the Seers of Chronos. Some years later, she met up with the Players in Venice, where her quick wit and charm managed to get Karl out of trouble with the local constabulary.

Image: With her olive-toned skin and black hair, it is not hard to believe that Gulia's grandsire may well have been *Romani*, as she often states. Whether worn back in a loose braid or with curls flying free in the autumn breeze, her hair is her most prominent feature, even more so than her eye. Her manner is open and she walks with a comfortable grace and a lilt to her step.

Roleplaying Hints: You are quick to smile — for so much in life amuses you. Whether it's the innocence of the young or the folly of those who fancy themselves wise, there is a great deal to smile about.

Quote: "I could read your palm and tell you much of your past... and your future. But instead, why don't you tell me? You are the architect of your own destiny, after all."



Politics

Unlike most traditional Covenants, there is little overt strife among the Players. They are each here for reasons of their own, and when the time comes to move on and away from the group, they will do so. There are no great secrets that the group has vowed to protect, so long as former companions don't report the Players as being a coven of witches, no one cares.

They do, of course, have philosophical differences. Anytime will-workers of such disparate backgrounds come together, one should expect some disagreement. They each seek their own path, and so long as no one impedes their progress, they may all continue to work in harmony.

Characters may encounter the Players. Given their transient nature, they may bring news from a nearby Cray or a covenant halfway across the continent.

In addition to being the bearers of news both magickal and mundane from the four corners of Europe and beyond, the Lickspittle Players have helped more than one confused young person to realize that there are indeed others like them out there. While they don't want to pick up hangers-on in each village, the Players do their best to direct the newly Awakened to like-minded tutors in their area.

As transients, the troupe makes a likely target for would-be witchhunters, as well as simply overzealous moralists. As radicals who occasionally plant a seed of discontent in the minds of local youths, they are sometimes the target of the authorities' wrath. Each of the Players may have friends or foes in any given city or hamlet, and the repercussions may be felt by the entire group.

The Magnus

The Magnus (properly, the *Saint Magnus*), is a small, single-masted sailing vessel found in the harbors of Orkney, Shetland, Iceland, or Norway. The people of those parts know it as a wandering trader and accept it as such, although the wise among them consider its captain mad for sailing in all weather in such a small craft.

In fact, Olave Kethrisson is an Awakened Void Seeker, as are three of his men. Their strange and diverse arts ensure that their craft is far more robust than it appears. The other eight of those aboard are Brethren. All share the Void Seeker dream of questing and courage. Their ship is a lodge of the Convention.



Anne

Background: A delicate beauty hailing from the Sussex coast of England, Anne always had a natural affinity for dealing with other people. Her gentle manner and soft, low voice puts others at ease instantly. Should she ever decide to put the life of a traveling Player aside, she will have her pick of suitors.

She observes the change in seasons with a reverence seldom seen outside the cloister, yet she takes pride in her resolve to not engage in carnal pleasures, for while she knows that such things are a part of the natural cycle, she also knows that the time has not come for her to tread that path.

Image: The fairest of the fair, Anne's alabaster skin and delicate golden hair make her a natural to play the company's ingenue roles. Her hazel eyes bespeak more wisdom than her slight frame indicates. Her compassion for others often comes as a surprise to those who expect such a beauty to be as distant as she is fair.

Roleplaying Hints: Although you play the innocent, you have seen more of the world than you care to remember at times. You've kissed more often in the course of a play than outside the glare of the footlights, but you know that when the time is right, a husband will present himself, for such is the way of the world.

Quote: "We all have troubles from time to time. Tonight, for a moment at least, leave your cares behind and be merry!"



Tower Nocturna: Assassins of the Night



orgive me, Father, for I have sinned."

The priest nodded slowly at the all-too-familiar phrase. Incense hung heavily in the small confessional, but he still smelled the rank odors that clung to the peasant on the other side of the mesh screen.

"What have you done, my son?" he asked, wrinkling his nose.

"I have seen what I should not, heard what I need not, and taken what I ought not, father."

It was the code Bishop Felipe had told him to wait for. His breathing quickened. But from this peasant? The priest leaned forward, trying to see the confessor through the screen as he continued with the scripted response.

"And what do you wish from me, my son?" he asked carefully. His heartbeat pulsed loudly in his ears.

"I need guidance, for I fear I will do the same again."

The priest swallowed, licking dry lips. He reached into his robe and produced a small leather book, sliding it through the narrow opening in the screen.

"Read, and be illuminated," his voice trembled. He could make out nothing of the man's face, for he wore a hood that hid his features. The Bishop wouldn't be pleased.

He heard the book open. Pages fluttered, and a bag of coins clinked. The tome, now emptied, slid back through the mesh.

"I think I have gained all the illumination I am due, Father."

The priest made a quick sign of the cross, hoping the absolution applied to him as well. "Then... go with God, my son."

The confessional door opened, and the priest felt the breeze from the man's departure. Tonight, a Florentine merchant would die at the Bishop's behest, and the silver for the deed had passed through the priest's own hands in a hollow Bible. And none was closer to identifying the men that knew too much to live... or to die.

The confessional opened again, and another sinner entered. "Forgive me, Father...."



A Tower of the Times

In the 15th century, Florence blazes with the cultural fire of the Renaissance. The Italian city-state births some of the finest art, architecture and intellectual thought that Europe has seen since the fall of Rome. Lead not by despotism but by the rule of an enlightened Republic, for it is home to the finest banking, trade, and textile industries to be found. It is the perfect example of what all Italy and all the world should be.

Or so it seems.

The “enlightened Republic” is in fact ruled by an oligarchy of influential professionals and guilds that are interested more in their individual well-being than the rights of those below them. The *contadini*, the land-owning nobility of the countryside, flock to prosperous Florence and bring their personal rivalries, turning the streets into a playground for their vendettas. The famed Medici bankers engage in bitter feuds with the papacy and other city-states over Florentine territory. Spies, assassins and reversals of fortune are the tools of trade in this struggle for power, and one cannot let cultural enlightenment or religion stand in the way. Just ask Machiavelli...he lives here.

In this game of dominance, importance lies not only with keeping power, but with keeping appearances as well. A *contadini* who wishes to triumph over her rivals cannot afford to be implicated in their unfortunate deaths. So everyone turns to the unknowns — the lone middlemen who have nothing to lose — who ply their dark trades to those with enough gold and enough need. But many of these unknowns are not as unaffiliated as some might think.

Few have heard of the Tower Nocturna, and those that have think it is just a myth. But the handful that truly know of the tower fear it more than petty rivals and grabs for power.

History

Gionni Lotario de Conte, the father of the Night Tower, was born the son of a wealthy *contadini* in the Italian countryside in 1440. His mother died from the plague when he was very young, and his father raised him as an only child. At the age of 13 he Awakened, taught magick in secret by a small cult of Verbena. They worshipped in a secluded glen on his father's estate, hiding from the eyes of the Church. He never fully subscribed to

their pagan beliefs, but he found their views on life and death fascinating.

He took control of the family fortune and estate, but the other nobles circled like vultures around the inexperienced Lotario. Even his Arts could not help him thwart the daunting forces set against him. With little political knowledge and no allies, his family's lands were eaten away. He set out, as many *contadini* did, to the promised riches in the city of Florence.

Lotario eventually found work in a Medici money-changing house. He lived meagerly for several years, barely eking out his existence. But from the banking house, he watched the secret games that the nobility played. He learned the basic rule of their game: Knowledge is power. But, he had little opportunity to find a way into their feuds and to reinstate himself into his birthright as nobility. So the feuds found their way to him.

The Medici, along with their wealth, possessed a host of enemies. One of those enemies was the Bishop of Rome. A man from the Vatican approached Lotario with a proposition. He offered the young magus a tidy sum of gold for information on the money-changing house and its Medici owners.

He gave the man no information of true value. The Church resorted to assassination attempts, managing to kill one of the Medici leaders during Sunday Mass many years later. But Lotario's mind had been set in motion. He saw the power of magick in the game of secrets. He realized the money and information he could gain by plying himself as a spy. And he recognized the profound, deadly power that a grouping of individuals like him could wield. This could be his chance for revenge.

His reputation as a spy, as well as his pocketbook, grew rapidly. When he was adept enough with Life magicks, he altered his appearance constantly to avoid recognition. He made sure to record every scrap of information that he gathered, both for and about his employers.

Lotario also made contacts with other magi and small cabals that shared his chosen trade. He proposed his idea — a small, unified Covenant of assassins and spies. They would never advertise themselves as such, for their true power would lie in their secrecy. When the time was right, they would use their information to crush any *contadini* who stood in their way.

The magi readily agreed to the plan. Under Lotario's guiding hand, the Covenant of spies and assassins gathered their funds together and looked for a proper place to base their operations.

The Covenant christened the place as the *Torris Nocturna*, the tower of the Night. Lotario took the title

Dux Nocturnus, and they set about to make their plans a reality.

The Tower Nocturna does not exclusively employ magi; however, only magi know of the Covenant's existence. The Awakened members of the Covenant take only the duties and assignments of utmost importance, in which their magicks are most needed. They keep in close contact with the spies and assassins of Florence, passing on less important jobs to various sleeper agents. They use various methods, mundane or magical, to gain information from agents completely unaffiliated with any magi of the Tower Nocturna.

The tower's power and influence depend heavily on its secrecy. The Covenant never advertises itself or its name. The cabal members never claim to be part of a larger group. Their agents don't have any idea that every scrap of information they gain is recorded and archived.

The Tower Nocturna has been incredibly successful in its years of operation. The high demand for its services and the care it takes in maintaining its secrecy have given the Covenant tome upon tome of information on nearly every noble in Italy. Hardly any of these nobles could think it possible that a mysterious organization has compiled all their assassination orders and darkest secrets. But the small few who have heard the whispered name Nocturna, or who know of the tower's agenda, live in constant fear of the day the Covenant decides to reveal all.

Many members of the Covenant are already pushing for that day. The coffers of the tower bulge with the silver and gold from its exploits, and its libraries fill with pages of the dealings of Renaissance society. The *Dux Nocturna* resists the other magi's demand that the Covenant make its grab for power, knowing that the tower must move slowly and secretly. He realizes that they have caught the attention of other supernaturals and powerful nobles, and if the Tower Nocturna does not move correctly, the Covenant may lose everything.

The Childhood Glen

The Tower Nocturna sits in the middle of a lightly wooded, rolling hill in northwestern Florence, surrounded by trees and lush countryside. The glen is roughly circular. The tower has no direct connection to a major road, with only a small, worn path leading to the highway to Florence.

The weather is mild, with cool summers. A soft breeze blows from the nearby Tyrrhenian Sea. The woods that surround the secluded glen are expansive. On a clear day, manor houses can be seen in the distance, and at night, the lights of Florence glow softly in the sky.

The calmness and beauty of its surroundings in no way match the tower's true, dark purpose.

Due to no prior knowledge of Lotario, the tower is built on top of a moderately powerful Cray. The Verbena cult, now long since gone, worshipped in the glen because of the Quintessence it provided. This unexpected windfall adds tremendous power to the small Covenant. Already more beneficial than Lotario had hoped for, the glen serves as the perfect hiding place for the Tower Nocturna.

The Grounds

At First Glance

The tower structure itself is unassuming. Though built as a defensive fortress, it appears to be a rural manor keep rather than a military stronghold. The tower reaches six stories into the air, with window slits along its sides, and a battlement on top to watch for anyone approaching.

The Manor

The manor house is built very much in the typical Florentine design. Here, various Covenant members come to read and relax, to play a game of chess or checkers, or even to pray. The manor house is the first part of the tower that the rare visitor sees, and it is designed to be as typical and inconspicuous as possible. Also, the Covenant likes to have a small portion of the tower available for relaxation in noble luxury, away from the demands of work. The manor house is a welcome change from the dank, darkened atmosphere of the tower itself.

The Tower

The entrances to the tower are in the back of the house. Magickal wards attuned to members of the Covenant insure that unwanted visitors never make it further into the tower. No matter which room in the tower a person is in, it is damp and cool, even in the summer months. All the walls are built of the same featureless, pale stone, and the floors are unadorned wooden planks. Candles and lamps provide some light, but shadows fill every corner and room.

The first two above-ground floors are devoted to training and study. A Renaissance-style laboratory dominates the first floor, used in the creation of toxins and poisons. The remaining space holds meditation rooms devoted to teaching the magicks of Mind (one of the most valuable tools of the tower magi).

The second floor is constructed much like a training dojo. This floor is used as a physical training facility for

the members of the Covenant and contains the tower's armory.

Floors three, four, and five provide the living quarters for the Covenant. Few cabal members spend more than a week or two per month actually living in the tower. The sixth floor and the roof battlement have at least one servant or Covenant member on watch for unusual happenings in the surrounding forest. They have several crossbows and other missile weapons ready in case anyone tries to attack the tower, which hasn't happened so far, but the Covenant profession is one that constantly breeds paranoia.

The Lower Levels

Underneath the tower are two below-ground levels, which are the most important areas of the entire structure. The walls are made of hardened clay, reinforced with rock and wooden timbers. The air feels drier than in the tower above, but much more stale. Rats constantly scurry across the stone floors. No outside light reaches the depths of the lower levels, and candles and torches provide the only palest, flickering light.

The first sublevel contains the infamous library of the Tower Nocturna. A portion of this room is a library of magickal texts, aiding the Covenant members in their enlightenment. But the rest of the room holds the tomes of handwritten notes on the information the tower has gathered.

The lowest level of the tower is the access point for the Covenant's Cray. It contains numerous ritual sorcery materials, and ample open space for elaborate magickal incantations. The magi of the Covenant come from no single background or tradition, so this level must cater to the diverse needs and beliefs of its members.

Cabals

The Tower Nocturna Covenant consists of three cabals. Each cabal is responsible for its own recruitment, and each oversees a specific aspect of the tower's missions.

The Lords of Nightfall

The Lords of Nightfall cabal, led by Lotario and sharing his title, oversees the Covenant as a whole. All spying and assassination contracts are approved and assigned by the Lords. Profits from these contracts are funneled into the tower's coffers through the cabal. In addition to controlling the flow of gold and espionage contracts, the Lords' scribes are responsible for recording the information that the Covenant discovers.

The Lords of Nightfall were fashioned under Lotario's direct control, binding the other two cabals under its influence. He knows that many, including Lucien

Meyreaux, the leader of the Night Hand cabal, want to make a grab for power as soon as possible. Lotario realizes that fear is the only thing that holds these nobles back from trying to destroy the tower. Once the tower begins to maneuver into powerful positions, the nobles might decide that their secrets are not safe, regardless of whether they attack or not. The Tower Nocturna could not protect itself against the onslaught of all those who might oppose it.

Lotario has also discovered another threat. The Verbena cabal that worshipped in the tower's glen has long since moved on, but a nomadic Garou pack has noticed the spiritual energy of the area. They see the Cray as a sacred site, and they abhor the Covenant using (and polluting) its power. Lotario knows that the tower has little it can use to satiate or fend off these animalistic shapechangers, and he wonders if they will move on or attack the Covenant when the time is right.

Gionni Lotario de Conte, the Dux Nocturna

Background: Lotario snuck out of his bedroom at night during his childhood, roaming on horseback. The woods had a strange calling to him, as if some force pulled him deeper into the forests. He found a small clearing, and each night he spied on a cult of witches that worshipped there. He watched their odd dances and mystic rituals. Their celebrations tugged at his heart, and the feelings awakened the Daemon's voice within him. His world changed.

The Verbena took the young Lotario and taught him magick by night, hoping that he could be saved from the clutches of the Catholic Church. At times, he was



swayed by their beliefs, but ultimately Lotario stayed true to the Church's teachings and to his father's daily influence. He hid his new abilities away, not wishing to alarm his father... or the Church.

When his father died, the world changed again. He lost his family's lands and wealth to corrupt contadini. Many pretended to be his friends or allies, only to betray him at their first opportunity. Others simply took what they wanted and left Lotario destitute. He fled to Florence and crafted his plans for the Tower Nocturna. From then on, he dedicated himself to its realization.

Image: Lotario shows his Italian heritage strongly. He has dark, well-groomed hair and a long Roman nose. He wears the height of Italian fashion and carries a rapier and dagger at his belt. The scent of rich cologne hangs heavily about him. His face is beginning to show the deep lines of stress and age, but Life magicks keep Lotario young and vigorous. His eyes, however, betray his worries about the Covenant and its uncertain future.

Roleplaying Hints: You made the Tower Nocturna. You built it, organized it, and *guided its development* to bring you back what you lost. You must take your power and prestige back from the very nobles that robbed it from you. You are patient and careful not to let these desires overcome your reason. You know the tower must move methodically and with care. Several of the other Covenant members don't agree with you, but they don't know everything that you do. If it takes all the determination you have, you must hold this Covenant together to see it attain what you dream.

Quote: "Our time will come, but for now, we must be content to wait in the darkness."

The Night Hand

The Night Hand cabal is in charge of the assassins of the Tower Nocturna. Its duty is not to gather information, or to spy, or to act as an informant. Its duty is to kill — as quickly and effectively as possible.

Lucien Meyreaux

Background: Meyreaux is French. He lived in poverty, without a family for much of his childhood. He survived in the slums of Paris until he was old enough to work as a deckhand on a sailing ship, and he escaped France as soon as he was able to get on a trading vessel.

He Awakened and trained under the tutelage of a Chakravanti, who had booked passage on one of Meyreaux's ships and noticed the boy's potential. The Chakravanti took him from his life of poverty and adopted him, traveling throughout the Mediterranean and teaching him magick.



Meyreaux and his mentor eventually parted company, and the young magus settled down in Florence. Without many opportunities for employment, he began operating as an assassin for the nobles of Italy. He, like many Chakravanti, felt the pull of Jhor, and justified his actions as removing the worst men from society. But it was a lie; he killed because bringing death by his own hand thrilled him.

However, his existence had little higher purpose until Gianni Lotario de Conte approached him with a proposal. Meyreaux readily agreed to the idea of the Tower Covenant and joined Lotario's forces as the leader of the Night Hand.

However, the tower's progress was never rapid enough for him. He argued with Lotario, trying to speed up the Covenant's timetable, but Lotario refused to be swayed from his own personal plan. Meyreaux, frustrated and disappointed, began turning to ways of deposing Lotario.

Several assassins could see the plans that were forming in their cabal leader's mind. They approached him and told him that they had allies who could help Meyreaux take power. He agreed to their offer, and never wavered, even when those allies were revealed to be demons.

Meyreaux is not fully under the sway of the Infernalists and their masters. He has many plans of his own and is positioning himself to strike at the unsuspecting Lotario and give the Tower the attention it deserves.

Image: Lucien Meyreaux is tall and lean, with a neatly trimmed mustache and goatee. His eyes constantly dart from side to side, watching intently. He

dresses plainly. He always carries a saber at his belt, and at least three knives on various parts of his body. He moves with grace and speed, like a predatory animal watching for its next kill.

Roleplaying Hints: Lotario is a fool. He doesn't understand the power that the Tower Nocturna holds... but you do. The time for waiting is over. The Covenant needs to move, to force its way into Italian politics and carve its own place of control. But you don't have enough power to remove Lotario yet. You have plans, though, and as long as you can keep Lotario from discovering them, you will have the Tower Nocturna in the palm of your hand.

Quote: "Perhaps we can help one another..."

The Twilight Whispers

The Twilight Whispers cabal controls the espionage and spying of the Tower Nocturna. The cabal's ears are everywhere, and even the slightest whisper of a secret is remembered and brought back to the Tower.

Isabella Paulini

Background: Isabella Paulini is a native of Florence and grew up knowing only poverty. She had an innocent beauty, and her mother forced her into prostitution to help support her family. Young Isabella hated the smelly, ugly, drunken men she had to feign lust for, and most of all, she hated her mother.

A Seer of Chronos became a frequent visitor to Paulini's room, and he took the nascent magus under his wing. She despised him, too, for he still seemed the same as the countless other men she had been with. But he taught her how to find pleasure in everything. He helped her to cope with her life, and she stuck to the Seer's teachings and ideas even after he left her for parts unknown.

Paulini discovered a way to escape her dismal life. She had gained a certain notoriety, and her beauty had grown since her younger days. Men of greater stature and importance started to visit her. She got many of them to talk about their businesses and affairs while in the throngs of her manufactured love, and she sold what she learned to others.

It was then that Gianni Lotario de Conte found her. He asked her to join in his Covenant, and she agreed. It let her escape from her former life as a whore, though it was not the freedom she had dreamt of. She wishes to be free, even of the bindings of the Covenant, but she never regrets leaving her earlier life behind.

CHAPTER IV: INDEPENDENT COVENANTS



Image: Despite her early years of prostitution, Paulini retains much of her beauty. She has long, auburn-colored hair and brown eyes. She wears elegant dresses and seldom adorns herself with more than a few pieces of jewelry. A slight floral fragrance surrounds her, and she speaks in a smooth, melodic voice.

Roleplaying Hints: You sometimes abhor yourself. You are in charge of the spies of the Tower Nocturna, and many of the eyes under your care act under the guise of prostitutes. You try to protect them from the ravages that you suffered, but you feel that you act like your mother, using young girls to support yourself.

You see the building feud between Lotario and Meyreaux. You feel a certain obligation for the man that saved you from your mother. You agree with Meyreaux that the tower must act sooner rather than later. You will need to make your choice soon... the coming storm is not far away.

Quote: "Come my dear, there is time enough for the worries of the world later."





Chapter V: Other Places of Note

The Benedictine Monastery of Saint Gregory: A Tragedy of Faith

The Monastery of Saint Gregory is a Benedictine foundation, situated in a remote valley in the French Alps. It has stood here for centuries now, and for most of that time, it has seen nothing but generations of devout monks in prayer, contemplation and labor — in obedience to the long-established Rule.

Its present tragedy began a few years ago, when a new prior was assigned to the place. Father Robertus was devout and sincere, but a wise observer realizes that he is prone to the sin of excessive enthusiasm. The Benedictine Rule enjoins moderation and a balanced life. Robertus was obsessive, demanding that each part of the day be spent in precise, vigorous acts of devotion or obedience. He was also deeply concerned with the capacity of the

younger monks for sin and distraction. When he took confession, he spent long periods questioning them about their impulses toward disobedience. The penances he imposed were severe.

In a fervid atmosphere of hidden fear and confused impulse, two youths Awoke — and instantly plunged into Quiet, dragging the entire monastery with them. This act in turn may have blasted other monks' Daemons into insane wakefulness; it is unlikely that removing any mere minority of the monks restored sanity.

The monastery has become a kind of Maraud Chantry, as well as a monument to obsession. Anyone approaching the place is drawn in. The monks, too, appear unchanged when first encountered, although they rarely put back their hoods. The regularity of their days has been replaced by an arbitrary schedule of

prayer and seclusion — the former taking place in a chapel that echoes with discordant chants. The only work that any perform now takes the form of back-breaking penitential labor.

The monks themselves all pursue their private obsessions and fears, with frequent flurries of sin filling their hours. Visitors are assumed to be agents of every outside force that the monks fear and hate. The influence of the monastery's psychic aura is liable to lead many such visitors into at least some of the sins of which they will be accused. Anyone moving a short distance from the monastery can find a jagged spire of rock or a terrifying precipice, and somehow, confrontations occur in such locations.

And yet, no monk dies — at least, not permanently. Several brothers are engaged in what they believe is true necromancy and demonology (although the beings that called forth this “magic” are constructions of their insanity, not true Umbrood). Those not “brought back” by “magical” activity survive apparent death by extraordinary coincidence, or they are saved by other monks for their own twisted purposes. Visitors may or may not be similarly fortunate, depending on the insane (and unthinking) whim of their hosts.

The monastery is now riddled with secret passages and spy-holes, which the monks find instinctively. (In fact, a brother's secret wish creates such passages.) Visitors become trapped in the brothers' private nightmares and obsessions with sin and betrayal. Sleepers are doomed to become part of the chaos, eventually taking up the robe (perhaps convincing themselves that they can destroy some threat within the place, in response to its mental influence). Even mages are hard-pressed to fight its effects. Once drawn in, they might have to work through to the heart of the mystery — the abbot's cell, where Father Robertus alternately tortures himself and is scourged by others.

The people of the villages around the Monastery believe that the place was destroyed in a great storm, which they assume triggered a landslide that swept the entire building away. Distortions in the landscape have largely blocked any paths leading to the site, and one or two persistent visitors simply failed to return. Likewise, a pair of priests sent by the local bishop didn't return, and the church is inclined to take the villagers' judgment as the best explanation. Alternatively, magickal Awareness might identify something amiss about this area, drawing mages into the matter.

The Island of Koraghiss



Somehow out in the Aegean Sea south of Greece, in territory sometimes disputed between Christian and Turkish navies, lies an unusual establishment — a substantial Disparate Chantry. The island of Koraghiss is ruled by independent magi who work carefully to keep it as neutral ground in the wizard wars.

The Founder

This Chantry was established by Hajji Abu-Umar Abd-Allah al-Khanan, a Turkish mystick of the Bektashi order of dervishes. Al-Khanan, whose magick uses an eclectic blend of dance, sacred Islamic chanting, formal scholarship that draws on a dozen ancient cultures, and insight, is a powerful mage who was once approached by Sh'zar the Seer himself. The Seer had a request that al-Khanan aid in the foundation of the Council. However, following days of debate, al-Khanan replied that Sh'zar's ideas could easily lead to chaos. He later had dealings with representatives of the Order of Reason and told them that although he agreed with many of their aims, he could not support their methods. Because he made it very clear that he would not oppose them, the Order made it their policy not to challenge this potent magus on his home ground.

Al-Khanan's philosophy is that each human being must find their own path to enlightenment within a framework of order and just law. He tends to view both the Council and Daedaleans as prone to arrogance, which does not mean he won't aid any who seek mystickal lore or advice. On the contrary, he is a friendly and outgoing figure, although he is prone to aggravating indirection (in the way of the most enlightened). His regard for “good order” is serious, although idiosyncratic and personal; al Khanan holds that it is wisdom to follow some rules, however arbitrary, and that submission to the law of Allah is the highest morality. He is courteous to followers of other religions, seeing each as a *possible* path to enlightenment, but he argues that polytheism and paganism are dangerously twisting, overgrown paths.

The Island

Koraghiss is a small island. However, it does have a very adequate spring, and it can grow enough olive trees and fruit and vegetables to support a small community. The mages in residence trade for food with larger islands within a day's sailing time.

Koraghiss is also a useful Cray, albeit subtle and hard to exploit without careful study. Al-Khanan sometimes extracts Tass from this source, in the form of ordinary-looking sand from the beach. Identifying what sand to pick up, and when to do it, seems to demand al-Khanan's extraordinary insight.

The Chantry

The inhabitants of the island are all Disparate mages, about a dozen of them, of various power levels. They dwell in an assortment of whitewashed cottages, one or two of which house substantial laboratories and libraries. The community changes fairly frequently, as members are free to come and go as they choose.

Visitors to the island are greeted politely, but they are not allowed beyond the beach until the Chantry

members have had time to assess them. Applicants for membership are examined even more carefully (but just as subtly), and must disavow any ties to the Council or Daedaleans. Would-be raiders may underestimate the Chantry fatally (if they are not sensible enough to listen to widespread rumors in the Awakened world).

Although the community is studious and its members address each other as equals, it is dominated by al-Khanan's philosophy of personal enlightenment, good order, and detachment. Its members mostly consist of Disparate magi who wish to avoid the brutal entanglements of magickal conflict, along with some who primarily wish to learn from al-Khanan or other senior members. Magick worked by this group can take almost any form — some members seem to verge on Marauds — but violently extreme spells are rare, as others of the community may complain. Individuals seeking to practice major Forces castings may take small boats off to other, uninhabited islands.

Plots

Koraghiss can serve many roles in a game. Disparate characters might come here to learn, or even to join





CASTLES AND COVENANTS

permanently, while members of active factions might seek knowledge (members of the Chantry are usually willing to trade for their lore), or even aid — although al-Khanan's policy of neutrality is almost certainly unshakeable. (The Chantry gives free advice and quiet assistance against serious Infernalist threats if asked) Renegades and old enemies might take shelter here, at which point, wise characters are well-advised to suspend

the feud — although it might be possible to convince the Chantry that they are nursing a viper.

The island could be a particularly good stopping-off place for expeditions heading in to the Ottoman Empire. Actual magick aside, the Chantry includes members from East and West, and several are especially knowledgeable about magickal lore and current secret politics of the Turkish lands.

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